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Exploring a Culturally Relevant/Responsive/Sustaining Third Grade Social Studies Curriculum: An Ethnographic Inquiry

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EXPLORING A CULTURALLY RELEVANT/RESPONSIVE/SUSTAINING THIRD GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

by

LUCIA BENZOR

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnographic inquiry in which I explore the third-grade social studies curriculum in my classroom, explicitly using culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy and students' *funds of knowledge* (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and their learning interests to teach the Native American unit to promote their academic achievement in, cultural competence and critical consciousness for, the histories of the United States. Theoretically, my research builds upon the literature of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017) and critical social studies (Dunbar- Ortiz, 2014; Parker, 2015; Ross, 2014; Zinn, 2015). Methodologically, my research builds upon ethnographic studies with young children (He & Phillion, 2008; Igoa, 1995; Schultz, 2008; Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Eight findings have emerged from my dissertation inquiry: (1) Inviting members of Native American communities to share their experience with the third graders helps overcome students' misconceptions and stereotypes of Native Americans and promotes their understanding of Native American existence and identities. (2) Multimodal approaches to instructional strategies validate students' funds of knowledge and engage them in deep learning, which leads to academic success. (3) In-and out-of-school curricula are equally essential and interdependent in promoting active student learning. (4) There is a need for cultivating creative insubordination

(Baszile, 2023; He, 20230; Schubert; 2023; Schultz, 2023) strategies to advance a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining curricula for elementary social studies in today's restrictive school environments. (5) The funds of knowledge from teachers and students play essential roles in developing their cultural competence and critical consciousness, which is crucial to developing a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining third-grade social studies curricula. (6) Overcoming stereotypes and misconceptions of Native Americans and developing cultural competence and critical consciousness is an ongoing process. (7) Doing ethnographic research with young children, researchers need to be flexible, build a trusting relationship with them, and find ways to actively engage young children in the research process. (8) Conducting this research enables me to overcome my ignorance about my ancestries and histories, inspires me to explore deeper into my own cultural heritages, and motivates me to become a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining educator for all.

INDEX WORDS: Culturally responsive teaching, Culturally relevant pedagogy, Culturally sustaining pedagogy, Critical social studies, Elementary social studies, Ethnographic inquiry with young children, Funds of knowledge, Native American studies, Indigenous studies, American Indian studies, Cultural competence

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family who have supported my educational aspirations my entire school career. Thank you for your supportive words and patience as I worked. Thank you, especially to my Daddy, who always believed in me and knew my hard work would pay off. This work is also dedicated to my closest friend, who encouraged me to apply to the program, gave me feedback, listened, and showed the utmost patience throughout the process. Lastly, this work is dedicated to my current students for helping me become a better teacher and allowing me to learn from you.

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PROLOGUE

Inspired by a course that introduced me to the concept of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017) as well as a course on the history of American education that both made me aware of my miseducations and shortcomings as a classroom teacher, I began to rethink things. From my course readings on culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017), I was intrigued by the different roles that students and teachers played that were very different from what I was taught in undergrad. In my books, students seemed excited, interested, and joyful (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Schultz, 2018). Teachers seemed to go beyond caring and were deeply informed about who their students were as people and what they brought to the table as students (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Students were respected as individuals and given more classroom space to speak up and share their ideas and expertise.

The course readings on the history of American education took a different tone. In addition to making me painfully aware of my miseducation as a K-12 student, I was especially troubled by how little I knew about Native Americans (Dunbar- Ortiz, 2014; Dunbar- Ortiz, 2016; Loewen, 2018; Spring, 2016; Spring, 2018; Zinn, 2015). As a K-12 student who prided herself on being well-read and intelligent, I was disappointed and questioned what other educational blind spots I held. My shame worsened as a Mexican immigrant with many Aztec cultural symbols in my home. This semester, I chose to address my miseducation and my students' education.

After being assigned to imagine a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy classroom, I decided to move from imagining to creating. Because I viewed social studies as the most flexible subject, it became my site for change (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Parker, 2015; Ross, 2014; Ross, 2017). Keeping the focus on student choice and voice, flexibility, student interests, strengths, and cultures (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2005; Salinas & Garr, 2009; Talbert et al., 2019), we created as a class social studies units that were engaging and creative, while also teaching the standards. We incorporated art by using found objects to create interactive maps of the U.S., developed tableaus to describe colonial life, designed movie trailers to explain the branches of government, and gardened and harvested crops to better understand the lives of early Native Americans and early American colonists. Most memorable about these changes were not the students' grades or new interest in social studies but their joy. This student joy solidified my decision to make these changes permanent and expand on them. Being a CRRSP educator is essentially a work of the mind and the thoughts and beliefs behind your classroom actions (Ladson-Billings, 2008). However, for classroom teachers, the change may only be fully realized once that change becomes more visible. Shifting my approach and teaching mindset was refreshing as a seasoned teacher and reignited my passion and commitment to providing a good education.

As a researcher, my work always focused on my students. I seek to create a lasting positive impact on my students and the community with my work. My students must also feel ownership of the work I seek to do, as they will be taking more responsibility for their learning, creating their learning paths, and sharing their knowledge with their peers to support their learning in social studies. While experimenting in the classroom with a more culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining approach to social studies inspired my research, the changes I will

make are not for mere research purposes. I seek to create lasting change in my approach to teaching, to change the heart and soul of my approach to helping students learn and feel joy and belonging in our classroom (hooks, 2021).

My students would benefit academically from my work as well. Exposing students to a different approach to learning where they teach their classmates, solve problems they are interested in, hear multiple perspectives, come to their conclusions, and involve their families would be a new and challenging but powerful and memorable experience for my students. In addition, my different approach to teaching social studies would form a foundation for students to understand Native American histories and culture (Hamalainen, 2022; Ray & DeSanti, 2022; Sleeper-Smith et al., 2015) as well as as the processes of social studies that ask students to question, challenge, investigate, build, and ultimately understand what social studies can be. I hope students will take these new habits of mind and apply them to the other core subjects and their lives outside of school.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In today's schools, social studies is often left behind. This is particularly true in elementary schools where state testing begins in third grade. This leaves teachers and students focused on math and English language arts, never getting the opportunity to understand social studies and what it offers students. Though many perspectives exist on the purposes of social studies (Ross, 2017), scholars can agree that it must be a dialogue between the past and present (Ross & Leahey, 2014). Not only can strong elementary social studies instruction lead to a strong foundation ready to meet the demands of middle and high school (Hawkman et al., 2015), but it can help students to recognize that there are "multiple historical, geographical, and cultural perspectives, thus expanding their world views, strengthening their social consciousness, and increasing their intercultural competence" (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 58). This is much needed in a time of social unrest and a diverse K-12 student population.

My study will address the consistently controversial subject of social studies and current issues at the national, state, and local levels. Though social studies has always been considered a core subject, it has typically played a minimalistic role in elementary schools and continues to be marginalized today (Heafner, 2017; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012), being used instead as a tool to promote literacy standards (Hawkman et al., 2015). Because it is typically a non-tested subject, it also faces reduced instructional time in the elementary grades or needs to be taught at all (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Further, social studies is, in many cases, one of the most disliked subjects (Busey & Russell, 2016), particularly among students of color (King, 2019), and is seen as having little to no value. Unfortunately, it is also given little attention in elementary teacher preparation programs, leaving teachers either ill-prepared to teach it or not equipped to change

their curriculum or approaches (King, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2003). In my teacher education program they continue to require only one social studies methods course (compared to multiple ELA and math courses) that does not delve into historical content but instead teaches strategies (GSU Elementary Education, 2022). Regrettably, social studies, more than other subjects, is significantly shaped by teacher beliefs and knowledge (Fitchett & Vanfossen, 2013), leading many to rely solely on textbooks and workbooks as their instructional tools that are unscholarly with no accurate updates to their contents (Loewen, 2018). With elementary teachers' lack of training in a subject that is marginalized from their prep program, the marginalization will continue in their classrooms.

Despite being sidelined as a core subject, social studies also has a fascinating history of being used as a pawn during times of sizeable cultural change or war (Parker, 2015) and with a back-and-forth swing between traditional history advocates that support a more conservative approach with progressive groups using it as a space to discuss social issues. Social studies "has and continues to experience the effects of societal influence from various advocates and opponents" (Jorgensen, 2014, p. 3) across the political spectrum.

Social studies is the center of discussion for the national culture wars in the United States. Because of these culture wars, schools and teachers have recently been scrutinized for what they are and are not teaching. The start of the COVID-19 pandemic saw many social justice initiatives gain national attention, with many schools reacting by seeking to make changes to their school policies and instruction that seemingly supported social justice initiatives. However, other conservative and white nationalist groups, such as the Proud Boys, the Manhattan Institute, Parents Defending Education, and Turning Points USA, to name a few, responded negatively to these changes (Kamenetz, 2021). Primarily fueled by conservative media and misinformation,

organized partisan efforts focused on inciting local community members to target their own school districts, schools, and classroom teachers (Pollock et al., 2022).

Described as a "conflict campaign" due to the manufactured conflict created by conservatives, the campaign focused on advancing partisan politics and exploiting the divisions in teaching and discussion of race and inclusion existing in our society (Pollock et al., 2022). The results have been protests at school boards by parents and organization representatives from outside the community, fear of radical indoctrination by teachers, and calls to "take back our schools." Some pushback was focused on teaching critical race theory (or a crude and mischaracterized understanding of its purpose), race and American history, or anything mentioning diversity, equity, and inclusion (Kamenetz, 2021). As conservative groups continue to suppress accurate American history taught in our schools, students and teachers continue to suffer. As these attacks continue, "they create fear and anxiety in the general population… that limit teachers' abilities to engage in equitable educational approaches due to fears of angry families" (Lopez & Sleeter, 2023, p. 89). Interestingly, Lopez & Sleeter (2023) remind us that around 75% of parents believed that their child's school teaches history in a way that aligns with their values, showing us that the wave of parents storming school board meetings does not reflect the majority's views.

My work will continue the social justice initiatives that began during the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on getting a complete historical understanding of the culture and lives of Native Americans. While I cannot yet engage in Native American ethnic studies in the way it deserves to be taught, I aim to provide students with an introduction to their histories and add to the much-needed research on how anti-racist teaching impacts white students and elementary students of color (Lopez & Sleeter, 2023). Ultimately, my work seeks to serve the needs of

students and their communities rather than the other way around, as is common school practice (Li, 2006).

My work also addresses issues at the state level. Relegated to the edges of mainstream American history, Native American's histories, languages, and cultures seemingly have no real place in Georgia state standards. In Georgia, third-grade students begin a three-year study of American history in which all strands of social studies (history, geography, economics, civics, and government) are integrated. The historical standards include Native American cultures in North America pre-contact, the exploration and colonization of North America, and early colonial life in the United States before the Revolutionary War. My work will be focused only on the standards that address Native Americans, which ask students to SS3H1: *Describe early American Indian cultures and their development in North America.* a. Locate the regions where American Indians settled in North America: Arctic, Northwest, Southwest, Plains, Northeast, and Southeast. b. Compare and contrast how American Indians in each region used their environment to obtain food, clothing, and shelter. c. Discuss how American Indians continue contributing to American life (e.g., arts, literature); SS3G3 *Describe how physical systems affect human systems.* a. Explain why American Indian groups occupied the areas they did (SS3H1a), with emphasis on why some developed permanent villages and others did not. SS3H2: *Describe European exploration in North America*. c. Describe examples of cooperation and conflict between European explorers and American Indians. SS3H3: *Explain the factors that shaped British Colonial America.* c. Describe colonial life in America from the perspectives of various people: large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, children, indentured servants, slaves, and American Indians (Georgia Standards of Excellence, 2016). While it is a positive thing that students can more deeply study Native American culture that goes beyond studying

isolated historical figures, as is the case in first and second grade with Mary Musgrove, Tomochichi, Sacagawea, and Sequoyah, the standards leave much to be desired. Looking at state standards of all fifty states, some left out Native Americans or were only spoken of in a pre-1900 context, making them appear extinct (Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016). Because I know that the bulk of my students' formal teaching on Native Americans will take place in my third-grade classroom, it makes the research I plan to do even more vital. In addition, in this chapter, I will use the terms Native American and Indigenous Peoples. However, I will use specific tribal names whenever possible to show students that Native Americans are members of a significant cultural group composed of various regional tribes.

Though my students are still early into their schooling, Parker (2015) found that "K and 1 students enter school with stereotypical views of Native Americans" (p. 11) and see them as exotic and uncivilized. Ladson-Billings (2021) believes that "for our students, American Indians are museum exhibits. No discussion of the ongoing plights of Indians in America is available to most students in our schools. The contemporary Indian rarely emerges in the classroom" (p. 3). In reviewing our standards, this statement holds true. Though one substandard seeks to bring them into the present, only one lesson plan in this unit's state curriculum's instructional activities addresses it. The language of the standards would also benefit from revision. In the standard, the wording may inadvertently create a distinction between being American Indian and American. Further, Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) suggests that emphasizing the "contributions of individuals from oppressed groups" seeks to highlight the "country's assumed greatness" (p. 5). Moreover, the standards' focus on culture leaves out the histories of the people, portraying them as stand-alone figures devoid of history. It is beneficial for students to learn about different cultures and groups, not just as a blip in the chronological history of the United States, but to understand their stories,

create empathy, and create their accounts using primary sources and other resources (Mason & Ernst- Salvit, 2010). While my job requires teaching the standards, finding the cracks in the curriculum would be an excellent site to begin change (Schultz, 2017).

My work seeks to reinterpret and expand on the standards to represent Native Americans, their histories, and their cultures and address current issues they face more fairly. Unfortunately, a new state law, SB 1084, which prohibits the teaching of divisive concepts and is focused mainly on addressing race in the classroom, along with the passing of HB 1178, a Parents' Bill of Rights that allows for the review of all instructional materials, may complicate some of the changes that I will implement in my instruction. However, building good rapport and relationships with the community and parents will prevent misunderstandings about my work. The context of my work at the local level will have the most significant implications for change and the site of the possible resistance. My current school is located within a typically conservative district in the Metro Atlanta area that has slowly transitioned to being 'purple' based on recent elections. However, my school is in a diverse small town with varying political beliefs. Despite these contradictions, my district, probably responding to pressure from various conservative groups, including the Greater Fayette Republican Women's Club, has proceeded to ban books that focus on or include discussions on race, gender, the LGBTQIA+ community, Black Lives Matter, diversity, social justice, or social-emotional learning in the name of student safety beginning the 2020-2021 school year. The multicultural children's texts purchased with Title 1 funds for teachers were taken back. A committee was also created to review library books or other materials that have received complaints about being inappropriate.

Additionally, teachers were made aware of the seriousness of these changes. They were warned that should they not abide by these new policies and become targeted, they would not be

supported by the school. Banned words and phrases included morning meeting, SEL, critical race theory, multicultural, diverse, social justice, and equity. Though this was a significant topic of discussion at the start of the year as it appeared as a reversal of the changes made in the prior school year, it died down as the year went on.

The actions of my district and its impact on classroom teachers were on par with what teachers nationwide were experiencing. According to Geller (2020), research suggests that teachers today feel more significant threats than previously accounted for. I concur. Though I strongly support parent involvement in schools, our current political climate has encouraged bullying and intimidation of our teachers and schools instead. As teachers continue to be encouraged to remain neutral to avoid tensions, neutrality in the classroom is simply unattainable (Geller, 2020; Loewen, 2018), with social studies teachers fearing reprisal for violating this expectation (Geller, 2020). Zinn (2015), however, reminds us that there is no such thing as pure, neutral facts innocent of interpretation, especially as schools remain places that are not neutral themselves (Geller, 2020). Ultimately, it will always be up to teachers to make thoughtful decisions as a professional about what is essential in the classroom for their students (Zinn, 2015).

Fortunately, my school also has many educators who understand the importance of culturally relevant learning in the classroom and have continued to follow through with the changes in teaching and learning that began during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this political climate, teachers must "make thoughtful choices about the degree to which we resist," and it is ultimately a "balancing act that involves creative adaptation, thoughtful resistance, and compromise" (Wade & Nieto, 2007, p. 35). My work speaks directly to the diversity and history

that some in the community support that others may denounce. For the students' sake, work needs to be done.

Research Questions

My work raises many questions about teaching and learning. My key research question is: How does culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy in the third-grade social studies classroom promote student critical consciousness, academic achievement, and cultural competence of Native American cultures and histories? The research on the positive impacts of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy on students has been well-established, including its use with young students (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Igoa, 1995/2009; Paris & Alim, 2017; Schultz, 2018). However, I seek to focus these pedagogical approaches in social studies to understand better the extent to which my students will gain knowledge, specifically their understanding of Native American cultures and histories. To integrate student culture into lessons, I will focus on student interests, talents, and learning preferences, such as peer work, games, social media, and books.

My supporting research questions are: How will using student funds of knowledge foster student academic achievement? How will using student culture and interests develop cultural competence and critical consciousness?

Overview of Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretically, my research builds upon the literature on culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; González, Moll, & Amonti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017), critical social studies (Dunbar- Ortiz, 2014; Parker, 2015; Ross, 2014; Zinn, 2015) and ethnographic studies with young children (He & Phillion, 2008; Igoa, 1995; Schultz, 2008; Soto & Swadener, 2005;

Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). While much research has been done on social studies education, there is little research on elementary social studies, primarily using ethnographic inquiry methods with young children. Additionally, much of the current research on culturally relevant/responsive/ sustaining pedagogy focuses on student engagement, leaving a gap in the literature for research focusing on the academic achievement of young learners from this pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant/Responsive/Sustaining Pedagogy

With so many praxis pedagogies, it can be confusing for educators to distinguish their differences and similarities. Culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogies, while distinct, share similar roots and a spirit of change in the classroom. Since Gloria Ladson-Billings first brought the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy to educators in 1995, educators appear to have eagerly latched onto the idea, especially given the push for multicultural education in the late '80s and '90s (Paris & Alim, 2017). While these ideas of diversity in the classroom, multicultural education, and inclusivity have remained steadily popular in many areas, culturally relevant pedagogy has not yet appeared in the classroom in its intended form, but rather a shallower form that employs the easier' food and festivals' approach to culture, leaving students with an incomplete and incorrect understanding of who their peers are (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). Further, its original meaning has become distorted and spawned multiple "remixes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). These "oversimplified and distorted conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy, which do not necessarily improve student learning, can lend themselves to the dismissal of the entire concept" (Sleeter, 2012, p. 572).

Culturally relevant pedagogy can be identified by its focus on student's academic success, developing and maintaining cultural competence, and developing a critical consciousness that

pushes them to challenge the status quo and move towards change in their community (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). Ladson-Billings continues by adding that "culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (2009, p. 140). This is done by creating solid relationships with their students, with teachers genuinely believing their students are the "most important people in the world" (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, p.35). Additionally, teachers should also see themselves as part of the community they are giving back to, co-constructing knowledge with their students and focusing on the learning and progress of the group rather than individual students.

However, the theory has either evolved over the years or has varied a bit by theorists who have created their asset pedagogies, which could need clarification for some educators. The phrase 'culturally responsive teaching,' though coined by Gay in 1992, refers to the need to not only be relevant to student's lives but also "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2013, pp.49-50). Though very similar, one of the differences is the amount of differentiated instruction for students and how culturally responsive teaching uses the multiple cultures of the students in the classroom to better tailor the curriculum to them. However, one of the most significant differences is its focus on curriculum (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). Gay (2000/2010/2018) describes this as teachers taking on the roles of 'cultural brokers,' which includes understanding the culture of the classroom and creating a positive one for their students, opportunities for critical dialogue, and understanding their histories as well as those of others and recognizing the students' cultural competencies and using them as a learning resource. While this may seem like asking many classroom teachers, Gay (2000/2010/2018) clarifies that culturally responsive teachers genuinely believe in the "human

dignity and intellectual capabilities of their students" (p. 52), making this a worthwhile endeavor.

Paris & Alim (2017) built upon the ideas of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching with their work on culturally sustaining pedagogies. This pedagogy calls for schools to be a site for "sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color" (Paris & Alim, 2017). Especially considering the rise in the minority population in the U.S., the idea of relevance does not do enough to critique the issues in our schools and ensure the continued cultural and linguistic practices of our students and families (Paris & Alim, 2017). Student talents must go beyond being relevant or interesting and be utilized in addition to learning about the cultures of others as well (Brown, 2007). This utilization allows students to showcase their knowledge instead of being overshadowed by other academic strengths or deficits in the classroom, which is sometimes the case (deSilva et al., 2018). Gonzalez, Mull, and Amanti (2009) go further and encourage teachers to utilize the intelligence and talents not only of their students but of their families and communities as well. Using their idea of funds of knowledge, they promote the concept that linguistic and ethnic minorities possess valuable resources that classroom instruction can utilize and build upon.

The framework of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy seeks to combine the works of Ladson-Billings, Gay, Gonzalez, Mull & Amanti, and Paris & Alim by identifying, understanding, and using student gifts and talents, focusing on academic achievement, and supporting students in seeking change in their learning environments and communities. While this greatly supports the work I seek to do in my classroom, Gay reminds us that "culturally responsive teaching alone cannot solve all the problems of improving the education of marginalized students of color. Other aspects of the educational enterprise must also be

reformed, and major changes must be made to eliminate the social, political, and economic inequities rampant in society" (Gay, 2000/2010/2018, p.1). While I realize that my research alone will not remedy these inequities, the knowledge gained from this type of classroom setting can and should enrich and enhance student lives in a way that empowers them to tackle them.

Critical Social Studies

Another praxis pedagogy, critical social studies, goes beyond traditional social studies learning. It seeks to critique society and our current political settings, pushing students to ask questions about their world and its structures (Ross, 2014). Education, specifically social studies education, in the U.S., has a long history of not only being white and male-centered but also one that seeks to decentralize other groups (Spring, 2016). Minorities experienced segregation and total exclusion from the curriculum, making students feel excluded, forgotten, and ignorant of their own people's history (Spring, 2016). Additionally, because social studies comprises multiple fields of the social sciences and humanities, including history and civics, and its traditional role in maintaining the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2003), it is the perfect subject to control the dominant narrative. Schools today reflect a society that engages in practices that privilege the dominant culture, with teachers being a strong socializing force in student lives (Adams & Glass, 2018; McCarther & Davis, 2017).

Critical social studies, however, seeks to do otherwise. CSS supports critiquing society, politics, and the world, encouraging students to continually question events, topics, and themes while gaining insights into the structural inequalities around them (Ender, 2019; Ross, 2014). Though CSS supports diverse voices and perspectives, it goes beyond tokenistic celebrations of food and festivals. Instead, it seeks to confront the standard curriculum through student engagement, reflection, and critical theory (Ender, 2019). Additionally, CSS does not aim for a

balanced story or to tell two sides. Instead, students must understand that texts can be told and read differently. They must then "deconstruct and reconstruct them… to reconsider and redesign stories based on intentional and continued analyses of the historical and contemporary record (Jewett, 2007, p. 169). It involves students interpreting history independently with primary sources and constructing historical accounts rather than being handed history by their teacher (Parker, 2015). In doing so, students can more meaningfully understand their world and their place in transforming it (Ross, 2014).

Critical thinking tasks and skills are also a necessity in CSS, though an approach that many teachers shy away from. Interestingly, many schools call for students to be engaged in critical thinking without specifying what students should think critically about (Walker et al., 2016). This continues today even while the censorship of school programs and materials increases (Apple & Beane, 2007). However, hooks (2010) believes that students involved in critical thinking should be "discovering the who, what, when, where, and how of things… and then utilizing that knowledge" (p. 9). Using a CSS approach, students could discuss issues in their community, school policies, or even controversial issues (Crawford-Garrett & Riley, 2016; Lennon, 2017), discovering their place within these issues.

Like CRSSP, it must be willing to deal head-on with issues that students face and understand students' progress compared to their communities (Paris & Alim, 2014). Critical social studies also acknowledges that young students are "culturally and intellectually global citizens" who can ask questions and share noticings about the world around them (DeJaynes & Curmi-Hall, 2019). Heavily focused on student critiques and critical thinking, reading, and writing, CSS seeks to engage and challenge students to create the democratic society they wish for themselves and others.

Overview of Other Relevant Literature

In addition to elementary social studies and culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy, my work will also address student and family funds of knowledge (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019; Gonzalez, Mull, & Amanti, 2009), student-led classrooms (Salinas & Garr, 2009; Talbert et al., 2019) and teaching Indigenous histories and cultures (Dunbar- Ortiz, 2014; Dunbar- Ortiz, 2016; Krueger, 2019). My review of the literature will guide my research and classroom decisions.

Connecting to culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy, funds of knowledge seek to go further. Coined by Gonzalez, Mull, & Amanti (2009), funds of knowledge encourage teachers to utilize the intelligence and talents of their students and their families and community. Using their idea of funds of knowledge, they promote the concept that linguistic and ethnic minorities possess valuable resources that classroom instruction can utilize and build upon. Another source of funds of knowledge to consider would be that of the classroom teacher. Though not often discussed in schools, teacher knowledge, biases, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences play a role in the classroom curriculum (Karabon, 2021).

The research is also evident in the effectiveness of student-centered classrooms. Also known as student-directed or student-led learning, student-centered learning is typically described as a good practice because of its inquiry and problem-based approach to learning that puts students at the center (Talbert et al., 2019). Through collaboration, student autonomy, and relating learning to real life, student-centered learning assumes students have much to offer and can solve independently, leading to significant classroom gains and increased confidence in their academic abilities (Talbert et al., 2019).

Lastly, my research also dramatically focuses on teaching Native American histories and cultures to non-natives. I needed to understand what the literature said here as a non-native teacher with no students who identify as native. (While I identify as Mexican and have an extensive Mexican lineage, Indigenous People of Mexico and Mexicans are seen as two distinct groups). As school systems and the media propagate stereotypes of Native Americans (Morgan, 2009), teachers must ensure these have no place in their classrooms. By using teaching resources and children's books from Native American writers, my students and I can better educate ourselves on learning Native American histories and cultures that are more honest and complete than traditional textbooks and uphold the dignity of the people. By discussing individual tribes' cultures and histories instead of one monolithic group and presenting students with other ways of knowing (Gross, 2005), my students and I will better understand a group that is given little to no attention in the classroom. Using the literature as a guide for my classroom decision-making, I hope to create a classroom environment that allows students to build their cultural competence of Native Americans.

In addition to cultural competence, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of Native Americans' place in American history is also essential. Because of Native Americans' small and tokenistic representation in the Georgia Standards of Excellence, students are given little to no opportunities to understand Native American cultures and histories. This leaves students ill-equipped to be culturally competent citizens in a diverse society. From falsely contributing Native American deaths to mainly disease instead of enslavement and tyranny of Columbus and the Spanish (Zinn, 1980) to portraying Native Americans as a tragic monolithic group (Ray & DeSanti, 2022), Native Americans have yet to have a real place in K-12 social studies education. Sleeper-Smith, Barr, O'Brien, Shoemaker, and Stevens (2022) remind us that

you cannot teach United States history without American Indians. As I attempt to teach a complete American history that includes Native American histories and perspectives, I strive to show my young students that Native American history is American history (Ray & DeSanti, 2022).

Methodology

This study will further the knowledge on using culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogies with young students focused on academic achievement in social studies, particularly during the American Indian unit. I define achievement here broadly, as Gay (2000/2010/2018) does, to include test scores, course grades, participation in classroom discussions, improved interest in and motivation for learning, and feelings of efficacy among students. Additionally, I expect the results to show an increase in the participants' cultural competence regarding Native American history and culture and an increase in student engagement during social studies instruction. The participants will benefit from a more robust understanding of standards SS3H1 and SS3G3. The study's results will inform my future instructional practices for the participants across all subjects.

Study & Data Collection

In this study, participants will participate in a modified Native American unit in my 3rd-grade class. As their classroom teacher, I will teach a five-week unit on Native Americans following the Georgia Standards of Excellence for third-grade social studies. Though I will teach the standards, the curriculum will be supplemented with children's books, videos, and other resources (approved by school officials to comply with laws and mandates) that support student learning of Native American history and culture, past and present. Additionally, using responses from a beginning of the year student interest survey, I will use common interests and learning

preferences (e.g., YouTube, video games, graphic novels, working with peers) as a part of the learning process to help students access and make connections to new content. Students will choose what region and specific tribes they would like to study based on interest and use their talents to teach their peers. The teacher, the PI, will support student learning by acting as facilitator and scaffolding learning by providing multiple resources, including books, student encyclopedias, guest speakers, and primary resources for student groups to create a presentation of their choice on Native American history and culture to educate their classmates. It will also include a partnership with a third-grade class at Indian Community School located in the Midwest, a school for students with tribal membership, who will be our pen pals for the remainder of the school year. To share new knowledge and to end the unit, students will create an interactive (game, poster, video) to share with other families at our school's Winter Family Fun Night. Though all participants will be required to create an interactive presentation to be showcased at the Winter Family Fun Night, being present for the event will be encouraged but optional since the event occurs in the evening after school hours.

For my study, classroom observations will be conducted daily, and the primary investigator will take field notes. Five in-person interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes will also be conducted at the research site with participants either independently or in focus groups depending on student preference that seek to understand student perceptions and knowledge of Native Americans and their opinions on and experiences with using their talents and interests to support the learning process. These interviews will occur three times during the unit, and two after the unit is taught. The interviews, with participant and parent permission, will be recorded and transcribed. Participants will be allowed to check the transcripts to ensure accurate representation.

Ethnographic Inquiry

The literature on using ethnographic inquiry methods with children has also been well established, although the research with young children could benefit from continued research. Though student responses to CRRSP in the classroom have been well-recorded, I seek to understand how young students respond, specifically in social studies. Ethnographic inquiry can help me understand what young children do and say in the changing context of the social studies classroom, interpret their meaning, and encode and recode what I believe to be true about how my students learn social studies (Clifford & Marcus, 2020; Hammersley, 2006). Guided by the landmark works of other ethnographic studies with young children such as *Learning and Not Learning English: Latino Students in American Schools* (Valdés, 2001), *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child* (Igoa, 1995/2015), *Spectacular things happen along the way: Lessons from an urban classroom* (Schultz, 2018), *Power and voice in research with children* (Soto & Swadener, 2005), and *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the politics of caring* (Valenzuela,1999), my work will build upon and add to the literature.

Though I acknowledge the difficulties that come with doing research with children, such as power imbalances (Mayeza, 2017), student engagement (Duneier et al., 2014), and student involvement (Albon & Barley, 2021; Jokinen et al., 2002; Tulebaeva, 2014), ethnography as a methodology remains very popular among various disciplines. In my research, I plan to allow students to be seen as capable, intelligent students with the knowledge to share about how they like to learn and what knowledge they must share with others.

By analyzing student work samples, recorded class sessions, and student interviews, I hope to further the knowledge on using CRRSP with young students focusing on academic achievement and cultural competence in social studies, particularly during the Native American

unit. Additionally, I expect the results to show an increase in the cultural competence of my students regarding Native Americans' histories and cultures, as well as an increase in student engagement during social studies instruction. Further, I hope the results of this research will inform my future instructional practices for my current and future students across all subjects.

Significance of the Study

My study centers on student learning, fostering an understanding of their communities and the histories of the United States, exploring the cultures of our Native Americans, developing critical thinking skills, and creating a classroom environment that values them as intelligent individuals with something to offer. My vision is to create an environment where students learn a complete U.S. history while using their talents and gifts to strengthen their understanding of the content and make connections to their life and their world today. Though my school has a somewhat transient population, to believe that my students have never experienced a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining classroom environment would be incredulous. As Ladson-Billings (2021) and Gay (2000/2010/2018) remind us, culturally relevant teaching is a work of heart and a mindset that one carries with them rather than a set of techniques. Though I would not reduce this pedagogy to merely caring for students, student care and joy are central to the work I seek to do. I wish to go beyond aesthetic caring to authentic caring, which entails getting to know students, respecting their intellectual abilities and talents, and valuing who they are as individuals. As their classroom teacher, this means providing an educational environment where students thrive (Savage et al., 2011). For me, the joy they experience is just as important as their academic achievement in the classroom. hooks (2021) boldly reminds teachers that "excitement can co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual

and/or academic engagement" (p. 12). This may be a piece that needs to be included in a standards-based classroom.

As a seasoned teacher who enjoys predictability and typically takes charge in the classroom, this type of 'radical openness' challenges my approach to teaching in switching to a more engaged pedagogy, which asks that I learn to let go, trust my students to lead, and understand that students learn best when there is a more interactive relationship between student and teacher (hooks, 2010). In this radically new process, being vulnerable with students as we navigate something new while encouraging critical thinking on both sides demands equal participation from teachers and students (hooks, 2010; hooks, 2021).

My research will add to the literature as well. In social studies, my literature review presented much more research on high school and higher education than on elementary students. Additionally, the social studies research is incomparable to the amount of research done on the tested subjects of math and English language arts, partly due to demand from districts (O'Connor et al., 2007; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Because of this, I seek to demonstrate student achievement in social studies and discuss its importance as a core subject and as a tool to help students better understand the world they live in and create the engaged and caring citizens our nation needs (Ross, 2014).

Another contribution I will make is to provide additional research on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy and school success. Though this is a component of the pedagogy, more research needs to be done on this component (Sleeter, 2012). Instead, many case studies focus on CRRSP and student engagement (Howard, 2001; Rodriguez et al., 2004), where readers and researchers assume, although reasonable, that student engagement will inevitably lead to school success. Though I would not limit my definition of success to tests and quizzes,

using the county social studies benchmark and student-created assessments will add to the literature and help build a case for change. Sleeter (2012) also suggests that research on how CRRSP positively impacts White students would help counter fears that CRRSP would only benefit minorities and somehow harm White students. Because of my diverse classroom, I can document this.

I acknowledge that my work will have some limitations as well. As stated previously, the tense political climate we are experiencing may trigger questions about the changes being made to social studies. I may be questioned about my work or even asked to stop my research. Because of the continued focus on the standards in addition to my district's goal to increase the use of culturally relevant pedagogy to improve student engagement and achievement (FCPS Strategic Plan, 2022), I believe that I am prepared to creatively proceed with my work while understanding that "agendas need to be flexible and allow for spontaneous shifts in direction" (hooks, 2021, p. 7).

Another limitation that I must acknowledge is the responses of the students. As many teachers have experienced, a strong unit plan, exciting resources, and engaged students only sometimes lead to a complete understanding of content knowledge. While I seek to focus on the histories and diverse cultures of Native Americans, some students may hold to their previously held biases and false assumptions. Ross (2017) reminds us that people do not change their ideas when someone argues otherwise. Additionally, young students' perspectives about the world, like mine, are shaped by family members, communities, and other groups they belong to (Parker, 2015). This may limit how much children will accept as truth from their teachers, particularly when it conflicts with historical accounts from the home (Parker, 2015).

In a time of heightened suspicion against our teachers and schools, inviting the community and parents into the classroom may seem counterintuitive. Trying a new approach to teaching history may seem odd when there are disagreements about what history is now acceptable. I argue, however, that my work could be the very thing we need to do as a school to show parents the positive impact that CRRSP can have on student achievement, engagement, and joy in our schools. If schools must reflect the best of us (Apple & Beane, 2007), decision-makers should begin to review their focus on test scores and begin to "see students as whole human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world" (hooks, 2021, p. 15). For our future citizens, we must.

Outline of Chapters

My dissertation consists of five chapters. The prologue outlines my autobiographical roots of inquiry. Chapter One is an introduction, which includes key research questions, purposes of study, and a brief overview of the review of literature and methodology. Chapter Two is an extensive literature review. Chapter Three focuses on my methodology, including research context, study purposes, research questions, research framework/design, data collection, data analysis, and data representation. In Chapter Four, data representation and preliminary data analyses are provided by identifying concurrent themes that emerged from the data. In Chapter Five, I reflect on my inquiry, including, but not limited to, my journeys of coming to grips with findings, implications for future research, and school recommendations. In the Epilogue, I discuss current situations, challenges, and future directions of 3rd grade social studies curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature on my theoretical framework, which has two strands: culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017) and critical social studies (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Parker, 2015; Ross, 2014; Zinn, 2015). Culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy is an asset pedagogy that focuses on students succeeding academically, developing and maintaining cultural competency, and seeking to change the status quo in a way that benefits their community (Ladson-Billings, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy also speaks to students' lives and addresses social justice issues, anti-oppressive teaching, and valuing and sustaining non-dominant student cultures. Critical social studies seeks to reexamine the typical ideas we hold about social studies both as a subject and its teaching by pushing for social studies to be a site where students analyze and understand social issues holistically, envision a future where these problems are solved, and take action (Ross, 2017). The framework also encourages students to question events, topics, and themes as they develop their understanding of social inequalities (Ender, 2019). Finally, critical social studies addresses issues of multiple historical perspectives by encouraging students to create their understandings of history, including those of non-dominant groups.

I will also be reviewing the literature on student-centered learning (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2005; Salinas & Garr, 2009; Talbert et al., 2019), the teaching of Indigenous Peoples of North America (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014/2016; Ray & DeSanti, 2022; Tuck, 2009), as well as the Georgia Standards of Excellence for third-grade social studies (GADOE, 2016). Student-

centered learning focuses on teacher-student collaboration, where the curriculum is co-created and co-investigated with students instead of focusing on the prescribed curriculum (Dover et al., 2018). In teaching Indigenous Peoples of North America, the focus was centering cultural values such as land and family, dispelling common misconceptions, and teaching Indigenous history more completely while teaching state standards. The third-grade social studies standards were also reviewed to discuss the parameters teachers must follow and explore the gray areas the standards leave for teachers to expand creatively. This literature review helped me understand the evolution of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy and critical social studies in education. It identified its guiding relationship to my research and discovered gaps in the literature that my research findings can support.

Culturally Relevant/Responsive/Sustaining Pedagogy

Our diverse society continues to see many changes in our demographics. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the populations of Hispanic, Asian, Multiracial, Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native continue to grow. Since the previous U.S. census of 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 23%, the Asian population grew by 35.5%, the Multiracial population grew by 276%, the Black population grew by 88%, and the American Indian/Alaska Native population grew by 27%. The White population, however, decreased by 8.6%. While this tells me that our nation's demographics are quickly diversifying, our classrooms are also. As our school populations continue to diversify, the need for culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy in our classrooms increases. Culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy grew from the philosophies of other asset-based pedagogies that came before it, notably culturally relevant pedagogy by Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) and culturally responsive pedagogy by Gay (2000/2010/2018). Here, I will compare the individual pedagogies.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Discussing successful teachers of African-American students, Ladson-Billings explored what it means to be a culturally relevant teacher. Because she sees the classroom as the "real place for integration where students come face to face with others who are different from themselves" (2009, p. 7), the classroom is explored as a site of great possibilities.

The need for culturally responsive pedagogy arose from a troubling trend of low academic success from Black students through a lack of teacher understanding. Though the academic achievement of all students has increased over the years, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the achievement gap between Black and White students persists (NCES, 2011). While Ladson-Billings cites finding fault with the children and their families as the most popular explanation for this phenomenon, she poses a question to educators. What if we change the way we teach African-American students? What if we use student strengths and culture to approach teaching and learning differently to foster academic success in a way that is relevant to students? This is the idea behind culturally relevant teaching. Though it is common for schools to equate exemplary performance with losing students of color's ethnic and cultural identities, this does not have to be the case. For Ladson-Billings, the change must begin with our children's teachers.

Ladson-Billings (2021) makes it clear that "there is no checklist, script, or set of techniques" in applying culturally relevant pedagogy (p. 4). She describes the frameworks' tenets as academic achievement or student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical or critical consciousness, describing them as "three sides of an equilateral triangle- equally important and equally necessary" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 4). It is described as an approach to teaching that

relies on teachers to be both decision-makers and intellectuals who can implement research and policy in their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Speaking on student learning, Ladson-Billings (2021) notes that while it can include standardized testing, student learning can mean any growth that students make in the classroom, regardless of whether it was measurable by a state test or choose to test it at all. Cultural competence, however, is one of the most misunderstood tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy because multiple fields have adopted this term, and it can take on new meanings (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Cultural competence refers to "teachers' responsibility to help students gain fluency and facility in at least one other culture" and making accommodations to serve diverse student populations (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 5). Because all students will be operating in a diverse and global society, all students should leave school being fluent in at least two cultures but preferably multicultural (Ladson-Billings, 2021). During this process, the classroom teacher challenges students to not just learn about others but to make authentic connections from the lives of others to their own lives (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Critical consciousness, seen by Ladson-Billings (2021) as the most ignored tenet, asks students to "apply, analyze, synthesize, and critique their environment and the problems they encounter to be effective members of society" (p. 7). This is not the same as promoting partisanship, aligning with political parties, or advocating for a specific political cause. This asks students to explore their problems, whether small or small, to allow them to use the skills they learned in solving one problem later to solve other, more significant problems (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Taken together, these three tenets were meant to raise the expectations and practices of classroom teachers for all students.

While the aim of culturally relevant teaching is not to bash our nation's teachers, it is "designed to problematize teaching and encourages teachers to ask about the nature of student-teacher relationships, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (Ladson-Billings, 1996, p. 483). Further, it asks teachers to closely examine what they do or do not do to uphold inequities that include and extend beyond their classrooms (Scherff & Spector, 2010). Because what we teach and how we teach profoundly impacts how students perceive and learn the curriculum, teachers must question their values, biases, and understanding of who they believe their students to be. This is especially true in low-income communities where teachers hold great power in determining the official curriculum and the means through which it is presented.

Though our schools continue to grow in diversity, a cultural desynchronization leads to students getting a more Eurocentric education instead of acknowledging and using the tremendous cultural capital of all our students and realizing that they all deserve something more. With solid teacher-student relationships and a reassessment of practices, more culturally relevant teaching practices and curricula can exist. A critical self-assessment is a crucial part of this change. While some teachers may not realize or wish to acknowledge their biases, some may also not understand that their perceptions of students, particularly African-American students, can affect how they teach them academically and beyond (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). From grading practices to interpretations of behavior, our biases affect all aspects of a child's education. Teachers engaging in culturally relevant pedagogy must be prepared to ask questions about instructional materials that may further ostracize diverse student populations. They must ask themselves whether their practices privilege one' way of knowing' over another and demonstrate flexibility and a diversity of perspectives (Smith, 2020). Reviewing assessment practices that only provide achievement scores instead of helping us learn more about students

should also be considered (Scherff & Spector, 2010). Further, Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) reminds us that "even when teachers carry out seemingly noninstructional actions such as smiling at a student or showing disapproval of a student, they are engaged in pedagogy" (p. 29). Culturally relevant pedagogy asks teachers to be fully conscious of the choices we make, the instructional mandates we reject, and the social and political consequences of the goals we uphold (Schoffner & Brown, 2011).

In addition to an ongoing consciousness of practices and their implications, culturally relevant teachers must be professionals who strongly identify with teaching and its promises (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). While Ladson-Billings makes it clear that there are no set personality traits or practices that make one culturally relevant to their students, culturally relevant teachers must understand that teaching is an art and see themselves as artists who understand the community in which they live and see themselves as invested members of the community, and sees teaching as pulling knowledge out of students instead of the traditional "empty vessel" approach (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is unique in its approach to working with students and fostering academic success. In many schools, it is typical for teachers to assume that students lack much knowledge, with a teacher's job being to teach them the state standards to prepare them for the next grade level or set of courses. Culturally relevant pedagogy argues that students already hold much knowledge, with a teacher's job being to use that knowledge to make the new knowledge relevant to them by making natural connections to students' cultures and using a wide variety of instructional strategies that speak to many learners (Scherff & Spector, 2010). In addition to students using their array of knowledge to gain skills, they also experience the knowledge of their peers' cultures that may differ from their own. With the help of teachers,

students can develop an appreciation and respect for different cultures and values (Scherff & Spector, 2010). Teachers can utilize their students' strengths, interests, backgrounds, and cultures through strong community building between students and teachers, students to students, and their communities (Helmer, 2010). Gay (2020) reminds us that the site for determining success is in the interactions between learners and learners and their teachers. It is imperative that students have this starting point for success, to identify their capabilities for themselves, and believe that they can learn and be successful.

In schools today, individual success through hard work is a prominent idea pushed on students at the start of their educational careers. The idea of academic success as competition against others is also typical. Culturally relevant pedagogy, however, highlights the idea of group learning and group success and embraces the idea that many communities, such as African-American communities, value collaboration more than individual work (Champion, 2003; Murff, 2020; Shade et al., 1997). Teachers encourage a community of learners where students learn to collaborate and be responsible for each other. Additionally, excellence goes beyond test scores and grades and views knowledge as "something that is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared" (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, p. 60). Where teachers are passionate about the content they teach, students can also ask questions about it and seek answers. In the learning process, students are reminded by their teachers that they are competent, intelligent, and competent, with teacher support to help them gain and implement knowledge.

Finally, culturally relevant teaching calls on students to use their new and already-held knowledge to question structural inequities and injustices within their communities, including their schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). In Schultz's (2018) work, students in his urban classroom worked to rebuild their dilapidated school building using their knowledge and

applying skills learned in language arts, math, reading, science, and social studies. Students wrote letters, collected and analyzed data, and spoke to government officials about the change they needed to see in their community as students. In another instance, a class made connections to their learning on epidemics and began researching local sanitation practices that affect their community and sought to make improvements (Schultz, 2017)

A study of high school dropouts discovered that making school relevant to their lives could have helped prevent 80% of them from dropping out (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's (2005) work support this. Their research on funds of knowledge, the idea that all students have vast knowledge that is useful and powerful, shows that when student knowledge, family and community knowledge, comes into the classroom, students can make connections and better grasp the content. With students of color making up most of high school dropouts (McFarland et al., 2019), to what extent could culturally relevant pedagogy have pushed these students to academic excellence? Culturally relevant pedagogy commits to asking, "Who gets to experience academic success and why?" (Scherff & Spector, 2010). It begins with a strong desire to involve all students in the curriculum through teacher dedication and a genuine willingness to seek purposeful change (Scherff & Spector, 2010). However, adding multicultural instructional materials and a love of students is not enough. Schaffner & Brown (2010) remind us that "culturally relevant teaching is only effective when teachers possess the cultural knowledge and instructional skills, self-reflection and self-monitoring techniques, and institutional and personal resources to support their efforts (p. 96).

Looking back on culturally relevant pedagogy as it stands today in popularity as it exists in schools, Ladson-Billings (2017) asserts that the framework and its components have been corrupted. First, student learning and critical consciousness are narrowly defined, and critical

consciousness is left out altogether. Ladson-Billings defines *student learning* as intellectual growth rather than a focus on increased standardized test scores. Intellectual growth also includes students' reasoning ability, problem-solving skills, and moral development (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Cultural competence must be understood and not seen as a list of cultural tendencies. Instead, cultural competence understands that all students have a culture that should be used as a starting point for learning, students should build fluency in another culture, and teachers should support students in developing a critical consciousness that supports them in questioning what they read and learn in the classroom. (Ladson-Billings, 2017).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

While culturally responsive teaching is also an asset pedagogy that shares many values with culturally relevant pedagogy, it varies from the latter through its focus on curriculum. Gay (2000/2010/2018) describes it as a framework for effectively teaching and engaging all students, regardless of race, gender, language, religion, or socioeconomic status. In practice, culturally responsive pedagogy's pillars focus on teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies (Gay, 2000/2010/2018).

Like culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching lies in the competencies of all students. It calls on teachers to "recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of their students into their teaching strategies" (Gay, 2000/2010/2018, p.1) and place students at honor instead of risk (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). Additionally, culturally responsive teachers are willing to serve the role of the student, inviting students to become the teacher and vice versa (Dover et al., 2018; Schultz, 2008; Sleeter, 2012). In a culturally responsive classroom environment, the classroom is seen as a community of learners where knowledge is shared and

gained from all participants (Murff, 2020). Tapping into students' cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and experiences, teachers then use that knowledge to help students gain knowledge and increase academic achievement. This approach helps students learn about themselves and the diverse people in their classrooms. Teachers play the role of 'cultural brokers' to provide students with opportunities to engage in dialogue about conflicts with other cultures (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). This approach to learning builds bridges between home and school and between different ethnic groups, uses strategies that connect to various learning styles, incorporates multicultural resources, and allows students to know each other's heritages, which is validating to students.

However, it is essential to note that though student culture is valued and used in the classroom to learn, not every aspect of a child's ethnic culture is reproduced in the classroom. Also, teachers understand that just teaching beadwork or dancing of a cultural group without the cultural contexts can promote stereotypes or mischaracterize cultural groups as one-dimensional (Hermes, 2005). They are also careful not to ignore the variability that exists within cultural groups and see culture as a process for the people in it where variations of that culture exist across time and place (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; Hermes, 2005). Making these connections while building relationships is the heart of a teacher's work. In fact, it has been shown that not making these connections contributes to academic failure and, later, psychological problems (Choi, 2013; Salazar & Franquiz, 2008). In addition, teachers also seek the help of the community and allies of these goals to hold high expectations of all students (Schultz, 2008). Culturally responsive teachers also understand the contextuality of competence and success in schools (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). In many school settings, the competencies of our students might not be

recognized, valued, or even viable to the typical school activities, but they exist within each of our students (Gay, 2000/2010/2018).

It is common in education to hear remarks about teaching the 'whole child.' Gay (2000/2010/2018) argues, however, that if this devotion were true, it would be evident in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These school changes would inevitably unleash our diverse students' potential and positively impact their academic and psychosocial abilities (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). An essential component of this change is having the appropriate instructional resources that support the learning process of diverse students (Murff, 2020). Students must see themselves in these resources, learning their history, as well as the histories of others. More engaging and varied resources could also lead to more engaged students who show mastery of skills. Diverse literature should be seen as a "window of opportunity for authors, teachers, and students to contemplate what is and what can be regarding racial and culturally diverse attitudes and actions" (Gay, 2000/2010/2018, p. 161). In addition to literature, ethnically diverse mass media should also be a part of curriculum content, considering that students bring this information and the media's effects on them into the shared classroom space. Because mass media and textbooks share similar issues, such as racial stereotypes, inflating racial harmony, downplaying conflicts, and mistreatments of minorities, and giving one-dimensional representations of events, people, and their experiences, teachers must be critical in their media selection (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). They are especially vigilant about not promoting the victimization of marginalized peoples as the main focal point of an ethnic group's story (Fitchett & Heafner, 2012). However, it is essential to note that multicultural and culturally responsive education differ (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Simply including multicultural resources as part of or supporting the mainstream curriculum is insufficient (Fitchett & Heafner, 2012). A few critical

points in culturally responsive teaching remind us that curriculum content is crucial to academic performance, improves student learning when meaningful to students, and is derived from various sources, including outside school (Gay, 2000/2010/2018).

With classroom instruction, too few teachers realize that our conventional teaching practices reflect European/American cultural values (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). These values can be seen in the classrooms' focus on the efforts and needs of the individual and the competitive space within our schools. Additionally, what qualifies as good teaching and learning practices vary by ethnic group. Instead, the values of cooperation, community, and connectedness, central in many other diverse cultures, are central features of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). Teachers should realize culture's vital influence on student learning and change teaching processes to be more compatible with who they are. This includes acknowledging that behaviors like eye contact, student dialogue, and engagement can have diverse responses (Au, 2010; Ukpokodu, 2006). This means much work on the part of teachers. Culturally responsive teaching asks teachers to deeply know their students, their histories, cultures, and the community in which they teach and expertly weave this knowledge into the curriculum and everyday teaching practices. To get to this level, teachers must embark on a deeply personal journey that asks us to question our assumptions, biases, practices, and beliefs about teaching through an ongoing reflection process (Rychly & Graves, 2012). To better know their students, teachers might utilize home visits, student surveys, and interviews with members of the community (Fitchett et al., 2010; Fitchett & Heafner, 2012; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amonti, 2005; Liston & Zeichner, 1990).

Though culturally responsive teachers hold all students to high standards and make academic success non-negotiable, caring and heart are at the center of the framework. Smith

(2020) sees the heart as empathy, compassion, genuine connection, and an intense commitment to student inclusion and educational equity. For Gay (2000/2010/2018), caring for students means understanding them and their worlds from an insider perspective. This also includes seeing students as people and showing patience, persistence, facilitation, and validation as they traverse the learning process. Caring for students, however, is not enough to support our diverse students as they navigate inequitable school environments. Good intentions from educators must be accompanied by pedagogical knowledge and a knowledge base of ethnic and cultural diversity (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). This should also be complemented by teacher self-analysis of the relationship between culture, ethnicity, and intellectual ability.

Like culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching has many shapes, forms, and effects (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). Gay (2000/2010/2018) believes culturally responsive teaching is already happening but is still a yet-to-be-realized vision in many places with significant barriers. Culturally responsive teaching asks much of teachers, including developing a culturally diverse knowledge base, designing a culturally responsive curriculum, demonstrating care and building a learning community, communicating with diverse students, and responding to diversity in instructional delivery" (Gay, 2002). Above all, culturally responsive teachers have "unequivocal faith in the human dignity and intellectual capabilities of their students" and understand that "a child's intellectual, academic, personal, social, ethical, and political dimensions all develop in concert with each other" (Gay, 2000/2010/2018, p. 52). While the framework acknowledges the vast hurdles in its full realization in the classroom, standards and accountability do not necessarily have to stand in the way of this (Bender-Slack & Raupach, 2008). Instead, teachers must do everything possible to promote and sustain long-term academic achievement, collective empowerment, and sociopolitical awareness.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Though very similar to culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to go further. The framework seeks to sustain our students' linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism. Culturally sustaining pedagogy also serves as a "response to the many ways that schools continue to function as part of the colonial project" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 2) and to "disrupt the anti-Indigeneity, anti-Brownness, and anti-Blackness that exists in our schools" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p.2). It shares with culturally relevant and culturally responsive the importance of student success in school, its centering on students and their knowledge, knowledge of self and others, deep caring for students, and the importance of a curriculum in which students see themselves. Though Paris and Alim (2017) recognize the foundation that culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy laid before them, they assert that the idea of 'relevant' does not do enough to maintain student cultures and support the goals of social critique. We must go beyond valuing all communities equally and consider the "skills, knowledge, and ways of being needed for success in the present and future" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 5).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy "calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being in communities of color" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 5). Despite efforts by other asset pedagogies to include student culture, Paris and Alim (2017) assert that teachers need to be more aware of the shifting practices of students and their communities due to seeing culture as static. Additionally, teachers are choosing what aspects of student culture to include or sustain in the classroom- a practice that Paris and Alim (2017) critique. They argue that when educators and researchers can move beyond being culturally relevant or responsive to students, they can create classroom spaces and curricula built upon and co-constructed with students and their evolving

cultural knowledge that can be central to their education (Paris & Alim, 2017). To accomplish this, "our teacher education pedagogies must be capable of producing the types of decolonizing educators whose humanizing ideologies recognize the value in such things" (Dominguez, 2017, p. 225-226). Because culturally sustaining pedagogy is more than just a new toolkit of books and activities, teachers must have a decolonized mindset. A decolonial teacher education program must have educators confront their positionalities and go beyond using labels of 'diversity,' ‘equity,' and 'social justice' in ways that do not disrupt colonial teacher education (Dominguez, 2017). While Dominguez (2017) acknowledges the realities of what teachers face in their classrooms, he argues that asset-based pedagogies have proven from decades of research to have addressed the concerns of rigor and academic growth that districts call for while also extending youth learning and social and civic development.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy has three central tenets: it attends directly to asymmetrical power relations and the goal of transforming legacies of colonization, recognizes the need to reclaim and revitalize what colonization has disrupted and recognizes the need for community-based accountability (Paris & Alim, 2017). Unlike other asset pedagogies that may fit inside the current hierarchies of school, culturally sustaining pedagogy sees itself as a paradigm shift, a call to unsettle practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). It is meant to be a "performance of resistance" that responds to the negative gaze experienced by many students of color by working to sustain student identities. Achieving these goals heavily depends on competent classroom teachers who understand the value of their students and the goals of culturally sustaining pedagogy.

One of the most significant aspects of culturally sustaining pedagogy is its deep discussion of culture. According to Paris and Alim (2017), culture is not necessarily converged

with ethnicity or race. While they do not provide a specific definition of culture, the authors remind us that culture is "constantly changing in progress as we engage in the process of being and becoming with the peoples and communities that are important to us" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p.83). Understanding what counts as culture in teaching and learning is essential, as asset-based pedagogies are often misunderstood (Paris & Alim, 2017). Because of this, culturally sustaining pedagogy asks teachers to be culturally competent, the ability of teachers to help students recognize and appreciate their culture of origin while building fluency in one or more other cultures. Paris and Alim (2017) also push teachers to consider idiocultures and subcultures. It is common for schools and teachers to hold narrow conceptions of what does and does not count as culture, which can prove to have dangerous consequences for young students. Not only would this impact the procedures and programs for students that increasingly judge minority students against dominant white standards, but it also clashes with young students' more flexible definitions of culture in an increasingly globalized world (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2008; Paris & Alim, 2017). According to Paris & Alim (2017), culturally sustaining pedagogy at its heart is about survival- a survival that hopes to sustain itself through education- and about changing the conditions under which we live and work by opening new and revitalizing community-rooted ways of thinking about education beyond the white gaze.

As educators consider what they are seeking to sustain, they must also realize that there are competing demands between tradition and newer practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). Educators must seek to sustain linguistic and cultural pluralism in schools, go beyond considering the heritage of students of color based on simplified teacher understandings, and pay attention to the evolving practices of the community, especially in the way in which they are lived and used by young people (Paris & Alim, 2014).

Funds of Knowledge: Students, Families, & Teachers

Though not a technical part of the framework of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy, funds of knowledge powerfully connect to the pillars of the framework due to its centering on student and family knowledge, harnessing it for classroom learning, and seeking to alter our perceptions of poor and working-class families by choosing to see and use their strengths. From Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti (2005), the idea of funds of knowledge advocates that students and families hold much knowledge and skills on their own. When teachers are aware of these students' and families' strengths and use them in the classroom to teach, students can make connections and strengthen their understanding of the standards rather than seeing school knowledge as irrelevant to their own lives (Breunig, 2017). This approach has also benefited students with disabilities or struggling students (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). However, how can classroom teachers gain a deep understanding of the funds of knowledge of their students? The research makes many suggestions.

In introducing the idea of funds of knowledge, Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) follow teachers as they conduct regular home visits with families and interviews with family members to understand them better. While the time spent in each home will vary, Kinney (2015) advocates for visiting households multiple times weekly for observations and parent and student interviews. Home visits allow teachers to learn about family structure, work experiences, literacy practices, languages, religious beliefs and practices, and educational backgrounds (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019). Teachers can also gain insight into students' household roles (Kiney, 2015). Additionally, these home visits indicate respect for family ways of knowing and improving home-school relationships (Roe, 2020).

While other researchers also advocate for regular home visits (Cun, 2020; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019), some are critical of this as the only method of learning about families (Joves et al.; Guitart, 2015). In addition to being hard and time-consuming to conduct for all students in the classroom (Volman & Gilde, 2021), Joves et al. (2015) point out that students may need to be in continuity with some or all family practices. As a seasoned classroom teacher, this is especially evident in language fluency. Kinney (2015) suggests that teachers specifically focus on the knowledge and skills in the household that kids might have access to. Though all students possess specialized knowledge on specific topics, they might need to be made aware of how these skills connect to classroom learning and need classroom teachers to support them (Castillo & Ives, 2020).

Going beyond home visits, there are other options for teachers to gain access to what students know. Artifacts such as drawings, writings, journals, or pictures would be accessible for teachers to collect (Cun, 2020; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019). Students may also share videos, photos, or even boxes with items that are significant to them (Volman & Gilde, 2021). Increased social interactions with students are also vital to learning about who they are outside the classroom (Castillo & Ives, 2020). However, it is essential to note that despite the benefits of using student and family funds for knowledge in the classroom, more than this approach is needed for student achievement (Fletcher & Shaw, 2012). Students also need to gain valuable skills such as knowing how to use their time and organization, monitoring progress, and reflecting on their learning (Fletcher & Shaw, 2012). Additionally, more than having an interest in what is being taught with connections to student knowledge is needed to give students access to the content (particularly math), especially when students find that subject or topic challenging

(Castillo & Ives, 2020). Despite these challenges, research generally supports the funds of knowledge approach in the classroom to support student learning.

Another vital source of funds of knowledge to consider is that of the classroom teacher. Because the curriculum is a living experience shaped by classroom life (Schlein, 2015), teacher knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes all factor into the curriculum (Baumann, 1992; Karabon, 2021). This personal, professional, and cultural knowledge creates the funds of knowledge that is present in our classrooms daily (Karabon, 2021). Teacher funds of knowledge combined with a desire to make the community a better place significantly influence what learning will look like in each classroom. Using their funds of knowledge allows teachers to examine students' overall success and see the big picture of student learning and growth over standards and test scores (Schlein, 2015).

However, the view of teachers as trusted professionals has been clouded by groups who wish for them to be seen as untrustworthy and needing to be held accountable for their jobs. As a result of neoliberal policies that promote competition, accountability, and measurement, teachers are no longer seen as independent decision-makers. However, they are being deskilled and relegated to implementers and workers needing guidance (Sari, 2018). Teachers' decisions are now being made at the corporate level by curriculum designers who create pre-packaged materials such as reading basals and whole math curriculum programs complete with assessments, teacher guides, and workbooks (Banegas, 2020). In addition to using only approved curriculum resources and an RTI process that adds teacher paperwork, these products continue the deskilling process (Nuñez, 2015).

Additionally, using resources that do not represent diverse student needs and backgrounds and have a narrow definition of what counts as valid knowledge ultimately hinders

student learning. Though these materials are common in many classrooms, teachers can use teacher discretion regarding what to include, exclude, and supplement to ensure student learning from the prescribed materials. Returning to trusting teachers as professionals will only improve student learning and well-being in schools.

Research supports that students, families, and teachers can contribute to student learning and achievement. As Schubert & Schultz (2014) note, students are not asking for much when they wish to see a connection between their real life and classroom learning experiences. Interestingly, Dewey (1902, as cited in Schubert & Schultz, 2014) did not consider the child and the curriculum separate entities. As decisions about our schools continue to be made by those with little to no relationship with our students, families, and teachers (Schubert & Schultz, 2014), teachers must recognize the intelligence and potential of our students and families as well as their professional knowledge to create a learning environment that is inclusive, challenging, relevant, and joyful.

Connections of Theoretical Frameworks to My Research

Though I acknowledge that the frameworks of culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogy have much to offer my research, students, and teaching practices, I could only fully implement some aspects of each framework. Citing discussions with my principal, district policies, and SB 377 (typically known as the Divisive Concepts Law), specific aspects and tenets of each framework needed to be revised to conduct research in my school.

Looking at culturally relevant pedagogy, the tenet of student learning was the most applauded and the one administrators seemed most excited about. Though I did not intend to improve scores on the district's social studies benchmark, I did not elaborate on my definition to

administrators. Cultural competence was also not at odds with district policies or state law per se. Because of my diverse school population, helping students understand the cultures of others was celebrated (though they probably imagined a more surface-level exploration of culture). Additionally, because my research focused explicitly on Native Americans, a group absent from my school, this alleviated any concerns of upset Native American parents. Critical consciousness was quickly the most dangerous of the tenets to explore. Educators are called to "apply, analyze, synthesize, and critique their environment and the problems they encounter to be effective members of society" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 9); this was selectively and carefully approached. Though we discussed Native American removal, relationships with colonists, and current issues in the Native American community, I did not necessarily guide students in critiquing the structures that allowed and continue to allow this to happen and did not discuss the issues they saw in their community that they wanted to solve. Instead, the focus became learning more about Native American histories and cultures, past and present.

Culturally responsive pedagogy's four critical aspects of caring, communication, curriculum, and instruction were also utilized in the classroom to support student learning (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). Additionally, Gay (2000/2010/2018) reminds us that these are "not mutually exclusive… and are dynamic, dialectical, and interwoven" (p. xxiii). The concept of caring was visible in my classroom during my research and beyond, starting with the *esprit de corps* approach to teaching and developing strong, caring, interpersonal relationships with my students that focused on "patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment" (Gay, 2000/2010/2018, p. 60). We met daily for morning meetings to foster community, and students were given many opportunities throughout each day before, during, and after the research to voice their opinions and preferences on their learning. Communication was evident in daily

conversations with students, where I practiced active listening with students and with myself. As Gay (2000/2010/2018) reminds teachers, listening to what students talk about tells you what they care about. I also considered that students know more than they are able to communicate in a particular medium so giving them multiple opportunities to communicate in various mediums was important for them to express what they truly know and for their teacher. I also created curriculum for my students choosing resources that aligned to their interests, would be engaging, as well as respectful and accurate to the tribes we were learning about. Finally, my approach to instruction tied all of these components together, focusing on student engagement, joy, constant communication between student and teacher, and accurate resources on Native Americans.

I again submit that critical consciousness to the level that Paris & Alim (2017) call for did not come to fruition in my classroom or in my research. Though I was upset to have to compromise my work and original vision for my research, I concluded that having some positive impact on my student's learning and development of cultural competence remains a worthwhile goal.

While they each play unique roles, using the framework of culturally relevant/ responsive/sustaining pedagogy gives me the guidance and support needed to reconceptualize the social studies third-grade curriculum. Its focus on student agency, the use of student knowledge and culture to support new learning, and gaining cultural competence aligns with my research goals for students to use their interests and cultures to achieve academic success and increase the cultural competence of Native Americans. Culturally relevant pedagogy reminds me to create close relationships with my students better to understand their needs, understandings, and interests and begin with their knowledge to make connections to the social studies content I am required to teach. It also reminds me of the long and purposeful path needed to build the cultural

competence of Native Americans while dispelling stereotypes and building connections to their cultural practices. Culturally responsive pedagogy centers on the curricular choices I make that ensure that students have access to the content and that Native American history and culture are taught in accurate and responsible ways using diverse resources from Indigenous authors and researchers. Culturally sustaining pedagogy will guide my decisions regarding the instructional resources to use, the connections I intentionally make to student culture and interests, and the constant questions I ask myself about my interactions with my students and their basis on colonizing teaching practices.

Finally, the framework of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy also supports the long-term changes I seek to make across all subject areas where students see the connection between themselves and the new learning, can build cultural competence in subjects beyond social studies, and question the American history they are learning.

Critical Social Studies

Leading scholars in critical social studies include Walter Parker (2010) and E. Wayne Ross (2014/2017). With a focus on understanding and respecting the histories and identities of others, imagining a new democracy, and critiquing the society we live in to create meaningful change, critical social studies allows you to reimagine a new perspective on social studies that is inclusive and action-oriented. Because of my work's focus on changing the social studies curriculum, the framework of critical social studies supports my understanding of the possibilities that exist within social studies, supporting students in learning about their history, the history and tribulations of others (specifically Native Americans), and more towards understanding what a just society is and how to create and sustain it for themselves.

Social studies is typically a unique field that takes time to define (Russell, 2012). Incredibly, many social studies teachers need help defining what it is and is not (Bisland, 2012; VanFossen, 2005). Ross, Mathison, and Vinson (2014) see social studies education as "the study of all human enterprises over time and space" (p. 25). The National Council for the Social Studies states that the purpose of social studies is to "help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (NCSS, 2023, p. 2). According to Ross (2014), it is a subject that has experienced and continues to experience the effects of societal influence, including social studies advocates and opponents, to find its place in the curriculum. Social studies also have a long history of "turf wars among competing camps" (Evans, 2004, p. 1). These camps include traditional historians, teachers who see social studies as a social science, social efficiency educators, followers of Dewey who seek to contribute to social improvement, and critical pedagogies who see social studies as a tool to transform society (Evans, 2004; Evans, 2015). Though different historical, political, and social events impacted the popular approach to social studies of its time, mainstream social studies today involves mainly using approved textbooks and other curricular materials without question and assuming their neutrality as resources to teach the standards (Knight et al., 2006; Sibbett & Au, 2018). Today's second, more common approach is a 'best practice' curriculum that values reasoning and evidence, supposedly independent of political beliefs (Sibbett & Au, 2018). This view also claims to work towards building a more just world through logic and creating critical thinkers (Parker, 2003). Others, however, question neutrality in standards and curriculum (Schultz, 2008; Sibbett & Au, 2018). This is where critical social studies differs.

Critical social studies seeks to go beyond the current mainstream approaches to social studies and is centered on societal transformation by creating a more just, democratic nation (Ross, 2017). It seeks to examine our society and place its issues at the center of instruction, pushing students to understand our problems and become active participants in solving them. Doing so creates a more democratic and equitable nation of informed citizens, one of the main goals of critical social studies.

Another marker of critical social studies is its focus on multiple perspectives and stories in the classroom, including racial, ethnic, and religious, attempting to tell a more inclusive history. Additionally, students are more than just handed these histories. However, they are given resources such as primary documents, maps, biographies, books, documentaries, guest speakers, field trips, and other resources to gain their perspectives and understandings of these histories and challenge the status quo history students are typically taught (Barton, 2011; Ross, 2014). Out-of-classroom experiences also provide intergenerational understanding and a greater connection to one's community (Alleman et al., 2018). Depending on student interests, they may gain these understandings through debate, role play, and creating artwork or other creative outlets (Barton, 2011). This increases student engagement and allows students to understand better the information presented in a different format. Because critical social studies teachers require students to analyze, compare, synthesize, and evaluate content, students must fully participate in this process that asks them to go beyond reproducing content by drawing their conclusions (Barton, 2011; Folsom, 2012; Parker, 2010). They learn how the stories told are developed and are involved in historical investigations using primary sources that help them understand the construction of various accounts (Parker, 2015). Teachers also support students in developing historical positionality during this process (Fitchett & Heafner, 2012). While students

learn about their histories and those of their classmates, teachers understand the variation within cultural groups and make this a recurring point in their lessons (Merchant, 2018). Students also appreciate the departure from traditional rote memorization of facts and dates, many of which still need to be learned (Folsom, 2012), when they are pushed to understand social studies in a much deeper way (Burenheide, 2012).

Critical social studies requires additional effort from classroom teachers. In addition to asking social studies teachers to prepare the next generation of democratic citizens, it also calls for them to address our most critical issues, including local, national, and global (Martell, 2018). Additionally, critical social studies teachers value political autonomy and critical thinking in the classroom (Sibbett & Au, 2018) and do not necessarily aspire to impartiality in the classroom as they understand that standards, resources, textbooks, and teachers can never be neutral in choosing instead to explicitly take a stand against injustice and inequality (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Sibbett & Au, 2018). They support this by emphasizing the importance of the research process to aid in the thinking process while modeling this themselves (Libresco, 2014). They also seek to expose the structures that exist in our society that create unjust and inequitable policies and conditions for others as critical social studies teachers see no separation between issues we face in society and what is discussed in the classroom (Ross, 2017; Sibbett & Au, 2018).

It also asks teachers to go beyond the more fragmentary conceptions of history and understand its conceptual underpinnings (Merchant, 2018; Yilmaz, 2008). While they seek for students to have a greater understanding of others' histories, such as Muslims, the LGBTQIA+ community, immigrants and refugees, and other communities currently facing persecution, they continuously seek these for themselves as this leads to a greater understanding of the diverse students they teach (Merchant, 2018). Teachers aim to teach students where we live in the world

and how we impact a person's worldview and include multiple perspectives while bringing these stories to life for students (Ross, 2016). Elementary social studies teachers have a tough job as they are tasked with setting the foundation for citizenship development, global awareness, democratic values, and a sense of commitment to making their world a better place (Passe et al., 2014).

Despite the intentions and wishes of classroom teachers, many classroom mandates, particularly the recent new laws passed that increase teacher surveillance and target instruction and those that call for diversity within standardization, seek to make things more difficult for teachers (Martell, 2018; Ross, 2016). Many are also bound to specific resources or face termination. As Loewen (2018) reminds us, textbooks cannot include every event, and decisions need to be made about what is most important. However, the critical thinking skills and ability to draw their conclusions about their world is where critical social studies become crucial as these can continue to persist despite textbooks used or the red tape that teachers must navigate. Critical social studies as a framework supports my work in many ways. First, it keeps my focus on Native American representations and student understandings of Native American cultures and histories. I seek to overturn the stereotypes and limited understandings they hold about Native Peoples by presenting them with the works of Native authors and primary documents to support students as they deconstruct and reconstruct their characterizations of Native Americans and build critical competence. In using district resources that do not always include correct or complete historical information, I intentionally ask questions of students regarding Native American enslavement, land theft, and other atrocities as they relate to their relationships with European explorers and North American colonizers. Fortunately, my standards as they are written allow me the space to discuss these topics in the units on Native Americans of North

America, European explorers, and early American colonial life. I am also careful to give a more comprehensive image of Native culture and include the beautiful aspects of culture and a more everyday picture of who they are today.

Other Relevant Literature Review

In addition to elementary social studies and culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy, my work will also address students as curriculum, student-centered classrooms, and teaching Indigenous history and cultures. My review of the literature will guide my research and classroom decisions.

Students as Curriculum

It is typical practice for teachers, parents, administrators, and stakeholders to have a say in what students learn in the classroom and the textbooks and supplementals purchased for the district. They decide what information would be most worthwhile for students to know and give the reason for creating fully functioning members of society. Students are supposedly at the center of these conversations but are only sometimes included. As Schubert & Schultz (2015) remind us, even as the same adopted standards and curriculum are taught in our schools, they are received by only some students in the same way. Instead, students "accept, reject, and refashion according to the lenses they have developed through their unique experiential, cultural, and other contextual background" (Schubert & Schultz, 2015, p. 233). Because students interpret content and learning experiences differently, one could conclude that students are, at least in part, the curriculum (Schubert & Schultz, 2015). Due to the current focus in education on academic achievement, competition, accountability, and testing, the needs of policymakers and students still need to align.

Teachers and students, however, yearn for something different. They yearn for students to be engaged, to see a connection between their lives and the content, to see the content being learned in various classes to connect with each other to create a bigger picture, and to experience schooling as enjoyable. Can students focus on solving problems in their own lives and communities rather than only preparing for their distant future as productive, working members of society? (Schubert & Schultz, 2015). Students go through schooling to learn. However, the tests they inevitably must take cannot measure their compassion, creativity, problem-solving, or curiosity. Despite the official curriculum, we also know that students' in-school and out-of-school experiences combine to form a more extensive curriculum that affects how they see the world and their place in it (Schubert & Schultz, 2015). If this is the case, teachers should be encouraged and trained to use student funds of knowledge to create a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining classroom that truly centers students and their needs. Students see curriculum as a continuous process rather than a set of skills or knowledge that students must retain (Schubert & Schultz, 2015). Unfortunately, change in an education system led by neoliberal policies and practices is difficult. One of the ways that teachers seek to move towards seeing students as curriculum is the concept of student-centered learning.

Student-centered learning is a concept that is typically seen as a good practice by researchers and district decision-makers alike. Though promoted for different reasons, researchers agree it improves student learning (Talbert et al., 2019). Also known as student-activated, learner-centered, and student-directed learning (Talbert et al., 2019), student-centered learning has various descriptors. Student-centered learning aims to put students at the center of inquiry and problem-solving, allowing them to create learning goals, choose their learning strategies, and evaluate their outcomes (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2005; Talbert et al., 2019).

Characteristics of a student-centered classroom include addressing student learner deficits, promoting collaboration, supporting reflection on learning, generating strategies to solve problems, linking their real life to classroom learning, sharing responsibilities with students and increased autonomy, multiple methods to explore and show learning, and attend and use the knowledge students bring with them (Garrett, 2008; Turner, 2011; Wang et al., 2013). Research has consistently shown the benefits of student-directed classroom practices for students and is seen as successful, if not more effective, than teacher-directed strategies (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Teachers who embraced student-centered beliefs and practices saw gains from student learning outcomes such as standardized tests (Wang et al., 2013) and higher levels of intrinsic motivation in schoolwork (Talbert et al., 2019). This was particularly true among K-2 students with teachers who did not embrace traditional lecture approaches (Salinas & Garr, 2009). In addition to preparing students to be lifelong learners (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2005), student-centered learning can empower students to become more aware of their knowledge and its application and improve motivation in school (Marvell et al., 2013). Interestingly, students with disabilities (Wehmeyer et al., 2000), students considered 'at-risk' (Salinas & Garr, 2009), and minority students were shown to benefit from student-centered learning, with research showing that minority students were able to close the 'performance gap' with their non-minority peers (Salinas & Garr, 2009).

The research also clarifies the questions, misconceptions, and gaps regarding student-centered learning. Teachers' understanding of this approach was one of the biggest concerns. First, researchers found that teachers needed to be more explicit about the expectations of student-centered learning (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2002) due to a lack of training from their district and teacher education program (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). While it was clear that many

educators understood the benefits of these approaches, many needed more competencies to fully implement these in their classrooms (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2002; Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Teachers also reported that district policies and limited class time also made instructional changes difficult (Rich, 2021). Further, teachers were generally concerned with how student-directed learning might undermine their classroom control and maintain order (Talbert et al., 2019) despite research showing that student behavior ultimately improved with less anger and more empathy among peers (Salinas & Garr, 2009).

However, students needed to be more consistent in their feedback. Some found it hard to connect their interests with classroom standards (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2002), reported a preference for teacher-centered instruction (Talbert et al., 2019), and struggled with transitioning from playing a different role in the classroom that required more involvement and work on their end (Maloch, 1999). Though Garrett (2008) supports giving students more time to adjust to these changes and explicitly teaching this new behavior, teachers must also be given time and training to adjust to significant role changes (Rich, 2021).

Though teachers may find it challenging to find the right balance between directing student learning and giving them space (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2002), the research is evident on the benefits for student learning. Despite the issues that teachers face with curriculums that call for student-centered learning and critical thinking alongside management systems that require compliance and obedience (Garrett, 2008), a thriving student-centered environment dramatically relies on the communication between teachers and students and the negotiations they make in the classroom within the limits placed on both groups (Rahimi et al., 2015). Additionally, teachers and decision-makers must also be aware that these changes will only guarantee academic success for some students (Turner, 2011). However, the foundation of

caring, respect, and collaboration between teachers and students will undoubtedly help students move in that direction.

Teaching About Indigenous Peoples of North America

In teaching about Indigenous Peoples, I was particularly interested in discovering what the research suggested about good teaching practices on their culture and history, especially as a teacher who does not identify as Indigenous. Because school systems and the media create and propagate stereotypes of our Indigenous Peoples (Blackhawk, 2007; Helms et al., 2010; Morgan, 2009), classroom teachers must work to correct this in their classrooms. Though some feel that misconceptions also happen because they tend to be a very isolated group, the rampant stereotypes and misconceptions also lead them to be the most misunderstood group in the U.S. (Morgan, 2009). Additionally, the way Indigenous Peoples' history and culture are taught in our schools (if at all) makes students believe they are people of the past (Krueger, 2019; Mihesuah, 2022) and as exotic with no relevance to today (Gross, 2005; Perdue, 2022). It is also true that many teachers are sympathetic but ultimately steer clear of teaching Native American history because they are not sure of how to approach it responsibly and accurately (Ray & DeSanti, 2022). While there is evidence that courses on Native American histories and cultures have become more common, they continue to be a sidebar to European and American history (Sleeper-Smith et al., 2015), whose stories of past tragedies continue to be repeated without mention of who they are as a people (Ray & DeSanti, 2022). This is the case in my own state's standards, with their cultures being reduced to the flora and fauna of Indigenous regions and clothing and shelters of the past. As Mihuesah (2022) reminds us, reducing an entire group of people to only a few identifiers misses opportunities for other discussions.

So what does research say regarding the 'right' way to teach the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples respectfully and accurately? One of the most significant topics addressed was nomenclature. Here, researchers agreed that though there was no universal agreement on the one best practice, the names of specific tribes are preferable (Barry & Conlon, 2003; Krueger, 2019; Krueger, 2021; Ray & DeSanti, 2022). Dunbar- Ortiz (2014) further suggests using a tribe's name in their language to be as accurate as possible. Mithlo (2022) extends this conversation and suggests that when discussing Native history or culture of the past and present, it is preferable to use the terms historical and contemporary instead of the more common traditional and contemporary as traditions continue to be a part of contemporary Native life in some form.

Though my standards mainly address North American Indigenous cultures of the past, teachers are advised to stay away from a "leathers and feathers" approach that seeks to characterize tribes as being similar (Gross, 2005). Krueger (2021) suggests that teachers take this opportunity to present students with other perspectives and ways of knowing. Taking the time to understand practices such as oral traditions and the practice of storytelling (Gross, 2005), as well as their use of natural resources and the role the environment plays in shaping societies and cultures (Helms et al., 2010), are suggested practices. To improve student connections to Indigenous cultures, Helms et al. (2010), Hummel (2022), and Meyers (2022) recommend that teachers focus more on local native nations in more detail for students to understand better the history of their land as well as Native histories and culture. In places like Georgia, where we are surrounded by evidence of ancient Indigenous sites, teachers should help students make connections between the past and present (Perdue, 2022). Combining these connections with other subjects would also support student learning (Thunder et al., 2022). Because Indigenous

history also includes genocide and other atrocities, teachers must be careful to include this as part of their history, not focusing solely on these events as defining them as a people (Tuck, 2009). Doing so may make students see Indigenous Peoples as being damaged or hopeless rather than understanding their complex personhood, including what they know and their hopes and dreams for their people (Tuck, 2009).

In teaching, teachers should also make sure to avoid promoting only individual achievements and the idea of contributions to the U.S. (though my standards specifically call for doing just this) and allow Indigenous Peoples to tell their own stories, when possible, through guest speakers, videos, or books (Hummel, 2022; Krueger, 2019). In addition, only mentioning feel-good stories such as the Code Talkers of WWII are ideas teachers of social studies would do well to remember (Ray & DeSanti, 2022). It is greatly suggested to utilize primary documents in social studies to allow students to come to their own conclusions (Ross, 2014). However, interestingly, some researchers advocate against an overreliance on historical documents and archaeological data because they lack Native voices (Hummel, 2022).

When teaching about our Indigenous Peoples, teachers must continue their learning and understanding of the content, critically examine the curriculum resources they plan to use, and participate in indigenous-oriented professional development opportunities. Though I have good intentions as a classroom teacher in doing 'right,' being aware of my biases and educating myself on Native cultures and histories will be an ongoing process, including studying my Indigenous ancestors in Mexico. Thus far, researching and learning about Native Americans has been a somewhat shameful experience because of the lack of knowledge I hold and the lack of knowledge I could share with former students. While Mithlo (2022) shared their arduous journey with this as well, they suggest the approach of "slow learning, deep curiosity, mutual respect, and

a comfort with not knowing" (p. 235, in Ray & DeSanti, 2022). I hope to teach my students that not only are Natives still here as American citizens, but they are also citizens of their Nations, offering much to both communities.

My reeducation was one of the most significant challenges of teaching this unit respectfully and honestly. It included a better understanding of Native cultures, histories, and values, particularly Native approaches to education. According to Lee and McCarty (2017), educational sovereignty is paramount. In seeking to engage in culturally revitalizing pedagogy, Native students are not separated from their languages, lands, and worldviews but are an essential part of their schooling. Their schooling also attends to reclaiming what was lost during colonization, particularly languages, and commits to focusing on community-based accountability (Lee & McCarty, 2017). In my goal of teaching Native cultures and histories that will begin their journey to cultural competence, I have made a great effort to educate my students on these Native ideas, values, cultures, and histories while on the same journey myself. Confronting my miseducations using Loewen's (2018) and Dunbar-Ortiz's (2014, 2016) work, I began to understand that Native history is "not a record of Native incompetence but of survival and perseverance" (Loewen, 2018, p. xxiii). According to Loewen (2016) and Dunbar-Ortiz (2014), Native Americans are the most lied-about and misrepresented group in our U.S. population. Typically, they are not present in our textbooks beyond the past tense, portraying them as savages and the North American continent as 'virgin' lands (Hamalainen, 2022). When they are present in textbooks or other resources, many myths are repeated, including their disappearance as a people, civilization being given to them by the Europeans, or their victimhood (Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016). While I did not actively reinforce or teach these myths in my classroom, I focused more on who they are today and their values. I chose picture books

that centered on their value of community, respect for elders, and traditions, including the ways in which traditions have evolved and are practiced today. I also greatly emphasized respect for the land and the idea of land as a curriculum (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). As Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) reminds us, everything in U.S. history is about land. For Native Americans, however, this does not mean land ownership but rather a deep respect for and a responsibility to the land (Treuer, 2021). As Tuck (2012) reminds us, the repatriation of Native American lands continues to be of great importance to their people if true decolonization were to occur in North America.

The teaching of the historical struggles of Native Americans and their continued suppression was challenging because of the state laws and district mandates that prohibit the teaching of divisive concepts. While I aimed to be honest, many resources I needed were aimed at adults. Many resources aimed at children were censored for repeatedly citing white men as the wrongdoers- the land stealers, enslavers, treaty breakers, and land polluters. The approved texts acknowledged the suffering and abuses that Native Americans faced as a people but were never to name the culprits. Interestingly, the digital county-approved resources did name European explorers as the culprits of these crimes, so a pattern of inconsistency among the approved resources concerning the historical story being told added to the confusion for both students and teachers.

Third-Grade Social Studies Standards

Presently, there are approximately 459,000 students who identify as Native American who are enrolled in K-12 public schools, with around 93% of Native students attending public schools. Unfortunately, they have very little presence in the K-12 Georgia state standards, with brief mentions in 4th grade, 8th grade, U.S. History, and a short unit on the Creek and Cherokee of Georgia in the past. Their most significant presence in the standards only occurs in 3rd grade,

with an entire unit devoted to Native American regional tribes before European contact. This made the unit all the more significant as it is highly likely that this will be the most direct instruction they receive on Native Peoples in their schooling.

The Georgia Standards of Excellence for third-grade social studies is where students begin a three-year study of the United States, where all four strands (history, geography, government, and economics) are integrated. Students begin by learning about Native American cultures and then the exploration and colonization of North America. In geography, students learn about the major rivers and mountain chains in the United States. Students also get an introduction to our representative democracy in government and an understanding of basic economic concepts in economics.

Though the strands are somewhat interwoven, my research focused on the standards that addressed Native Americans directly, which mostly fall under the history strand. They state that students are to: *SS3H1* Describe early American Indian cultures and their development in North America. a. Locate the regions where American Indians settled in North America: Arctic, Northwest, Southwest, Plains, Northeast, and Southeast. b. Compare and contrast how American Indians in each region used their environment to obtain food, clothing, and shelter. c. Discuss how American Indians continue to contribute to American life (e.g., arts, literature). Students were also to: *SS3H2* Describe European exploration in North America. c. Describe examples of cooperation and conflict between European explorers and American Indians and *SS3H3*. Explain the factors that shaped British Colonial America. c. Describe colonial life in America from the perspectives of various people: large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, children, indentured servants, slaves, and American Indians. Native Americans are excluded from the rest of the Social Studies curriculum.

Typically, teachers in my district have been trusted to teach the social studies standards using an array of resources they thought taught the standards best and any extensions that students may benefit from. Though teachers were provided with resources such as student newspapers, workbooks, and digital content, teachers were not required to use them. After the passing of HB 1084, which bans the teaching of divisive concepts, things were quite different. My district reacted by passing its resolutions to ensure that state laws were being followed and preceded the ban. Because of mandates, I knew creative insubordination would be the only way to continue teaching the standards while ensuring that I was following mandates. As Schultz (2017) states, teachers looking to take a more social justice approach to teaching and learning must look for the 'cracks' in the curriculum.

For standard SS3H1, which calls for students to describe early Native American cultures, I instead had students select a specific tribe to study from the regions mentioned above. This addressed student misconceptions that Native Americans were one monolithic group. Students were also allowed to select a tribe that interested them based on an image and art gallery representing various Native American tribes. The list was created using a GADOE document listing several specific tribes in each region. It was shortened based on my available resources online and in school. Because of the district mandate, I was required to get books approved before student use by the district. All books were purchased on Amazon and were recently published. Books from the media center were automatically approved; however, the 24 books that were relevant to our studies were written at least two decades prior.

Further, standard SS3H1 also calls for students to compare tribes focusing on food, clothing, shelter, and their contributions to American life. To address this standard, I created a table that included art, clothing, food, shelter, and other exciting facts students researched for

their tribe. To continue to address the misconceptions of Native Americans only existing in the past, the table included a section for both past and present. I chose to add art because several students shared that they were highly interested in art as a hobby and even a possible career. While the specific aspects of culture listed in the standards are surface-level at best, I also went beyond the standard in the read-aloud I included as part of our daily morning meetings that addressed other cultural aspects such as reverence of elders, connection and appreciation of nature, and Indigenous names. The books were selected using the National Museum for the American Indian's worksheet on selecting Native American children's literature (Smithsonian, n.d.). and books recommended by Social Justice Books in collaboration with American Indians in Children's Literature (Reese, 2022).

For the last two substandards that called for students to compare regional ways of life and share Native contributions to American life, I did something different. To compare various tribes, students held a social studies fair for their third-grade peers. They included in their presentation a discussion of how they are different from other tribes based on their classmates' presentations on their selected tribes. To address contributions, I chose to utilize a combination of picture books, guest speakers, virtual field trips, and a review of Georgia history from second grade to give a more diverse picture of Native American contributions as they relate to their everyday lives, such as the art they consume, athletes they admire, places they visit, and their influence on the establishment of U.S. democracy. Because my goal of building cultural competence will be a year-long endeavor, I will be connecting Native Americans into the upcoming government unit and environmental unit and continuing read-aloud with representations of Native Americans that add to their understanding of the culture and its people.

Connections

A review of this literature will guide my research in many ways. The research on student-centered learning informs me of student decision-making's impact on academic success and changes students may struggle with making as they are given the space to explore their selected Native American tribe independently. The research on the teaching of Native Americans was invaluable because of my increased awareness of common stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions, as well as approaches to teaching more respectfully and accurately from various Native American scholars that would support my goal of building cultural competence in my students. Finally, an overview of the Georgia Standards of Excellence allowed me to see what the standards wanted my students to learn and the gaps in the standards that allowed me to take them beyond the standards to a more comprehensive historical and cultural understanding of our Indigenous Peoples.

As I read and consider the frameworks' many pillars, beliefs, and the way in which they support my work, I will be drawing on many, but not all, elements. I will be highly focused on student academic success and group learning, a pillar of both culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy. However, I will be drawings on Gay's (2018) broader definition of success to go beyond tests and grades. Further, I will also be drawing on culturally sustaining pedagogy's idea of academics and learning going beyond what might be valuable to students now and consider what will be valuable to them in the future.

Another big idea that I will be drawing on is the essentiality of teachers, specifically their pedagogical knowledge, cultural knowledge, knowledge of students, and knowledge of self. All four of the frameworks, culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy and critical social studies, make it clear that they ask much of teachers. As important members of the community,

teachers are asked to create critical thinkers, facilitate discussions and learning, help students make connections between what they know and value with new knowledge, support students in building cultural competence (which the teachers themselves must hold), and recognize the great power they hold in the classroom that should be used towards creating positive change for students and their communities.

According to my four main frameworks, teachers and students must always be actively working towards these changes. Teachers must expose and critique the structures in society that exist that continue these injustices, including the ones that exist in our schools, and consistently seek to disrupt them. As teachers work to decolonize themselves, they are called to actively work with students in this great cause of disruption.

In order to work through such a goal, many things need to be done. First, teachers must examine their own practices, beliefs, resources, and their own relationship to the structures they are seeking to disrupt. Teachers must also include the community and other allies in this fight to support student learning and move to create a better society for them. However, none of the work that needs to be done can happen without strong relationships and trust between teachers and students. Teachers should continue to have respect for and an understanding of student cultures and values, honor their cultural capital, incorporate student abilities in lessons, and co-construct a space with and for students by involving them in their own learning and community building.

In this chapter, I examined the similarities and distinctions between culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogy frameworks. In attempting to teach social studies in a challenging, exciting way that connects to student lives and diverse interests, using culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy would be a good fit. CRRSP focuses on student achievement, using student culture and talents for teaching and learning, and supporting

students as they seek to create change in ways that matter to them (Gay, 2013). This type of pedagogy can lead to "increases in student motivation, student interest in content, student ability to engage content area discourses, student perceptions of themselves as capable students, and confidence when taking tests" (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 197). Because of social studies' focus on history, geography, and civics, is it the subject "best suited for nurturing students' cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness" (Martell & Stevens, 2019, p. 2). Using the frameworks of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy and critical social studies curriculum, I will reimagine and recreate the social studies curriculum, focusing on the Native American unit while incorporating student interests and knowledge and the community to teach these standards. (Though much discussion has taken place on the use of the terms American Indian, Native American, and Indigenous Peoples, the term Native American will be used in these chapters with specific tribal names being used when possible). I also examined the benefits of deeply knowing and using student and family funds of knowledge, the positive impact that student-centered learning has on academic success, and the historically accurate and appropriate methods of teaching Native American history.

By using these frameworks in my research and making changes to instructional practices, teachers can create a more impactful, relevant, and empowering education that leads to student success and student joy. Students might then be more equipped to use this knowledge to create positive change for themselves and their community.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss my methodology, an ethnographic inquiry, in which I explore the third-grade social studies curriculum in my classroom, explicitly using culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy and students' funds of knowledge and their learning interests to teach the Native American unit to promote their academic achievement in, cultural competence and critical consciousness for, the histories of the United States.

This qualitative study explores various instructional strategies and diverse resources that can be used to build student cultural competence of Native Americans and eliminate and replace stereotypes and misunderstandings with a diverse understanding of Native American tribes, past and present, as well as their cultures, histories, and values. Guided by culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogies and critical social studies frameworks, the central phenomenon being investigated is how using culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy in social studies while teaching the Georgia Standards of Excellence on Native Americans could impact students' achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Cultural competence includes the awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and skills that lead to a better understanding of and relationships with those from other cultures. I aspire to discover how incorporating students' funds of knowledge into the social studies curriculum might impact student achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

The study was conducted in my third-grade classroom. The completed study consisted of six girls and five boys. Students who received parent permission and completed a student assent form were selected to participate in the study. Within our five-week Native American unit, students selected a specific North American tribe to study, focusing on their food, clothes,

shelter, art, and any other interesting facts they discovered. These specific cultural aspects were chosen because of what standard SS3H1 specifically asks students to identify, compare, and contrast. Students were given all the resources they needed to research, including books, functional websites, pen-pals, guest speakers, and field trips during the unit to support their understanding of their tribe. They then reported on what they learned to their peers using the choice board made by the classroom teacher using student interests such as iMovie trailers, posters, Google Doodles, creative writing, reports, Flipgrid, Tableau, or a free choice. Students either worked with a partner who selected the same tribe to study or worked independently. Students were given a chance to present their work twice at the end of the unit. The class held a social studies fair during school and invited other third-grade classes to present their work. Other available teachers and classrooms were invited to participate. After school, students had a table set up for their projects to present to the community during our school's Winter Family Fun Night. After the unit of study is over, students continued with their pen pal project, communicating with Native American third-grade students who attend Indian Community School. To continue the learning, students were invited to watch the PBS animated series "Molly of Denali" to learn about the modern life of a young Native American girl living in Alaska twice a week during lunchtime. Any student was allowed to attend any sessions they wished.

Data sources, including interviews, individual and focus groups, classroom observations, and student work samples, were utilized to understand better student perceptions of Native Americans and knowledge gained during the unit. The data was analyzed using inductive analysis and open coding to generate categories and themes.

This chapter provides an overview of the rationale for choosing ethnographic inquiry, the main research question and supporting sub-questions, a thorough description of the research design, and data collection and analysis.

Ethnographic Inquiry

Because of its eclectic history and changes over time, ethnography is sometimes hard to define and provide parameters for (Nicholas, 2021). According to Hammersley, ethnography is "a form of social and educational research that emphasizes the importance of studying firsthand what people do and say in particular contexts" (2006, p. 4). Madison (2020) expands further, describing ethnography's aim as focused on "engaging, interpreting, and recording the social meanings, values, structures, and embodiments within a particular domain, setting, or field of human interaction" (p. 3). Clifford and Marcus (2020) remind us that ethnography encourages us to keep thinking, challenging what we think we know, and to *make the familiar strange*. Though ethnography focuses on culture, it goes beyond decoding cultures and recoding what we believe to be true (Clifford & Marcus, 2020).

In my research, I capture many distinguishing characteristics of ethnographic inquiry. First, my work seeks to examine the inner workings of my classroom as I work towards being more culturally relevant in my social studies instruction, seeking to understand the social setting and the students involved. As Van Maanen (1988/2011) states, ethnographies are portraits of diversity that display the intricate ways individuals and groups understand each other. Because I will be working closely with my students, my research is personal, include observations and interviews in the same setting over a long period of time, and focused on understanding who my diverse students are, their cultures, backgrounds, talents, and intelligence, and how these can be used to teach grade-level social studies content. There is also a significant focus on culture. In

addition to student culture, I examined classroom culture, school culture, home culture, and any other cultural groups my students feel they belong to understand better how these work together to impact student achievement and engagement. Additionally, Ritchie (2019) believes that ethnographic research is well-suited to learn about lived experiences via long-term engagements, which supports the goals of my research in learning about students' experiences with a different course of a unit of study.

Benefits & Challenges

Though it has its challenges, doing ethnographic research with children has many benefits. benefits. It allows researchers to see not just what students are learning, doing, saying, and feeling but also shines a light on their intelligence, confidence, and how they contribute to the societies and cultures they are a part of (Ritchie, 2019). Additionally, it assumes that children are competent interpreters of their world and have amassed much knowledge that researchers can learn from rather than assuming they are merely gaining knowledge from the adults around them (James, 2011; Ritchie, 2019). Ethnographic research with young children can be a chance to give children a voice, though some are critical of this idea as it assumes that children are not capable of speaking for themselves (Szulc et al., 2012). Ethnography as my form of inquiry allows me the opportunity to add to the literature the voices of young students in elementary social studies while keeping focused on the political and social contexts in our prescribed county curriculum. Its goal of understanding complex cultural structures in context, as well as its structure of working backward to discovery, make it a solid methodology for further study systems that are always in flux.

Though ethnographic inquiry has many benefits and remains a popular methodology in many disciplines, there are many challenges to be aware of when working with young children,

particularly your own students, in your classroom. First, researchers are typically asked to play dual roles, getting close to the participants, and immersing themselves in their world while staying true to their research and writing about others' cultures. It can be challenging for a researcher to want to be loyal to their group while keeping a certain level of detachment to maintain objectivity (Clifford & Marcus, 2020). Additionally, ethnographers are tasked with representing people, things, and ideas foreign to them. They take what they have learned from their participants' cultures and help others understand it, carefully selecting and excluding ideas to create as truthful a story as possible. However, due to the systems at play and the power and history of the ethnographers themselves, the truth is always partial, only sharing what they know (Clifford & Marcus, 2020). Because no one reads from a neutral standpoint, a complete picture of what is being studied cannot happen despite the work done to fill in knowledge gaps. However, others argue that the biases of ethnographers are what give them their point of view, and, if honest in their writing about their background and relationship with participants, can paint a clearer picture for the reader. Further, ethnographers' work is focused on culture, which is hard to pin down as it changes. Clifford and Marcus (2020) argue that in attempting to analyze and write about a culture, you also participate in its production and change.

Doing ethnographic research with children adds another layer of challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the issue of power. While many suggest that researchers strive for the "least adult role" to address the power imbalances that might exist between adult researchers and children (Mayeza, 2017), others believe that power is a very complex thing (Foucault, 1982; Christensen, 2004). Power cannot simply be seen as something that an adult has and decides to have less of, mainly because power is characterized by the resistance of the subordinated group (the children) (Foucault, 1982). As teachers of young children know, children do not simply

accept the power roles that adults demand but are constantly negotiating and challenging existing power structures.

Additionally, if I were also the classroom teacher of the participants, it would be hard to detach themselves from the role of authority for both parties as the adults are charged with keeping students safe, and students are expected to meet the expectations of the adults around them (Eder & Corsaro, 1999; James, 2011). It can also be made more complex when research occurs in an institution like a school with its power dynamics due to gender, grade, class, race, and more (James, 2011). Because children are typically sensitive to the child-adult differences in their daily lives, it might prove challenging to ask them to set these ideas aside temporarily (Christensen, 2004). However, Murphy and Dingwall (2011) suggest that power imbalances between researchers and participants do not necessarily lead to exploitation. Still, researchers need to remember that not all students might be comfortable with participating, with some choosing to communicate their feelings with nonverbal cues that researchers must be in tune with and respectful of (Ritchie, 2019).

Student engagement in the research process can also present challenges. Depending on the age and abilities of the students, communication between students and researchers can vary. While older elementary students can share their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and questions with researchers in various ways, younger students express themselves differently. Students' drawings and 'writings' can also interpret children's understandings (Albon & Barley, 2021). Depending on the age of the children being interviewed, a student's ability to articulate their thinking might also prove challenging to the interviewer attempting to gain knowledge (Duneier et al., 2014). However, Wolcott (2008) reminds us that getting a full, complete account from participants is impossible and should focus on capturing the spirit of those we study.

Student involvement can also become tricky with younger students. While parent permission is always necessary, student permission should be seen as just as important, with students at age seven being able to give written permission for their participation (Albon & Barley, 2021; Tulebaeva, 2014; Jokinen et al., 2002). Because researchers assume that students are intelligent, capable, and aware of their world, it should also be assumed that they can decide the extent of their participation in research. Abon and Barley (2021) suggest that students can be involved in reviewing field notes for accuracy, while Okyere (2018) believes that knowledge should be co-produced with the students to give them a direct voice in the data. Others suggest involving students at every stage of the writing process (Tickle, 2017). While the extent of student involvement varies by researcher, student involvement is crucial in closely understanding children's experiences and viewpoints.

Exemplary Ethnographic Research with Children

Many key exemplars of educational ethnographic research focus on the critical approaches I am interested in. Some of these essential works include *Learning and Not Learning English: Latino Students in American Schools* (Valdés, 2001), *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child* (Igoa, 1995/2015), *Spectacular things happen along the way: Lessons from an urban classroom* (Schultz, 2018), *power and voice in research and children* (Soto & Swadener, 2005), and *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the politics of caring,* (Valenzuela,1999).

Learning and Not Learning English (Valdés, 2001)

In *Learning and Not Learning English*, Valdés (2001) focuses her attention on middle and Latino students receiving ESL services in California. In the text, Valdes provides the readers and overview of teaching English as a second language and a background of the ESL program in Garden Middle School and its town but focuses the bulk of the book on the ESL experiences of

four students at this school: Lilian, Elisa, Manolo, and Bernardo. For each student, Valdes focuses on who they were in the classroom, their level of English proficiency at the start of the program, their access to English both in and out of school, their ESL course and content courses, and concludes with their English proficiency after two years in the ESL program as well as their home life. She concludes the text by offering changes to policy and classroom practice and the future of ESL.

In this text, Valdes' primary argument is that secondary ESL is inadequate and that Latino ESL students, specifically newcomers, deserve to learn English while still focusing on academic achievement. In her sketches of the lives and educational experiences of the four selected Spanish-speaking students, she highlights the rarity of authentic English interchanges where students experience isolated vocabulary lessons and read-alouds of children's books instead. Unfortunately, this English does not model the authentic uses of English outside the classroom, nor is any connection made to students' course content.

Despite these experiences, Valdes does not seek to villainize the ESL teachers, though he admits their practices are problematic. However, she attributes this to a need for adequate and proper teacher training, large class sizes, and system and state policies. In fact, one of the teachers she follows the most she deems "a teacher of goodwill" (p.43). She also critiqued the practice of only using English to teach English to ESL students. At the same time, those in foreign language courses get significantly more support from instructors and resources that offer translations and instruction in English. English-only practices ultimately do not lead to English language proficiency.

While Valdes (2001) gives a less than stellar review of Garden Hills ESL's program and states that "this is neither a happy nor a comforting book. It is not a book about success" (p. 3),

she is optimistic that her findings serve as evidence for a rehauling of the ESL program and the policies that exist that prevent students from acquiring English proficiency and present new opportunities that are often denied to ESL students.

Valdes' (2001) ethnographic work highlights the importance of working closely with students directly impacted by teacher pedagogy, school goals, and district policies. Her work pushes me to ensure that the learning in the classroom is relevant to students and provides them with something they need. One of the most significant impacts of Valdes' work on my future research is her examination of teacher practices. What practices have I adopted that are seen as 'best practices' or typically classroom practices that do not support student learning, and what traditions or new practices do they need to be replaced with? Lastly, her approach to ethnographic research with young children was refreshing. It was not focused on being a success story with youth but on presenting a situation clearly to readers on the realities of student life.

The Inner World of the Immigrant Child (Igoa, 1995)

In *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child*, Igoa (1995), as a teacher-researcher and former immigrant child, explores the inner world of immigrant children. She demonstrates how she has created a learning environment that is responsive to the immigrant children's feelings and needs. Through the voices and artwork of the immigrant children in her class, she portrays the immigrant children's experiences of uprooting, culture shock, and adjustment to a new world. She also describes cultural, academic, and psychological interventions facilitating learning as immigrant children transition to new languages and cultures.

The text itself is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on understanding immigrant children, while the second focuses on teaching them. Here, Igoa (1995) paints portraits of the students' lives and their experiences with adjusting to and living with two

cultures, as well as how she, as a teacher, responds to these challenges in the classroom to support them better. Igoa (1995) also shares student artwork and writing samples of their work and progressions, showing how she uses art and storytelling to motivate students to read and write in English. Additionally, she attempts to connect immigrant children's experiences with psychological interpretations.

Igoa's (1995) text acknowledges that she only attempts to share her teacher's world and the experiences of young immigrant children who are uprooted and experiencing an unfamiliar country. This text was written specifically for pre-service teachers but is valuable for educators of immigrant children as it walks readers through creating a culturally relevant curriculum and its impact on students.

In reading Igoa's research, I am reminded that I would be unable to create a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining classroom or connect social studies to my students' lives without an intense portrait of who they are, how they see the world, and their opinions on what they observe. Her approach to using art was also interesting as a possible communication tool for my students. Though I anticipate having very few students receiving ESOL services, speech services, or special ed services in my upcoming class, art as a communication tool may allow many students to explore their thoughts further and share them in more creative ways.

Power & Voice in Research with Children (Soto & Swadener, 2005)

In *Power & Voice in Research with Children*, Soto & Swadener (2005) explore the issues of power and voice in conducting research with children. The chapters focus on the complexities between researchers and students, their multiple perspectives, and new understandings emerging when researchers involve students more closely.

Soto and Swadener explore various aspects of working with children in this three-part text. In Part I, they attend to issues of power and voice. Here, the authors discuss the paradoxes and implications of doing research with children. The chapters featured the use of narrative inquiry to understand children's perspectives on the events of September 11th through drawings and writings, interviews of a Palestinian child on their environment that encouraged the child to ask questions of the researcher and the act of researching your children with an inquiry focused on play. Part II explores research focused on race, class, and gender. These chapters featured a case study of culturally relevant pedagogy in high school social studies, a narrative inquiry focused on the academic and social experiences of Chinese immigrant children in elementary and middle school, observations of young children defining femininity, and the street art of Kenyan children describing their homes through art and interviews. Finally, Part III centers on the linguistic and cultural identities of children. The featured research shares work on the drawings of bilingual, border children that center on how they help others, interviews of ELL students' definitions of what it means to be American, collaborative teacher research on the use of bilingual literature circles in a bilingual classroom, and the writing of bilingual narrative poetry with bilingual children. The many featured researchers in the text remind us to be cautious in assuming children to be unknowing. Instead, they consider how their way of seeing can be seen as fascinating insights often lost by adulthood (Soto & Swadener, 2005).

Much of Soto & Swadener's (2005) work can apply to mine. I think Soto's work on visualizing voice through drawing, focused on the events of September 11th, touches on my work with heavy social studies standards and reminds me that children can handle the discussions but may need other outlets beyond writing and speaking to explain themselves. Habashi's work interviewing a Palestinian child suggests that, in the interview process, students

should be encouraged to ask questions about the research they are involved in, even if it challenges the work's intent. Jipson & Jipson and Graue & Hawkins' work on how they conducted research gave me much to think about in my role. I need to consider that I may be misinterpreting students' thoughts/ behaviors/experiences and how I might be using my own childhood experiences in interpreting these to be considerate of what I am asking children to do and where this work is taking place.

Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way: Lessons from an Urban Classroom (Schultz, 2008/2018)

Another exemplary ethnographic research with children is Schultz's (2008/2018) (2008/2018) *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way: Lessons from an Urban Classroom.* Working in inner-city Chicago as a 5th-grade teacher, *Spectacular things happen along the way: Lessons from an Urban Classroom* (2018) focuses on Schultz's year-long experiment in his inner-city classroom. Seeing issues with following a traditional curriculum, Schultz decided to try a new approach with problem-based learning using a new curriculum called Project Citizen, which asks students to consider a problem they want to solve. Deciding to focus on their dilapidated school building, the students set out to get involved in local government and community activism and, with the help of their teacher, were also able to learn content standards. This project received much national attention, not only because of where they came from but because they oversaw the creation of meaningful learning for them and their community.

This ethnographic research focused on the students but was told from Schultz's perspective. In his text, he cited classroom observations, group discussions, and student work as his data to explore student experiences in his reconceptualization of the classroom in its standard

approach to teaching and learning. Though student voices were present in the book, Schultz's voice was the most prominent. However, the students ultimately created their course of study by having a say in what they would focus on in the project and the next steps. They made decisions on the amount of teacher support, which, in turn, made it clear to readers that they were benefiting from Schultz's research, which is critical when doing research with children.

One significant takeaway from this text that I would like to apply to my research is the student awareness of the research taking place and the documentation of the student agency. This text is a beautiful example of CRRSP and CSS in action. Lastly, it is evident to all involved in this project that the students greatly benefitted from participating in this research. Because my reconceptualized curriculum could benefit my students and the entire third grade, I seek to ensure that all students learn about their community while supporting it.

Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring (Valenzuela, 1999)

In this three-year ethnographic study in a largely Latino high school in Houston, TX, Valenzuela focuses on how schools strip students of their identities. Valenzuela (1999) begins by discussing the academic achievement of immigrant and minority students and their experiences with educational opportunities in the U.S. that lead to economic opportunities for some but not others, specifically Latino students. In interviewing teachers and students, Valenzuela exposes the complex dynamics between teachers and students. Using classroom observations and in-depth interviews, teachers view students as not caring about learning, while students view teachers as not caring about them. This theme of caring was prevalent throughout the text. Valenzuela attributed this feeling of being uncared for to hostile school practices that do not value the students' culture or language and teachers that focus on content and assimilation over relationships.

Many of the interviewed students felt that giving in to school practices and listening to teachers amounted to an abandonment of their people, with one student, Frank, saying, "I see *Mexicanos* who follow the program so they can go to college, get rich, move out of the barrio, and never return back to give to their *gente*. Is that what this is all about?" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 94). Because of strong family ties in Mexican communities, this idea of moving on without your family and adopting more Anglo values is at least unappealing and, at most, offensive. Students make it clear, however, that they are not against education but resist schooling, which Valenzuela (1999) describes as "the content of their education and the way it is offered to them" (p. 19).

The institutional policies, procedures, and practices upheld by teachers and administrators that seek to deculture students are described as subtractive schooling. However, Valenzuela (1999) also offers readers examples of additive schooling, which she describes as "equalizing opportunity and assimilating Mexicans into the larger society, albeit through a bicultural process" (p. 269), such as the teachers that feed their hungry students in the morning before classes begin. However, she does not speak much on additive schooling and leaves much to be desired by readers on what these practices might look like.

Valenzuela's ethnographic work reminds me to focus on the students' words. What are they willing to share with me, and what questions might they want to ask me? How can I ensure they are heard and understood how they wish to be? Though there might be challenges with young students communicating with me and my adult interpretations of their ideas, I would like to ensure my work is mainly inclusive of student voices, as Valenzuela's text was.

Research Design

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this ethnographic study is:

> How does culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy in the third-grade social studies classroom promote students' critical consciousness, academic achievement, and cultural competence of Native American cultures and histories?

Specific questions are:

> How will using students' funds of knowledge foster their academic achievement?
>
> How will using students' cultures and interests develop their cultural competence and critical consciousness?

District Portrait

All participants live and attend the same elementary school located in a suburb of a large metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. In 2020, it had a population of 106,567 (U.S. Census, 2020), with an estimated median household income of $96 084. Approximately 42.2% of adults held a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2020). The district serves about 20,865 students from grades PK-12 and comprises fourteen elementary schools, five middle schools, and five high schools. The student population is 44.6 % White, 29.5% Black, 6.6% Asian/ Pacific Islander, 13% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American/Alaska Native, and 5.8% two or more races. Additionally, 18.4% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and 7.4% are English Language Learners (GADOE, 2019).

The district graduation rate was 90.7% compared to the state average of 82.6% and the national average of 86%. The district also had an overall CCRPI score of 89.5, 10.7 points higher than the state average of 78.8 (GADOE, 2019). District high schools reported a score of 91.5 on

the CCRPI on content mastery compared to the state high school score of 70.0 for content mastery. Additionally, the district has had eight schools deemed a National Blue Ribbon School since 1984 (GADOE, 2022).

School/Community Portraits

In Georgia, the overall 2019 CCRPI score for elementary schools was 79.9 while the participants' schools earned a score of 83.6. The participants' school is designated a Title 1 school. It serves approximately 595 students from grades Pre-K through fifth grade. It offers students weekly art, physical education, and music. In addition, it offers a variety of extracurricular activities for all grade levels, such as a running club, art club, Spanish club, book club, dance club, chorus, and a Science Olympiad team, to name a few. The school also participates in the house system, where students are separated in dens with fellow students to foster a sense of community in the school and earn points for their den throughout the school year for good character or notable accomplishments.

In 2019, the school population was 2.3% Asian, 0.2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 52% Black, 22.2% Hispanic, 6.1% Multiracial, and 17.3% White. About 43.5% of the school population is considered economically disadvantaged, with 16.2% English Language Learners and 14.2% identified students with disabilities.

The school earned a score of 78.8 on content mastery, with 60.5% of students being deemed proficient or distinguished learners. The school earned a CCRPI score of 83.82 in English Language Arts, 75.26 in Math, 75.77 in science, and 77.33 in Social Studies. This was the last school year (2019) where the state tested students in Social Studies.

The county is diverse and has recently undergone many racial and political changes. Traditionally known as a strong 'red' county, the county was deemed purple at our last

presidential election, with 52.7 % of voters siding Republican and 45.9% of voters siding Democrat (Vestal et al., 2020). The most recent 2022 Senate race shows an even more narrow difference, with 50% Republican and 49% Democrat (CNN, 2022). Interestingly, the geography of the county shows this split, with the North side of the county voting majority liberal and the south side voting more conservative. The political leanings of district representatives can be more conservative, however. The controversial 'Divisive Concepts' Bill, HB 1084, was supported by our district senator (Georgia et al., 2022), while the 'Parent Bill of Rights,' HB 1178, was introduced by our district representative (Georgia et al., 2022).

Participants

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix I), participants will be recruited from my third-grade classroom. I will open participation to all classroom students who can speak fluent English and communicate without assistance. Because the study will focus on the instructional changes made in the classroom and student impact, I wanted to include as many students as possible to get a more accurate understanding of its impact on student learning and perception. Participants in this study were selected by sending a parent recruitment letter to all parents of students who meet the participation criteria. The letter detailed my role as the primary researcher, what I intend to study, and all the tasks involved. This information was placed in student folders and emailed to all parents with emails on file. Next, parental consent forms were sent to parents. Parents were given one week to return signed consent forms. Students whose parents returned the signed consent forms met with me in a morning meeting to discuss their possible recruitment into the study. This morning's meeting session included a short oral discussion in student-friendly language of the research that will be taking place. Students were also given a hard copy of student assent forms, which gave more

detailed information for them to read themselves. The assent form was written at a reading level, making it accessible to all participants. Students had a chance to ask questions about the research during the morning meeting session and could request that the assent form be read aloud to them. No students asked for this accommodation. They were also given time later in that school day to ask me questions about the research privately, but no students did. Forms were collected from all students at the end of that school day regardless of signature to avoid peer pressure to sign for participation. All students who were given parent consent also signed for student assent but would have been excluded from the research if they had not assented. No maximum number of students could have participated because I wanted as many of my students to participate as possible and have their voices heard regarding their experiences. No incentives were given to students for participating in the study. Ten participants elected to participate in this study, four males and six females. A participant profile follows.

Name	**Age**	**Sex**	**Race**	**SES**	**Overall Academic**	**Years At Burch**	**Parents with College Education**	**Interests**
Michael	9	M	Bl	Middle	High	6	Y	Sports, Netflix, math, football
Justin	8	M	M	Middle	Gifted	4	Y	Video games, reading, dogs, math
Zack	8	M	Bl	Middle	High	2	Y	Roblox, cars, Dog Man, P.E. minions
Jack	8	M	Wh	Low	Average	4	N	P.E., basketball, reading, Nightmare Before Christmas
Alaya	9	F	Bl	Middle	Gifted	5	Y	Swimming, reading, Encanto, acting, math
Jade	9	F	Bl	Middle	Average	4	Y	Roblox, Reading, P.E., reading
Dilan	8	F	Wh	Middle	High	4	Y	Art, nature, Pokémon, reading
Sarah	9	F	Wh	Middle	Gifted	5	Y	Reading, zombies, mysteries, dance
Fato	9	F	Wh	Middle	High	5	Y	Reading, Disney plus, graphic novels, math
Maggie	8	F	Bl	Middle	Gifted	4	Y	Dogs, reading, painting, math

Because all instruction will remain standards-based, including the supplemental materials, and only the instructional methods will vary, my district approved the study without instructional alternatives needed for parents and students who did not consent. Those without parent consent were not interviewed, recorded, or had work samples collected for research purposes. Permission to conduct research in the classroom was also obtained from the assistant superintendent of student achievement, the person responsible for approving and overseeing research in the district, and the school principal.

Data Management

Because the study is centered on young students, I chose to obtain assent forms from students in addition to consent forms, as all participants will be either eight or nine years old. Assent forms were signed, and students gave verbal consent to ensure they understood what their signature on the assent form meant. Parents were not present for data collection because the study occurred in the classroom during the regular school day. During data collection, students were verbally asked for permission to take pictures of their work samples and to keep physical work samples until the end of the data analysis period. For interviews, students were allowed to select the location and time from a list of options and decide if they preferred an individual interview or a focus group. Because there is limited time in the school day and many students cannot be interviewed before or after school due to transportation issues, all interviews were done during the school day. Students could select from the following time slots: recess, Specials (art, P.E., music), DEAR time (independent reading time), lunch, or the After School Program. If students decided to be in a focus group, I ensured that all students consented to participate with the others in the group. I reiterated that the other participants in the focus group would also be hearing their answers. Before all interviews, students were informed of the purpose of the

interviews, the expected length of the interviews, the focus of each interview, the plans for the information gained from the interviews, the recording and notetaking of the interviews with participant permission, and reciprocity.

Multiple steps were taken to protect the privacy of the participants. All research was kept confidential, with digital data only stored in a Google Drive folder that only I have access to. Written observational notes and physical student samples were kept in a locked closet in a locked classroom. Recorded interviews were kept on a recording app on a password-protected device with only myself having access. All audio recordings of interviews were destroyed once the recordings were transcribed. All data will be destroyed three years after the research end date except for the student work samples, which will be returned to students after analysis.

Data Collection

Many instruments were utilized in this research, including student interviews, both semi-structured and groups, depending on student preference, observation, student work samples, a pen pal project, media, and a social studies fair. A more multimodal approach was chosen to get a fuller picture of what students know and believe beyond interviews, though interviews were my dominant source of data. A description of each follows.

Individual & Group Interviews

I utilized semi-structured interview formats with participants. This was chosen for my students for a few reasons. Because of the age of my students, I wanted some structure to exist to keep students on topic. I also wanted to ask open-ended questions to allow students to share their opinions and provide probing questions to ensure they understood the question enough to answer it comfortably. Follow-up questions were also used to explore their answers further and gain clarity. Before interviews were done, an interview protocol was conducted where I introduced

myself as a researcher, confirmed their name and age, shared the interview plan, asked for permission to record and take notes, discussed what students hoped to gain from the interview, allowed students to select a pseudonym, and assured students of the confidentiality of their responses as well as the importance of their honesty.

Students were interviewed in person a total of 5 times in the classroom with only the participants present. All interviews took place in the classroom for student comfort. Interview one focused on knowledge and perceptions of Native Americans, where students shared and discussed the drawings they created on what comes to mind when they think about Native American food, clothing, and shelter and what comes to mind when they hear the words' Native American.' They also discussed what they would like to learn about Native Americans before the unit began. Interview two focused on student perceptions of changes in instructional practices, where students discuss their likes and interests and their thoughts on including more of them in the classroom to support student learning. Interview three again focused on perceptions of Native Americans and the inclusion of student interests, where students re-attempted the first drawing task and compared their first set of drawings with their more recent drawings.

Additionally, students were asked to discuss if they noticed any classroom instruction differences and their opinions on the changes. Interview four focused on knowledge of Native Americans, where students were asked to share what they recalled from the Native American unit at least a month after formal instruction ended and what they enjoyed about the unit, notably participating in the Social Studies Fair. Lastly, interview five focused on their perceptions of pen pals and knowledge of Native Americans, where students discussed what they learned from their Native American pen pals from four months of correspondence as well as what they have learned

about Native Americans from watching the PBS program 'Molly of Denali' during lunch. If participants chose not to come to lunch to watch the show, the interview skipped those questions. In scheduling interviews, students were given multiple time slots from which to choose. These slots included time during recess, specials, lunch, and after school (only if students are in the afterschool program or have parents who worked there). Because of the strict school schedule we follow, I wanted students to pick a time that worked best for them to ensure they did not miss an activity or event that was important to them. My goal was for students to be happy to participate in an interview at a convenient time to ensure quality responses and to continue student participation in future interviews. Students could also decide if they preferred a group interview or an individual interview to create a more relaxing interview environment for students. The only exception to group interviews was interviews one and three, which focused on individual student drawings. The goal was for interviews to last at most twenty minutes unless students decided to continue the interview on their own accord.

Classroom Observations

Participant observations took place daily during the Native American unit which lasted approximately six weeks. Handwritten notes were taken during social studies instructional time, which is 50 minutes daily. Notes were focused on perceived student engagement, representations and perceptions of Native Americans, and student wonderings on content discussed during the five-week unit. Quick notes were taken when teaching a whole group lesson as students transitioned to their first break of the day approximately 45 minutes after social studies instruction. If students were working on researching independently or with partners, I took notes as students worked. Notes were also added, reviewed, and typed during the student's first break of the day to ensure the accuracy of the notes. From my observations, I hoped to gain a more

authentic view of student understanding of Native Americans and the changes made as they move through the unit.

Student Work Samples

Student work samples were also collected during this study. These varied greatly depending on what students select from the choice board. The choices will include but are not limited to the following: Google Doodles, movie trailers using the program iMovie on iPads, written research, board games, Flipgrids, tableaus, creative writing, posters, and student-free choices. To demonstrate learning, students could choose any of these options or utilize the free choice option after a discussion with the classroom teacher. Students could create one after finishing a research section of their selected Native American tribe. For example, once students researched Hopi art, they created a movie trailer showing what they researched. Students were allowed to create multimodal representations of their learning unless they chose to create a series of something, for example, a series of drawings for their selected tribe.

The activities on the choice board were chosen using the student interest survey given at the start of the school year. For my students who love technology and being on camera, I included movie trailers and Flipgrid. For my students who enjoy drawing, I included Google Doodles and posters. For my writers, I included creative writing and more traditional written research. For my students who like crafts, I included board games. Finally, for students who like to perform, I included tableaus. I included a free choice option to keep student representation open and encourage creativity. From these activities, I hoped to gain a deeper insight into what my students learned about their tribe, specifically what stood out to them about the tribe's art, clothing, shelter, food, and any other interesting facts.

Pen Pals with Native Students

Upon initial discussions of my research with my principal, she suggested I reach out to the Indian Community School in Franklin, Wisconsin, where her step-granddaughter attends. The school accepts only students who have tribal membership, with its mission being to "cultivate an enduring cultural identity and critical thinking by weaving indigenous teachings with a distinguished learning environment" (ICS, 2020).

After getting permission from both principals to begin a pen pal program between one of their third-grade classes and my class, the cooperating teacher and I held at least two Zoom sessions where we discussed what we each wanted to gain from the pen pal experience for our students as well as a schedule for sending letters and how often we wanted to Zoom with our classes. Each class was to write letters to their pen pals at least once a month, asking them questions and sharing things about themselves and where they live. We planned to Zoom at least once a month at the end of our school day to accommodate the time zone difference and their school schedule. This was to continue for the remainder of our school year since our school year ends first. What I hoped to gain from participating in pen pals year-round is for students to have a connection with a Native American student their age who they can make connections with and begin to see Native Americans as people who are alive today and who participate in mainstream American culture while also keeping their traditions and language alive in their daily school lives. For their class, the classroom teacher hoped for her class to gain a bigger worldview of kids who are not Native American and get a picture of a diverse classroom in the U.S. South.

Media

In discussing my research with the elementary instructional coach for Social Studies, one of the resources she suggested for students was to tie in the PBS show "Molly of Denali," which

follows 10-year-old Molly, who is of Gwich'in, Koyukon, and Dena'ina Athabascan descent, and her life in Alaska with her friends and family. The animated show is a blog from Molly to viewers living in the lower 48 states to teach them about life in Alaska as well as being an Alaska Native in the present. Most of the voice actors on the show are Indigenous and can speak in their Native language on the show. This show was selected to teach cultural competency and dispel stereotypes that students have about Native Americans only existing in the past. We began watching the show after the initial Native American unit was over to extend learning using different media. Because the episodes are 30 minutes long, we watched them in the classroom on Tuesdays and Thursdays during lunch as a 'lunch and learn' option, with all students invited to join us when they wish. I made this optional to respect student break times since they are lacking in our current schedule. Before the lunch and learn series began, I showed students a trailer of the show first to pique student interest. What I hoped students gained from watching this show weekly was an understanding that Native Americans continue to exist today and choose to participate in some mainstream American culture while keeping some of their traditions, including their language.

Social Studies Fair

Because of all the researching and creating that students will be doing, I wanted to give space to share their learning with others and educate the community. After speaking with my principal, I allowed my students to present their work at our Winter Family Fun Night. This was chosen because the students were to perform a choral concert with many of them and their families in attendance. Because this presentation took place at a significant school event, they had the opportunity to educate the community, including their peers and parents, about their Native American tribe. Because this was an afterschool event and some students may be unable

to attend, another social studies fair was held the day before during school hours. This occurred in a large meeting room, with other 3rd-grade classes invited to attend our presentations. Students had their tables to present and discuss their work with their peers. What I hoped students gained from the social studies fair is a chance to educate their friends, family, and community about what they have learned about their Native American tribe and dispel common misconceptions and misunderstandings that others may have.

Data Analyses

Interview Analyses

I utilized inductive analysis for my interview data. All interviews were transcribed by hand to allow me to be closer to the data and have a more in-depth understanding of the participants. They were transcribed within 48 hours of the interview to ensure that if the participant's words were unclear or inaudible in the recording, I could use my notes and memory to insert what was said. In my transcription, every attempt was made to quote students verbatim, including pauses, filler words, and any made-up words that students chose to use. This was done to increase the trustworthiness of the transcripts and to represent the participants as authentically as I could.

In this data analysis, I chose to code manually. Not only did this allow me to get closer to the data, but the number of interviews I had made it easier to make connections on paper and physically create categories and themes using physical notecards and sticky notes. Manipulating data on paper and writing codes in pen gives a researcher more control and ownership over the work (Saldana, 2016). For this process, I printed copies of all interviews and utilized large and small index cards for codes and categories.

I used open coding, specifically In Vivo coding, to generate themes. Because children's voices are typically marginalized, coding with their actual words will enhance my understanding of their views and opinions. In Vivo coding aligns with my goals of understanding student perceptions and how they might change over time and "capturing the meanings inherent in people's experiences" (Stringer, 2014).

To start the coding process, I first read the interviews at least once in their entirety to get a general feel for the data, an overview of the participants, and to note any words and phrases that immediately jump out. The students made many predictable comments, such as mostly discussing Native Americans in the past tense, recalling that they learned about Native Americans in second grade, and admitting that they felt they knew little to nothing about them. Surprisingly, there was much focus on skin color and identity. I documented these noticings in a memo.

Then, I read the interviews a second time. I labeled this as the first coding cycle on the physical interviews, underlined any words and phrases that stood out to me, and wrote them in blue on the margins on the right-hand side. As I coded, I kept in mind the goals of each interview to help me determine what to code and my interview questions. Finally, I reread the interviews and noted this as my second coding cycle. I underlined words and phrases that I should have underlined the first time and wrote them in pink on the left-hand margins of the paper. After both coding cycles, I wrote a memo documenting the connections, questions, my decision-making process, and any lingering ideas and questions that arose during the reading and coding process. Next, I created a master list of codes from each interview indicating whether they were generated from the first or second cycle. This was done to help me create categories later. I also wrote every code on its index card. Additionally, I coded each index card indicating students' race,

gender, and academic performance. From these codes, I then generated categories and themes. The categories I created were also written on note cards. After the categories were created, I analyzed them and created my themes. The themes I created were meant to help me answer my initial research questions and provide new insights into student learning.

The research questions I am exploring are: How does culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy in the third-grade social studies classroom promote student critical consciousness, academic achievement, and cultural competence of Native American cultures and histories? How will using student funds of knowledge foster student academic achievement? How will using student culture and interests develop cultural competence and critical consciousness? Student interviews will be the primary source of data in answering these questions. To measure academic achievement, I will look for students directly mentioning what they learned about Native Americans in the unit, their increased interest in the topic, and their discussions of their second set of drawings after the unit ended. To measure cultural competence, I will look for instances of students discussing what they believe to be true about Native Americans and making connections about Native American culture to their own lives. Finally, in measuring critical consciousness, I will be looking for students to identify the issues that Native Americans have faced in the past and present.

Observations & Student Work Samples Data Analyses

Analyzing student movie trailers, posters, and games was much different and more complex than analyzing text. Though many resources exist on conducting research with small children, there are fewer resources on analyzing their work with image analysis presenting its challenges (Freeman & Mathison, 2008). There were two sets of student work that needed to be analyzed. One was a set of drawings I asked students to create following a series of questions

before the research took place, and another was done after the unit. The students decided on the other set of student work created entirely by them, intending to show what they learned about their tribe. This was done for multiple reasons. First, it allows me to have specific questions answered about their perceptions of Native Americans while allowing them to share other knowledge beyond that. Freeman & Mathison (2008) also acknowledge that "multiple methods are useful as a means of confirmation and as a way to provide information one data collection strategy might not have generated" (p. 148).

In analyzing student work that primarily used images to show knowledge, including posters, Google Doodles, and iMovie trailers, I used Freeman and Mathison's (2008) framework for analyzing visual data. Focusing on the work's subject matter, I analyzed the work using literal reading and iconic reading. Literal reading focuses on the physical features of the image, who or what is portrayed, and the setting. Iconic reading focuses on the images' relationships to more significant ideas, values, events, and cultural constructions. I then took notes of these and generated themes I noticed in that set of student work.

To answer my research questions, I will use student work as a secondary form of data. However, I will continue looking for academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness using the same approach in analyzing student interviews.

Data Representation

In my data representation chapter, I summarize my research and share a table of participant profiles. I include each student's likes and interests, family backgrounds, current academic standing, and my relationship with them and their parents. Then, I identify and describe the specific research activities, which include interviews, student work samples, the Social Studies Fair, our guest speaker, viewings of *Molly of Denali*, the letters to pen pals, and a

reflection of how each research activity impacted my students. Finally, I share emergent themes from my preliminary review of the data and what I have gathered from each participant.

Significance of the Study

My research centers on cultivating students' academic achievement, critical consciousness, and cultural competence, focusing on Native American cultures. Using student funds of knowledge and interests and creating a classroom environment that values them as intelligent individuals with something to offer will help students meet these goals.

Looking at past and current ethnographic research, my work seeks to add to the literature in multiple ways. First, my research focuses on elementary-aged students, while ethnographic work focuses on adults. Much of the research that needs to be done on adults is focused on high school students who can better express themselves than young children. As a veteran elementary teacher, I witness the interesting, creative, and brilliant ideas that young students have to offer if only given the chance to share them. As Spradley (1980/2016) notes, ethnographers must go past merely collecting knowledge for knowledge's sake and use what they learn to serve others, believing that ethnographers are responsible for synchronizing these two goals. Using ethnography to learn from and about my students, I aim to apply my knowledge to create a better learning experience for students and encourage other teachers to do the same.

Additionally, my work focuses on the subject of social studies. In today's accountability-focused schools, most districts are concerned with collecting data on reading and math achievement in the elementary grades (Zhao & Hoge, 2005). This is partly due to the importance placed on the foundations of these subjects and the standardized testing done on only these two subjects (O'Connor et al., 2007). A recent change in testing removed Georgia's science and social studies testing requirements, leaving teachers to focus on ELA and math standards across

all grade levels. Though social studies research exists in K-12, it mainly focuses on high school courses. My social studies research hopes to add to the literature of social studies research with young children on a topic that has little to no space in Georgia's current standards of excellence. I also involved the participants in my research, asking for input in reviewing and approving their interviews, work samples, and other data I may collect. Additionally, I allowed students to make changes as the unit went on to ensure that it aligned with their goals and mine. This research will add much to educational ethnographies by adding the voices of an age group typically not researched in a subject area typically seen as second class.

This research is also based on the premise of curriculum as political text and curriculum pedagogy and adds to the field of curriculum studies. As Pinar (2008) reminds us, curriculum is not politically neutral. Combined with a set of standards and curriculum that leave much to be desired for men and women of color, state laws that prohibit the discussion of divisive concepts, and district book banning, my research was impacted to some extent by these forces and limited the resources I used and our planned discussions. Through creative insubordination, however, many of my goals of cultural competence and social justice for Native Americans could continue. With curriculum pedagogy, my work focused on using the frameworks of critical social studies and culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy in the classroom to build a bridge between theory and practice focused on daily classroom practices. In my research, I attempted to decenter myself as a source of knowledge and allowed students to seek answers independently. However, I also acknowledge that I used my power as the authority to counter the stereotypes and misrepresentations of Native Americans prevalent in our official curriculum with guest speakers, alternative resources, and a relationship with Native children to serve as authorities on their own culture. Because curriculum studies also concern itself with culture and

education inside and outside the official school setting (Morris, 2016), my research adds to the field as an example of a teacher and her students attempting to acquire new knowledge about Native Americans, their cultures, and their histories while traversing a political divisive landscape, and deciding what we believe to be true about a diverse group of people.

Summary

This study represented an effort by an ordinary classroom teacher that sought to do better educate my students and me on the Indigenous People of North America, to create a unit that centered on student funds of knowledge with excellent student input, to build cultural competence in students to become more caring, informed, and well-rounded citizens, to experience success in schools, and to build critical consciousness in my students. I hope my work will spark conversations among students, their peers, and their families. From our experiences and relationships with those outside our classroom that students have built and continue to build, I hope my students will be more willing to challenge Native American stereotypes and misinformation they will inevitably experience in their later education.

For myself, I use this research and these writings to prepare myself for the changes to come in my teaching. As mentioned, being a culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining educator asks many educators. You must not only change your practices, but your mindset must shift to believing in students, and that change in education is possible and attempting to see that to fruition, even if only in your classroom.

For other ordinary classroom teachers, this research will be seen as a bridge connecting theory to practice. In a time in education with daily constraints of curriculum, laws, and mandates, this research demonstrates the first big step in creating a culturally relevant,

responsive, sustaining classroom by finding the cracks in the curriculum and accomplices in making it possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA REPRESENTATION

Overview

My ethnographic research inquiry sought to explore the third-grade social studies curriculum, focusing on the unit on Native Americans. Using the lenses of culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017), funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and critical social studies (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2009; Parker, 2015; Ross, 2014; Zinn, 2015), my work sought to use students' interests and talents to teach the standards on Native Americans to promote their academic achievement in, cultural competence, and critical consciousness for, the histories of the United States.

Using ethnographic inquiry in my own third-grade classroom located in a Title I school in a suburban district in the U.S. South, a group of ten diverse students participated in the study. A wide range of data was collected with specific research activities, including individual and group interviews, student work samples, classroom observations, letters to and from their pen pals, a TV club, and a social studies fair. All were carefully analyzed to determine how these activities impacted students' academic achievement, critical competence, and critical consciousness toward Native Americans.

In this chapter, I provide participant profiles, critical examinations of research activities, and preliminary analyses of the themes that emerged from the data.

Participant Profiles

Michael (Black male) is a very popular student, particularly among the boys. He is the youngest of four and has attended this school since Pre-K. He comes from a household of very

involved parents who frequently participate in after-school events, chaperone field trips, and donate supplies to the class. His peers see him as very intelligent, confident, and athletic. In class, he is a well-rounded student who excels in all subjects, though he does not particularly care for writing. I believe he is gifted in math, though he has been tested for gifted services before and fell short of meeting the qualifications. He frequently participates in class discussions and enjoys being challenged, especially with class competitions among his peers. Michael is an extraordinarily hard-working and goal-oriented student who wants the feelings of accomplishment but typically prefers working independently on assignments.

After school, he enjoys football and basketball and plays at recess daily with other students. He enjoys reading as well and is typically drawn to books about sports or mysteries. When Michael grows up, he dreams of playing football for Alabama and wants to one day be known as the smartest kid in the world.

I have a good relationship with Michael and his parents in the classroom. I work well with gifted students, so I can frequently challenge him, particularly in math, his favorite subject. We work closely to create new reading goals for him to keep him motivated to read. Because of his standing among his peers, I trust him to hold leadership positions in the classroom and set the bar high for his peers.

Justin (White male) is one of Michael's closest friends in class, as they are both gifted and enjoy being active. He is the middle child with two sisters and is close to both parents, and seems to look up to his dad. His parents are actively involved in his life, with his mom being a teacher at the school. He is a very high student who participates in discussions, asks questions, and respectfully challenges and questions many of my statements, practices, and decisions. He is quite a complex thinker above his peers academically but enjoys helping others who ask for

support. Though he enjoys interacting with his peers and has many friends, he frequently seeks out one-on-one conversations with me to ask questions or converse with an adult. He has also attended our school his entire school career.

At home, he describes himself as a competitive gamer who loves to read and play challenging games like puzzles and chess. He also enjoys playing with his dogs and watching YouTube. He dreams of becoming the best reader and gamer in the world.

I have a strong relationship with Justin in the classroom, and he was very excited to be in my class, as he shared with me during Meet the Teacher. I tried to work closely with him this year to ensure he was being challenged because he is gifted and focused on growing his skills in chess, math puzzles, and critical thinking puzzles. I allowed students to play chess in the mornings to support my gifted students, who they also taught their peers to play. Because his mom is a teacher at my school and she chose him to be in my class, I communicated closely with her about his new interests and ways to extend his learning at home.

Zack (Black male) is also a bright student in my third-grade class. Though he is a creative and deep thinker, he has never been able to qualify for gifted testing due to his ADHD diagnosis. He has struggled severely with attention since starting school but was finally put on medication for ADHD this year and has shown significant improvement in his focus and learning. He began his schooling attending private school and started at our school in second grade. He is the oldest sibling with one brother, whom he feels very protective over and loves very much. His parents are pretty involved with him at home, reading with him regularly and practicing weak skills. His family certainly values education, having many educators in their family.

In the classroom, Zack takes much time to complete his work, with extra time needed to complete all assignments. This is due to his giftedness and typically overthinking questions and working slowly to ensure he does his best work. He is very chatty with his peers and quite kind, so he has many friends in class. He describes himself as kind, loving, and playful. I would also add that he is confident in himself and very attentive to the needs of others. I believe I have a generally good relationship with Zack, though he gets frustrated with me when I redirect him because of his ADHD. After school, he enjoys playing with his little brother, watching Minions, reading graphic novels and books about cars, and playing Roblox. Growing up, he would like to make his family proud and be one of the world's wealthiest men.

Jack (White male) comes from an extensive, loving, and religious family. He is the middle child and only boy with six sisters. His mother is a stay-at-home mom who regularly volunteers at school, closely monitors his academic progress at school, and provides extra support for him at home. He and his siblings have all attended our school since at least Kindergarten. Jack is a social butterfly in the classroom and loves to talk to any of his peers. He is also quite perceptive to the needs and feelings of others and regularly volunteers to help his peers and other teachers. Academically, he started off struggling but needed more to receive extra reading or math support from the school through the early intervention program. However, Jack is a student who pushes himself to meet his goals and wants to do well academically. He always participates in class, even when topics are challenging, and goes to practice weak skills and seeks support from his peers when needed. Working with others is where he learns the most compared to independent work time. My relationship with Jack is a strong one. He frequently shares things with me about his life and brings small gifts he made or bought for me. Because he

was struggling in class, I met with him frequently to check in on his reading and math progress and, together, came up with goals he wanted to work towards.

Jack would describe himself as funny and friendly to his peers. He enjoys reading, especially graphic novels, and watching YouTube in his spare time. He loves anything to do with the movie Nightmare Before Christmas and longs to be a good reader eventually. Growing up, he would love to have a job and be a basketball player.

Alaya (Black female) is a hard-working, creative, gifted student who loves school and always has a smile on her face. She has attended Burch since Pre-K. In the classroom, she participates well, asks questions, shows great attention to detail, and is always willing to support and mentor others without being asked. She has many friends in class and across other grade levels with whom she spends much time after school. She is a solid student in all subjects and a voracious reader. She describes herself as kind, sweet, and joyful. She is the oldest, with one younger brother. In her spare time, she enjoys basketball and acting and loves to be in front of an audience. She is part of a local children's theater and has been in many plays.

She has a very supportive family who are very involved with her education and extracurriculars. Her parents frequently attend school events, have served as chaperones for field trips, and donate things to the class when needed. They certainly place great importance on education for their children. I have a strong relationship with Alaya. She regularly checks in with me about her new academic goals and progress and invites me to her plays and sports events outside school. When Alaya grows up, she would love to be a famous actor and a doctor and hopes to make her parents proud.

Jade (Black female) is a very kind, compassionate student who enjoys school and has many friends. She is the oldest and has one younger brother. She describes herself as respectful

and loving. She has attended Burch since Kindergarten when her family moved from Virginia. She has many friends in the classroom and is seen as very bright and capable by her peers. At the school, she is focused, hard-working, and very creative. She always puts forth her best effort and takes it upon herself to look out for a student with severe needs in our classroom without being asked. She greatly enjoys graphic novels, Roblox and Minecraft in her spare time. I believe I have a good relationship with Jade; she tells me frequently that she is excited about being in my class and feels happy to be here. We regularly discuss her progress in class and give book recommendations as she tries to push herself as a reader.

Her parents are very supportive and involved in her education, with her mother being a teacher at the school I have known for many years. She attends many school events, is in close contact with me about her academics, and works with her at home. When she grows up, she would like to deliver babies, go skydiving at least once, and learn how to do hair to make extra money.

Dilan (White female) is a very bright student who always has a positive attitude and a smile no matter what. She cares about school and always seeks to do her best. She works hard in all subjects but especially enjoys reading and art. She is pretty creative and has many close friends in the classroom. She is the middle child and has three sisters. She describes herself as someone who likes reading and art. In her spare time, she enjoys being in nature, looking for rainbows, and playing in the rain.

In the classroom, she shows a lot of enthusiasm and interest in what we are learning and is comfortable asking questions. She is very easygoing and regularly seeks opportunities to help others and care for our class pet. I have a strong relationship with Dilan; I have known her for

many years and had her older sister in my third-grade class a few years prior. Additionally, her mom is a teacher in the school whom I have known for several years.

From my perspective, Dilan has a supportive family that encourages her to do well in school and supports her and her personal goals. They regularly attend after-school activities and are involved in her extracurricular activities such as dance. Her parents have volunteered to support our class as guest speakers and field trip chaperones. When Dilan grows up, she would love to get a pet, explore, and go to college to become a veterinarian.

Sarah (White female) is energetic, sassy, and bright. She is a voracious reader and always has a book or two on hand. She is a gifted student who values a teacher's opinion and enjoys working with other girls in the classroom, though our peer relationships are sometimes poor. She is the youngest in her family and has one older brother. In addition to reading, Sarah enjoys dance and the show Descendants.

In the classroom, she is likelier to show participation and enthusiasm in reading than in most other subjects. She enjoys leadership roles and working with others but is still learning what teamwork looks like. She is very vocal about not being a good math student, but I would disagree as her teacher. Because of her giftedness in other subjects, it may appear that she is behind because she has to make a more significant effort to learn and practice those skills. I believe that I have a good relationship with Sarah. She has attended Burch since she began Pre-K, and I have known her reasonably well since second grade when I attended many of her plays. Her foster mother is also a teacher at Burch, whom I have known for many years and have a good relationship with.

From my perspective, Sarah has a very supportive family involved in her life. She is heavily involved in dance, and I keep consistent communication with her mother, who puts

academics first and regularly checks in with me about Sarah's life, including custodial matters. When Sarah grows up, she would like to be a runner, a librarian, and a reading teacher.

Fato (Black female) is a very smart, perceptive, and kind student. Though not classified as gifted, she is a solid student in all subjects and works hard to do well in all that she does in school. She has attended our school since Pre-K except for a semester of second grade, where she attended school in Senegal. She loves to chat with friends at any chance and enjoys being around peers as much as possible. She describes herself as funny and sweet and is the middle child in her family with two brothers and two sisters. She is also quite the caregiver, constantly volunteering to care for our class pet and looking out for a student in our class who is nonverbal autistic and requires much support. After school, Fato enjoys reading, particularly graphic novels, watching Disney+ and Netflix, and math. She has also undergone a big transitional year as it was her first year of fasting during Ramadan and wearing a head covering at school.

She loves all subjects in the classroom but feels very confident in reading and math. When she finishes a task, she always asks to support other working students. Though she does not identify as one, Fato is also a very gifted writer. Overall, I can tell she really values school by her effort and participation and how happy she is to be there. I feel I have a great relationship with Fato because of our honest talks and the regular book suggestions she asks for. She regularly asks me questions regarding my opinions on various matters and brings me thoughtful letters and small gifts.

Fato has a family that is not involved in her formal schooling but seems to value education from our few conversations. Her parents are from Senegal, so it is possible that there are cultural differences in what is expected of parents regarding a child's schooling and their type of involvement. Fato was not involved in extracurricular activities but is an avid reader,

being able to finish a chapter book in a day and spending much time with her siblings at home. When she grows up, she would like to attend Georgia Military College in high school before she goes to college, visit Florida, get near a volcano, and become a doctor.

Maggie (Black female) is a gifted student who is very introverted and shy but creative and perceptive. She is an all-around strong student in all subjects and picks up new concepts easily. She is the oldest, with one younger brother. She has attended our school since kindergarten. Though she is very shy at first, once she warms up to someone, she is funny and silly and loves to tell jokes. She has many friends in class that she is close to and is friendly with all her peers. Maggie is a huge animal lover, specifically dogs, but is very drawn to our class pet and enjoys caring for him. After school, she loves reading, painting, and doing crafts.

In the classroom, she is very introverted and does not participate much in any subject, though she is strong in all of them. She enjoys group and partner work and can step up and be a leader while also taking directions from others. Maggie prefers to finish her work quickly and read a book instead. However, she is very goal-oriented and had a goal of reading one million words by the end of the year. She met that goal by December and read another million words before May. She is also a very creative writer and was our grade-level winner for the Young Author's Competition. I feel I have a good relationship with Maggie as we make time to connect in smaller groups, and she is willing to share things with me about her life despite being very introverted.

Maggie comes from a very supportive family, in my opinion. I communicate frequently with her parents, who regularly volunteer at school in many capacities. Her mom is part of the PTO. I have known her for many years as she has been my doctor, and I have had a good relationship with her. Her parents are very involved in her academics and keep a close eye on her

progress at school to support her further at home. When she grows up, she would like to have a lot of friends, own many dogs as pets, and be a vet.

Much diversity exists within my ten participants in this study, both racially and culturally. I acknowledge that most of them do come from supportive and stable middle-class families, which may be a minor limitation in my study. Because I knew many of the participants' parents professionally and personally, they had prior knowledge of the work I sought to do and agreed to be involved before the consent forms were sent home. The participants, however, were given no information about the research or my goals at my request, which the parents agreed to follow.

Specific Research Activities

Before the Research

Before my research began, I made many assumptions about my students' background knowledge. Having taught second grade for many years, I knew they had a unit of study in social studies that focused on Creek and Cherokee Indians, explicitly asking students to describe the Georgia Creek and Cherokee of the past to Georgians today as well as the cultural and geographical systems associated with Georgia's Creek and Cherokee. Because students spent about five weeks in this unit of study, I assumed students would recall at least some of the standards they learned. I was incorrect.

Because I was a second-grade teacher for many years, I always seek to make connections between new and past content. In one of our first social studies units focused on rivers and mountain ranges, I attempted to make connections between the Appalachian Mountains and the Cherokee that lived there. Out of twenty students, only three recalled hearing the word Cherokee,

and no students could tell me who they were. Then, I decided I had to approach my research more fervently than initially planned.

To reignite their background knowledge before our unit of study on Native Americans began, I planned a field trip to the Atlanta History Center, a prominent history museum located in the Buckhead community of Atlanta. This was a memorable field trip because nearly none of my students had ever been there and because it was their first school field trip. (The pandemic had limited our ability to take trips, so this was a new experience for students and parents alike.) The guided tour was called “We Are Still Here” and focused on the Cherokee people's history and contemporary culture. It began with a short presentation that discussed the Creek and Cherokee cultures of the past, the injustices they faced, and the present day. A small group tour followed this. Led by docents, the tour included Native American storytelling, the Trail of Tears, settler and Native relationships, the contributions of Sequoyah, traditional games, and a plethora of artifacts for students to engage with. Because I could stay with my class on the tour, I could note their questions and comments on the content. Students shared many misunderstandings, stereotypes, and generalizations about Native people, including their past and not present existence in the United States, the differences that exist within tribal communities, and the unjust relationships they had with settlers.

Overall, this was a very well-done tour that was multimodal and allowed students to engage in learning in multiple ways. Because of the great feedback I received from the students on the field trip, I again assumed that what they learned on this trip would support their learning when we began our unit of study on Native Americans. Becoming aware of the deep stereotypes and misconceptions my students held about Native People, I sought to take a more multimodal approach in my research, utilizing diverse research activities to reach students and their diverse

learning styles better. Following, I will describe in detail the research activities participants engaged in, including interviews, student work samples (digital and concrete), classroom observations, a social studies fair, a viewing and discussion of the show 'Molly of Denali,' a guest speaker, and letters to pen pals.

Interviews

The interviews took place from November 2022 to March 2023. A total of five interviews were conducted with participants. Students, however, were allowed to decide about participating in an individual or a group interview based on the questions being asked during that interview. If they selected a group interview, all participants had to agree on the group they had created before we began. If not, students could opt for an individual interview. All interviews contained between six to ten questions and were conducted during the school day. To ensure students were comfortable and not missing a favorite scheduled activity in our day, I allowed them to select a period that worked best for them and me. These included recess, specials (which include P.E., art, and music), lunch, and after school. To ease the burden on parents, I gave the after-school option only to students who attended the after-school program or students whose parents were teachers in the building. After the interviews were transcribed, students were also allowed to member-check them, though no student chose to do so.

Before any interviews were conducted, I began with an individual interview protocol where I reviewed the purpose of the study, discussed the expected length of each interview and their purpose, gained permission to audio record, and take notes, discussed reciprocity, and asked students to select a pseudonym. Despite the mix of personalities of the participants, all seemed comfortable with interviewing from the beginning.

The interviews aimed to gain knowledge of student perceptions of Native Americans and the activities and instructional changes that occurred within the unit of study. Each interview had a separate focus to gain a deeper understanding of student understanding. See Appendix A for interview questions. Because one of the aims of ethnographic research with young children is to give a greater voice to student knowledge and experiences, I will be centering student interviews for most of my data analysis. Over the course of these five interviews, students showed much growth in their understanding of Native American cultures and people, past and present, and their willingness to learn, show compassion, and ask questions. Below are vignettes of two students that display the types of questions asked and the responses of students and their learning during this process.

Justin

Benzor: Let's look at this one first. So on this drawing, I had you draw what you think of when you hear the words Native Americans. Can you tell me more about that?

Justin: So when I hear Native American my usual thought is people who were in America a long time ago, and my second drawing was people who are like not from America. They don't they don't become a citizen straight away. That's just my thoughts. You really can't give hate for my opinion. That's literally what I think.

Benzor: Oh, that's why you put 193 BC at the top! Okay, tell me about-let's do one drawing at a time. Let's do the top one and then the bottom line. Okay, tell me about the top one.

Justin:: So, the top one, this is a long time ago when people really didn't have anything. And they were like, not wealthy, not really anything. They didn't know how to do a lot. And they're like this color. That’s what I think.

Benzor: What do you mean this color? Like how you chose to their skin color?

Justin:: Yeah but I don't know how to pronounce it because everyone is a shade of brown. So I don't know really how how to say it.

Benzor: So is there a reason you chose to color things brown?

Justin:: Because I think that shade of brown is the usual things for people that are not from America.

Benzor: Okay, can you tell me about his outfit?

Justin:: So since they didn't have anything back then, like any clothes and like they didn't know how to do anything I just added a leaf right here. Because it's the only thing that really made sense to me. In 193 BC they really didn't know how to do anything.

Benzor: Was there a reason why you chose that specific year?

Justin: No. It's just the only thing I could think of.

Benzor: Okay, is there anything else you want to say? About this top drawing?

Justin: No.

Benzor: What do you think made you draw this specific picture?

Justin: What made me draw this specific picture was that my brain told me to do it. My family told me a few things about African- Americans too. And I was looking stuff up on my TV about African Americans and I saw huts. And in the classroom. So I just drew stuff like that.

Several months after the initial interview, Justin was interviewed again and his responses changed drastically.

Benzor: Ok, next question that is really important. Have you learned anything from your pen pal? If so, what do you think they've taught you?

Justin: They have but I just don't remember because I only read them once.

Benzor: You only read the letters once?

Justin:……..

Benzor: So is there anything else about Athabascans or modern Native Amricans you might be interested in learning more about?

Justin: Their history. I want to learn the timelines.

Benzor: So how far back did you want to go?

Justin: I want to learn probably maybe 1970s and back until like the 1500s.

Benzor: Oh, that's a long time ago. That's a lot of stuff.

Justin: Yeah!

Benzor: Thank you so much for talking to me. Is there anything else you want to ask or want for me to know?

Justin: I have a question. So… if it's possible like maybe afterschool can you teach me more about the Athabascans' history?

Benzor: I could give you history resources but during the class day that would be hard.

Justin: Yeah, I'll take the resources and do them in my mom's room. That's pretty much all I want to know is the timelines. Like what if one day I had to do a project in the future on Native Americans and I could choose who I liked I would choose Athabascan. I would already know a lot about them. Like I still don't know a lot. I don't know the wars they've had, I don't know the leaders they've had, I don't even know what the flag even is. All I know is the food, clothes, shelter, art. And the other interesting facts we added.

Benzor: Ok, I will try to find things that are kid friendly. Thanks!

Alaya

Benzor: Alright so remember my goal is for me to understand your ideas and you being honest helps me learn. There is no right or wrong answer to anything I ask. Everything is just opinion.

So I wanted to ask you some questions about the drawings you created in class earlier. Let's start with this one first. This is the one where I asked you to draw what you think of when you hear the word Native American. So can you tell me about what you drew?

Alaya: I drew people dressed in different types of clothes and feathers in their head and when they're Native Americans they would wear feathers of different colors.

Benzor: Ok, are these four different people?

Alaya: Yes.

Benzor: Are they adults? Kids?

Alaya: Adults.

Benzor: They're all adults.

Alaya: Yes.

Benzor: So tell me about the colors you chose because it looks like you did all brown?

Alaya: I thought brown was the suitable one because brown usually goes with Native Americans so I thought that brown would be better.

Benzor: What do you mean it goes with Native Americans?

Alaya: Like when there's Native Americans they usually wear brown.

Benzor: Ok, so tell me about the feathers? Is there a reason you chose to add feathers or maybe these colors?

Alaya: I added the feathers because I knew that when I see them, Native Americans, in pictures, they would have these colors in their head and they look like features.

Benzor: Ok. So what do you think made you draw Native Americans in this particular way?

Alaya: Um… Why I drew it?

Benzor: Yeah.

Alaya: Because it reminded me of what Native Americans look like when I see them in pictures.

Benzor: Ok. As you know, we're going to learn more about Native Americans in class. What do you think you already know about Native Americans?

Alaya: I know about the Cherokee and the Creek and the Indians and I also know it was hard for them to live because they had to hunt for their food and built their own homes and they didn't have enough money to buy real stuff.

Benzor: Ok anything else you know?

Alaya: Um…… I think but I can't remember.

Benzor: You can have a second to think if you want.

Alaya: ……. That they also had to take care of their kids and teach their kids how to hunt when they grew up too.

At the end of the unit, Alaya was interviewed again and shared her new knowledge.

Benzor: Alright. So the past few weeks, we've been learning a lot about Native Americans. What do you think you've learned so far?

Alaya: I've learned that they have struggles and they also have needs that other people have like they need this stuff that other people already have like they need water and food and all sorts of stuff that everybody needs. And they were here first in America first and then when people come to take their land I feel like they kind of get upset about it because they trespass on their land and I feel like they deserved a little more better than to have nothing and to have something because if they didn't have anything to survive they wouldn't have anything

Benzor: Okay, is there anything else that you want to know or learn about Native Americans that we maybe didn't get to yet because our last days think tomorrow? Something else?

Alaya: No.

Benzor: So, thinking about your pen pal, both of them, do you think you learned anything from them?

Alaya: My pen pal, both of them actually, taught me this word and I forget the word but it's in a greeting when you say it.

Benzor: Can you remember what it was or something else they taught you?

Alaya: No.

Benzor: Alright, so we're gonna shift gears a little bit. In the last interview we had I think we were in this when we talked about using the things you liked, and know about in class to help you learn. Do you think that that is something you've had the chance to do in social studies, and the past few weeks might have a chance to try out things you like and know about it and use it to help you. Just your opinion.

Alaya: Yes.

Benzor: Okay, so you said yes. Why?

Alaya: Because whenever I'm with my friends they give me advice in reading or doing in science, math, and social studies and they help me learn more about these kinds of things.

Benzor: So do you think that including being with your friends more often, in science, math or writing would be helpful to you? If so, why? Or why not?

Alaya: It would be helpful to me because if I'm struggling with something and then they come by and I ask them a question they might may tell me the answer, and they might teach me a little bit more about the subject. Also because she knew a couple of stuff and I knew a couple of stuff and then when we put them together, we learned something new together at the same time.

Reflection

In conducting these interviews, I noticed many changes in my students. First, it was clear that students not only enjoyed the long-term collaboration with their peers on this project but that it benefited them academically. Students could stay focused on their research and tasks at hand, creatively collaborating with each other and addressing their misconceptions and misunderstandings in the process. Students also cited learning from each other and building on what each other knows to learn and create something new. Additionally, student misconceptions, firmly held ideas, and their change in beliefs were also present in these interviews. Many students began with an understanding that Native Americans did not exist today and were people of the past. They attributed this to not "having seen any in Georgia." When they did speak of them in the past tense, they were generally looked down upon as having "not knowing anything" and "loving nature." A few students also wondered about the race and nationality of Native Americans and whether they are considered American citizens. Though almost all students recalled having learned about Native Americans in second grade, most students also admitted to not knowing much about them.

As they participated further in the unit, students developed cultural competence and were able to not only name the specific tribes they were studying but were able to describe cultural aspects of the group. They were also able to describe their understanding of Native Americans in the present, describing them as "normal people like us." As they learned more about their specific tribes, they asked questions about the injustices they faced in the past such as land theft and abuse at the hands of European explorers. Despite learning about many specific tribes, many students continued to generalize with only a few students specifically naming their tribe in later interviews.

Student Work Samples

During this unit of study, one of my aims was for students to learn about Native Americans through modes of learning that worked best for them. I also sought to vary my assessments and give students choices in how they wanted to demonstrate their learning to me and their peers. Using my knowledge of the resources that students prefer to use and the results of their student interest survey on what they enjoy (see Appendix B), I chose to utilize books for their research. Though we did have multiple research site subscriptions for students to access, such as Britannica Kids, Gale, and BrainPOP, my experience with this group and past third graders showed that when using websites for research, students typically relied on one source for all their research and did not wish to engage other sources. This is not in line with the social studies practices that I wanted students to practice, which ask my students to engage with multiple and varied sources, both primary and secondary, to engage with history and begin to ask questions.

After I made the decision to engage students primarily with diverse texts, I began my research in my school's media center. Out of the 193 books that mentioned or explicitly were about Native Americans, there was a mix of fictional stories with Native Americans as characters that were set in the past, Native American storytelling, stories that included Native Americans in some way, and informational texts that were tribe specific. Unfortunately, of the 193 books that were available for student checkout, only six were written within the last ten years, and only twenty-one were written within the last twenty years. This includes all texts before they were analyzed for content. Because of my student's lack of knowledge and misconceptions, I wanted to ensure that they were engaging with high-quality and accurate texts that do justice to the histories and diversity of Native American tribes. To accomplish this task, I used a worksheet for

selecting Native American children's literature created by the National Museum of the American Indian. The worksheet was created for teachers as a guide to help select books that accurately represent Native Americans that are tribal-specific and speak of Native Peoples of the past and present. Specifically, the worksheet looks at language use, inclusion and representation of contemporary life, tribal specificity, accurate representations of Natives, and the authority of the text by Native Peoples. According to the worksheet, few of the books available in the media center were acceptable texts.

To solve this problem, I sought out texts that met these criteria. However, I had to consider first what specific tribes would be our focus. To narrow this down, I consulted the list of Native American tribes in North America that was created by the GADOE and posted online as a unit resource for teachers. Tribes were listed by region, including arctic, northwest, southwest, plains, northeast, and southeast.

I sought to allow students to study a tribe of their choice to gain the understanding that Native Americans were not a monolithic group and that various and different tribes existed and continue to exist in North America. However, the list created by the GADOE included over two hundred tribes and would probably overwhelm students. Additionally, because of the lack of high-quality books available to my students, I needed to narrow down the list to tribes for whom I could locate high-quality texts that met the suggestions of the NMAI and were also suitable for elementary students. This was a difficult task.

At the suggestion of the National Museum of the American Indian, I used the following sources to help me create a list of potential books: book lists on Native Americans created by socialjusticebooks.org, tribal library resources created by the American Indian Library Association, and americanindiansinchildrensliterature.com. I mainly focused on nonfiction texts,

with some fictional texts to be included in the classroom as read-aloud or during small group reading lessons. Because none of the books on the list were available in my district to check out for student use, I purchased forty-two books, including three encyclopedias.

However, I faced another step before putting books in the kids' hands. Because of HB 1084, I had to submit materials that were not purchased and reviewed by the district. These were reviewed by Dr. Ryckeley, the head of the social studies department for the district, and Ms. Shaddix, the elementary social studies coordinator. Before my research was approved, I constantly communicated with these two people. We set up meetings to share ideas, ask questions, and share resources. They were very supportive of my work and seemed happy that social studies was getting the attention it deserved at the elementary level. In reviewing the books, none of the books were 'banned.' Instead, they flagged specific pages they thought needed my attention either because the children might need help understanding the content, it may not be appropriate for their age group, or it may go against the divisive concepts law. It was never suggested that books should not be used in the classroom or that I was forbidden to use certain materials, only to proceed with caution and to give them ample time to read all texts while they are being reviewed. All the texts that were submitted for review were eventually used in my classroom in some way.

Once I had student resources ready for students, I allowed students to pick the tribe they were the most interested in studying. This was done with a classroom gallery walk featuring various photos of tribes from different regions. Then, students were to write down the three photos that had piqued their interest the most on a sticky note. From there, I would create student groups based on their interest in the tribe. This was done to keep the focus on the research and project instead of just working with friends who may have had different interests.

After students selected a tribe, they were provided with a graphic organizer that was adapted from an organizer created by the GADOE. In alignment with the standards, students are asked to look at a regions' clothing, food, shelter, and environment. In the organizer I created, I had students focus on a single tribe instead of a region and added art and other interesting facts as aspects of a tribe to focus on. While I had initially hoped for students to learn about Native American histories and injustices, I encountered another roadblock. Though I was able to find resources for many tribes that were accessible for elementary students, there was very little that discussed histories and the present. Most of the texts that I found were written for middle grades students or higher. Additionally, the few texts that I purchased that included history were flagged multiple times due to their potential for discussing divisive concepts. For example, the text "We Are Still Here: Native American Truths Everyone Should Know" by Traci Sorell (2021), included discussions of Native American boarding schools, allotment land laws, removing Native children from their homes, and religious freedom. Interestingly, it was not the topics themselves that were potentially problematic; it was that the text specifically names white people as the oppressors.

With the books, websites, and graphic organizers at hand, students were ready to begin their work with their partners. Students were free to use their preferred resources but reviewed what was available for them to use. Before every work session, I reviewed the choice board I created for the unit using what I knew about students' interests and the results of their student interest survey. The choices included: iMovie trailer, poster, series of tableaus, Google doodle, written response, creative writing, Flipgrid, and free choice. I sought to create a diverse list that allowed students to creatively display their learning as well as more traditional methods. Initially, the goal of the choice board was for students to research one aspect of their selected

tribe at a time and then select one option from the choice board. They would then present their work to their peers as they finish creating to allow students to compare their selected tribe to others' and to be inspired by the creativity of their peers. This plan quickly changed.

As part of my goal to create a student-centered classroom, we met at the start of the social studies block as a class to discuss how their research was going, their problems, their successes, etc. In one of the sessions, one of my students, Justin, suggested that he and his partner were interested in going in a separate order than what the graphic organizer called for. Many other students agreed. Another student, Aliya, spoke up and mentioned that she and her partner would like the option of only doing one large presentation of everything they have learned about their tribe. Others agreed that they felt overwhelmed by the number of things they would have to create with their partners and felt like they might have to rush to develop and get to the next thing. Following how we typically make decisions as a class, we voted on these new ideas. We decided that students would be free to research their tribe's descriptors, and the assessments would be presented at the end. From a previous meeting with social studies district heads and my principal, I knew I would be given a space in the cafeteria for my students to exhibit their work during the school's Winter Family Fun Night. With these changes, students may be more likely to create fewer but more high-quality work samples that have a more lasting impact on their learning.

Reflection

Students' work varied greatly from posters, Google Doodles, a report, a board game, and iMovie trailers. They all served to depict students' understandings and misunderstandings of the selected tribe they studied over the course of six weeks. Upon analyzing the student work, I

interpreted that those students gained much knowledge from their studies while still holding onto a few misconceptions.

First, several students showed a great interest in the art of their tribe and attempted to replicate that with drawings. There was not much writing to add more information for the reader, though, about the significance of the art, why it was necessary, and what it was made of, and it does not tell me much about their understanding of the art. This may not have been something they gained from their readings or just chose to leave out. Their work was also very bright, with many using the colors that were associated with their tribes, such as turquoise or brown. However, a few took more liberties with colors and chose creativity over accuracy. Almost all students included a section for past and present on their posters without being prompted to do so, though no specific years were included. These had homes, food, and clothing in the past. There were some misunderstandings about summer and winter homes in the past as these did not exist with all tribes, but students may have been recalling information they learned from second grade about the Creek and Cherokee tribes of the past. Their depictions of what their tribes ate in the past were accurate, but their drawings of what the people of their tribe eat in the present seem limited to what the students themselves eat, drawing primarily fast food. The writing that students included was limited to labels, with one group encouraging the reader to look closely at their work depicting the past and present and asking them - “Do you see the difference?”

Their understanding of culture is mostly surface-level and limited to food, clothing, and shelter, with a few adding art. Though students had the option of going further, students (like adults) seemed to have difficulty defining culture and identity. Additionally, the standards themselves call for only a surface-level understanding of Native American cultures from the past. While I attempted to fill in gaps after the unit ended with carefully selected read-aloud,

continuing pen pals, and making connections to units in other subjects, students still mostly thought about Native Americans in the past tense (though more respectfully) with some mentions of the present.

Social Studies Fair

As we continued with our self-directed research on our tribes, students became more excited to present their work and share their creations with their peers. In one of our discussions before social studies instruction began, more and more students began sharing that they would no longer be able to participate in the Winter Family Fun Night. With many of my students relying on the school bus as their sole form of transportation, this was not surprising. However, I reflected on a recent interview with a participant and made a new plan.

In a previous interview, I discussed with a participant what they had enjoyed thus far about our research on Native Americans and what they were learning. In their feedback, they mentioned that they enjoyed sharing what they had created and learned with the class because they typically only share what they learned with their parents or teachers but never with their classmates or other kids in the school. This gave me the idea of doing two exhibitions- one after school for the community and one during school hours for their peers.

They loved this idea when I presented it to the students during a morning meeting. We gave ourselves a deadline, so students knew when they needed to be done with presentations and voted on inviting the other third-grade classes to our fair. We reserved a room for about an hour of presentations, with students set up around the room's perimeter to present their work to students as they approached their tables. I served as a facilitator of the groups and took notes on students' presentations, interactions, questions, and comments from visitors.

The social studies fair held during school hours served as an excellent opportunity for students to educate their peers, answer questions from their peers, and think further about what they did and did not learn from their research. Additionally, it served as a rehearsal for their presentations during Winter Family Fun Night the next day for those who could attend.

The night of the event, the school was abuzz with excitement and filled with families as our school's first big event since our district's COVID restrictions were removed. Most were there to attend their child's chorus presentations and eventually made their way to the exhibits. While my students were performing, I set up all the student-created work in the cafe with the help of Ms. Shaddix, our elementary social studies coordinator. Before my students came, many parents and student visitors came over to ask questions about student work and the purpose of the work. Interestingly, many of the adults mentioned that they did not recall learning anything about Native Americans as students themselves and were happy to hear that students were getting a more diverse education at our school.

Later, about eight of my students arrived, with seven of them being participants. As families and students walked past, they called many of them over to view their work, including their own families and siblings. With their families, students could present their work confidently, discussing what they had created and why. Parents seemed impressed with their children's work and passion for their creations. Rather than just passively listening to the presentations, however, many asked their child many specific questions about their tribe. Students could not answer all questions, such as where those tribes may live today or how certain tribes created pieces of artwork, but they could passionately provide many details and stories about their tribe that were not present in their work.

Reflection

Because I facilitated the projects during this unit, I was already aware of all that students were going to present during the Social Studies Fair before they presented their work to their third-grade peers. Students who finished their work early were also given the opportunity to rehearse their presentations and receive feedback from me if they wished. Students surprised me with their knowledge during both the in-school and after-hours Social Studies Fair. Though they had made posters and trailers detailing what they learned, they were able to answer questions about their tribe and project that they did not address in their presentation, such as how they got their ideas, their favorite resources, what they still wanted to know, interesting facts, and tribal history. Both teachers, visiting students, and parents seemed very impressed with the knowledge and even passion that some spoke with about their specific tribe. Both Social Studies Fairs made it apparent to me that analyzing student work on its own was not enough and that a short formal interview on what they created, and their process would have been helpful data in this research process, and it was a missed opportunity.

Guest Speaker

One of the limitations of my study was the focus on Native American histories and cultures but with limited Native voices. As a Mexican American teacher that lacked knowledge myself, I felt I needed more support in ensuring that various tribes were represented accurately and respectfully. Thinking back to Schultz's (2017) advice of connecting with local organizations, I reached out to the Atlanta Indigenous Peoples Association. I got in contact with Laura Cummings Balgari, the co-director of the organization and member of the Pee Dee and Natchez tribes. I informed her of my goals, and she agreed that our missions did align and that

she would love to Zoom with my class. Eventually, the Zoom visit turned into an in-person classroom visit.

To continue being open with my work, I invited our two district social studies coordinators to attend the presentation as well as my principal. In Laura's one hour presentation, she brought in and discussed contemporary Native clothes, photos of members from more than one tribe and members with mixed backgrounds, family artifacts like instruments, moccasins, dolls, and more modern-day jewelry. She also held a question and answers session for students to ask questions about her tribe or of Natives in general. Despite the length of the presentation, students remained engaged and seemed excited to have her in class.

Reflection

In interviewing students during the end of the unit, at least half of the students mentioned the guest speaker and what she taught them. Typically, it is hard to keep young students engaged during a one-hour presentation, but because of Ms. Bulgari's background as a pediatrician, students were given information and had conversations with her in a kid-friendly manner. It was apparent that they had many questions for her and were eager to discuss various topics with her, ranging from Native American wars, weapons, hunting, food, and jobs. Because the presentation focused mainly on the present, students' questions were also present-focused. I believe that this guest speaker was one of the reasons that students were able to change their thinking on Native Peoples being a group in the past. While she could not return to speak to the class due to distance and her schedule, Ms. Balgari did invite students to attend an upcoming pow-wow in Atlanta held by the Atlanta Indigenous Peoples Association. Because of the distance and weather, none of my students could attend.

Molly of Denali

When I initially submitted my work for review, this show was separate from the plan. However, because of the success of the Native American unit of study and my desire to continue student learning beyond our social studies block, I sought to make changes to extend my research by two more months. Considering how many of my kids enjoy YouTube, Netflix, and Disney+ afterschool, I thought further about the media that students consume. I looked for media that accurately and respectfully depicted and discussed Native American people and their lives today. While I had hoped to focus more on history because it was lacking in our first unit of study, I could not find any documentary or series that discussed Native history and was aimed at children.

I discussed this issue with both district social studies coordinators, and they suggested the PBS animated television series “Molly of Denali.’ The series has been on the air since 2019 and follows ten-year-old Molly Mabray, an Alaska Native, and her friends and family as they run the Denali Trading Post. In between two short segments, one live-action segment features Alaska Native children and their friends and family. The show's cast are almost all Native actors, created with the help of at least 88 Native contributors, and regularly includes the Gwich’in language in episodes.

During our morning meeting, I introduced the idea of TV Club where every Tuesday and Thursday, students would come to the classroom during lunch to watch ‘Molly of Denali.’ To get students excited, I showed a trailer for the show. Students’ feedback was that they liked the idea of watching TV at school, and many were interested in continuing to learn about Native Americans.

Because it was an opportunity to continue learning more about modern Native Americans, I opened the club up to any interested students to attend. However, I did not make it mandatory for my ten participants to participate because it was during their lunch time, and I wanted to respect the time they needed to have a break and be with friends.

At our first meeting, we had about eight students attend, most of whom were not participants. I explained the rationale behind watching Molly of Denali and that we would have discussions after each segment to discuss what we learned. Because our thirty-minute lunch is cut short due to wait times, we could only watch one segment and the live-action segment of an episode. Because the episodes are stand-alone, I allowed students to select any episode. We were limited to protecting the free episodes available to stream on PBS Kids, as others were paid only on other platforms. We participated in TV Club as a class for about six weeks.

The episodes that students selected were all from season two or three. The table below lists the segment title and briefly describes each segment.

Segment Title	Description
The Story of Story Knife	A Yupik girl loses her story knife and Molly helps her find it.
Raven Saves the Birthday Party	Oscar works on remembering the stories of his elders.
The Qyah Ice Classic	Molly and her friends compete in a contest to predict when the river ice will break
Lights, Camera, Patak!	Molly and Tooey help Mr. Patak record a carving demonstration
Forget-You-Not	Trini's mom is deployed and wants to send her a care package of her favorite things
Puppy Sitting	Trini offers to babysit her friend's newest sled dog
Molly & Elizabeth	Molly is excited to show tourists around town, but they do not think she is Native enough
Uqiquq (Throw Party)	Tooey's family throws a special celebration to honor his first catch
Lynx To The Past	Trini is discouraged because she can't add her own moves to the Lynx Dance
Molly of the Yukon	Molly hopes to catch a Yukon River king salmon

Reflection

Upon announcing the start of the TV club, most of my class was intrigued and excited. After I showed the trailer for the show in class, many students showed interest in coming to watch the show during lunch. However, only a small group of students attended the first showing, with fewer students attending as time went on. Interestingly, it was not my participants who participated in the sessions regularly, but two typically hard-to-motivate boys that were the most eager. In our discussions after the segment, students were particularly interested in Native relationships with nature. Students wanted to know how they know how to do something or use something (such as what plants to use as medicine). They were also curious about learning the language spoken in the show, as all the students who participated only spoke English. Their questioning showed a great deal of respect and interest in Gwich'in/Koyukon/Dena'ina

Athabascan culture, particularly in the ways in which they held onto traditional practices in the present. With its kid-friendly language, students could go deeper into a new tribe, allowing them to compare cultural traditions with the original tribe they studied. They immensely enjoyed the show, with many continuing to watch it at home after the study ended.

Letters to Pen Pals

The idea of pen pals was also not one I initially thought to do. However, in a meeting with the district social studies coordinators, I mentioned how important it was for my students to learn that Native people still exist today and live contemporary lives as they do. My principal mentioned that she had connections to an elementary school in Franklin, WI and emailed their principal about connecting with me about a possible project. The school was called Indian Community School. Admitting only students with tribal membership, it seeks to cultivate students' culture by weaving Indigenous teachings into the curriculum and every school day. Because I wanted my students to communicate with Native children, this seemed like a good fit. Once I got permission from my principal to participate in pen pals, I communicated with the principal of Indian Community School about connecting with one of their 3rd grade classes.

Several weeks later, I finally got an email from Ms. Pfeiffer. A third-grade teacher at Indian Community, she was also very interested in the pen pal project, so I set up a Zoom to discuss the idea further. She was open-minded about the idea of pen pals but wanted to know the rationale behind the project. When I shared my goal of cultural competence for my students and for their world to get a bit bigger, she shared the same goal for her students. In fact, her students had struggled with the same thing. In the past, an attempt was made by her school, the Jewish Day School, the local Catholic school, and the nearby public school to socialize the students at a community festival. The students resisted mingling with others, and it was deemed unsuccessful.

Ms. Pfeiffer's goal was to try this again in a smaller and more intimate setting with our students regularly writing to each other and Zooming each other to build relationships with others. We aimed to write about once a month and Zoom once a month if possible.

Due to classroom interruptions, scheduled breaks, and time zone differences, we were not able to Zoom every month but were able to write a letter almost every month to our pen pals. In between these interactions, we would share pictures or presentations on what our respective classes were working on. In February, Ms. Pfeiffer's class hosted a school-wide assembly on Love, one of their Seven Sacred Gifts, and sent us their performances and poetry they wrote and presented to the school. My students shared writing they were proud of and pictures of field trips. This communication continued until my students' last day of school. Both classes enjoyed the communication of writing letters and meeting on Zoom and hope to continue in this school partnership next school year.

Reflection

Out of all the multimodal activities that students participated in, this year long pen pal activity I believe was the most impactful. From November to May, students regularly wrote letters and Zoomed with Native American students from various tribes. In the beginning of the activity, students asked many questions relating to their tribal membership, the languages they spoke, and what they typically like to do. Eventually, students moved on to communicating with them about school breaks, sports, siblings, what they learn at school, and video games, even sharing their screen names so they can play with each other online. From their questioning, it seems that students went from seeing them as Native American kids to other kids like themselves and go from "othering" them to seeing the similarities between their lives and building cultural competence.

Because we know that people are more likely to resist stereotypical and dangerous beliefs about a group of people when they have formed relationships with them, this activity benefited students the most because of the authentic relationships they built. Students were eager to learn and communicate with each other and felt that they had indeed made a new friend. I aim to continue this relationship next school year with my new set of third graders.

Finding Emergent Themes

Seven themes have emerged from my preliminary review of the data: Native American identities, Native American existence: past and present, Native Americans' relationship with others, students' desire to learn, connections to the natural world, more engagement in learning, and school as knowledge. These themes emerged as I reviewed interview transcripts, student work samples, and pen pal letters. In this section, a description is provided for each theme, as well as supporting evidence from the data and my understanding of what students are sharing and thinking.

Native American Existence: Past and Present

Before the unit began, I knew that most of my students held many stereotypes and misconceptions about Native Americans. Notably, many students believed that they no longer existed, having only lived long ago. This was a running theme throughout the unit. Because the standards stated that I must teach Native Americans food, clothes, transportation, and shelter from the past, this was included in our readings and research. However, because my intention was to build cultural competence, I needed to develop my students' understanding of Native American existence in the world today. Thus, I made that a focus.

In addition to drawing what they thought of when they heard the phrase 'Native American,' they were also asked to draw Native American clothes, shelter, and food as they perceived it. This

was done at the start and the end of the unit to be able to see growth and changes in student perceptions of Native Americans as a people and how they live their lives.

Fato

For Fato, her original drawings featured a singular smiling person labeled African while her updated drawing featured two of the same girls. Thinking about their clothes, food, and shelter, Fato originally imagines them to live in cabins, wear jumpsuits, and eat bananas and apples. Her rationale for these was because they "lived long ago near trees" and that the pictures are what "always pops in her head" when she hears the word Native American while also claiming to have "never heard of Native American before."

In the present however, there are drastic differences. In the way she imagines Native Americans, she has split the paper into two sides labeled past and present with the same girl on each side. The girl from the present was labeled as being Indian while the girl from the present was labeled African American. Now she "sees Indians and African Americans as different" but with Natives still existing in the past. Fato made the drawings differently this time because "I see in pictures in the High Museum of Native Americans." Her drawings of Native American clothes, food, and shelter have also evolved. Their homes now include "a house made from red clay" in the past and in the present "it's what almost everyone lives in, a regular house." Clothes have also changed from a "shirt made of deer fur and pants" in the past to a "regular shirt and pants made of wool" in the present. Food now consists of beans, corn, and squash because she "learned a lot more" and "remembered things from the history museum." Interestingly, she added extra information to her paper labeled "Native American tribes" and listed "Hopi, Yupik, Aztec, Cherokee, Wampanoag, Seminole, Artic, and Tlingit." Fato added this because she "learned more" and "to me they are very interesting."

It is evident in her interviews, drawings, and student work that she was very attentive during the unit. Not only that, but she also continued to notice Native American depictions from our field trips to the High Museum of Art and the Atlanta History Center. However, I can also assume that while Fato now sees Native Americans as people that continue to exist today, she continues to grapple with who they are as a people with her labeling of them as Native American and African American, even African. She herself is from Senegal so that background may play a role in the similarities she might be seeing as a reason for why she correlates these groups together. Additionally, her explanations shared information about Native Americans, past and present, but were still focused more on the past.

Jade

Jade's drawings were also transformative. When asked to draw what she thinks about when she hears 'Native American,' she drew three people- a boy, a girl, and an adult man. The girl is labeled "Native American black girl" and is smiling, wearing a shirt that says, "Black Girl Magic." The boy is labeled "Native American black boy" and is also smiling, wearing the same shirt as the girl. According to Jade, they are smiling because they are "proud of themselves for being black," and the boy "likes himself the way he is." The man is shown frowning and is labeled "Native American- a soldier that is a black person" with a shirt that says soldier. This is because "Native Americans means soldiers and black people." Interestingly, only the girl and the man are colored brown, while the boy is left uncolored, with no rationale as to why this was done that Jade can recall.

Her second drawing depicts homes, clothing, and food. Two gray homes were drawn, which depict "a house like a dollhouse" and a house "made of bricks," though they appear very similar in their drawings. The clothes show a gray shirt, gray pants, and gray underwear. For

food, Jade drew an apple, a banana, and a carrot, all brightly colored, because "Native Americans only ate healthy foods."

After the unit, the drawings showed many changes. In her drawing of 'Native Americans,' she chose to write her thoughts instead and included only one drawing of a girl's face, laughing. The writing shares that Jade "thinks about black people for some reason" and "of their tribe and how people are different." She struggled again to elaborate. Her next drawing was much more specific. For all three categories (homes, clothes, and food), she has split each into two small sections labeled past and present with all of the drawings being uncolored except for the clothes. For homes, she drew a teepee because "that's where they used to live" and a house that is "a normal house just like ours" in the present. The clothes show a "coat, shirt, and pants made of bull fur" and a "crop top shirt, coat, and pants" that were different colors, but Jade was not sure that they were made of. Native American food included a list instead of drawings (which I allowed if they preferred). The past section includes apples, corn, bull, turkey, and alligators because she "can be more specific now." The present section included mac and cheese, pizza, and maybe lemon pepper wings. These were different than the first set of drawings because "now that I've learned more, I can do different things." Jade also included an additional list titled "More Facts" and wrote "use every part of the bull, uses the brain of the bull for coats now, and uses natural resources." Jade included these because she "learned more" and know that "they were good about using their natural resources."

Similarly to Fato, Jade showed much growth in her understanding of Native cultures. She was able to grow in her understanding of their existence in the present. Though she drew a teepee, this is consistent with her studies as she focused on the Plains tribe for her research. Curiously, she continued to struggle with race and labels as she consistently labeled Native

Americans as the same as being black. However, her repetition of the phrase “Black Girl Magic” is a positive message for her to include as a young black girl. The mention of the soldier I might attribute to the celebration of Veteran’s Day at school and a read aloud of the book *At the Mountain’s Base* by Traci Sorell which focuses on a Native American family eagerly waiting for their pilot daughter to return from war. Though Jade herself was not able to elaborate on that portion of her drawing.

Justin

Justin’s initial drawings were very clear. In drawing what he thinks about when he hears ‘Native American,’ Justin drew a single, smiling boy, colored brown and wearing only a leaf. He is surrounded by a fire and is next to a teepee with the top of the paper labeled 193 BC. This was because “clothes were not invented yet,” “lived in huts because I saw it in different books in second grade,” were colored brown because “brown is the color of people not from America,” and didn’t draw much else because they “didn’t have anything back then.” For his drawings of homes, clothing, and food, he again drew a teepee which he called a “hut,” four articles of clothing that he was not able to identity but did recall that they were supposed to be “made of sheep or ox skin,” and two small images labeled “any meat” and “any fish.” These drawings lacked detail both in the way they were drawn and the little coloring that was done. When pressed to discuss these drawings further, Justin struggled and shared that “I don’t know much about them” but maybe because “Native Americans might not be from Georgia.”

Justin’s drawings came to life much more in the second round. This time when he thought about Native Americans, he labeled his sheet past and present at the top of the paper. In the past, he drew a person riding a horse and a man with a crown. This was because “in the past, Athabascans rode horses to get around” but thought that it “might have been harder for Native

Americans to go their way around with settlers" so he added "a settler at the bottom trying to take over their land." In the present, however, a person is smiling standing next to a street with a car. Justin thought that this is because "in the present, they just live a normal life" and that means they "live near a street or a house." He didn't include any home in the past because they "usually didn't live in houses" and "had to find a cave for their house" though the cave was not included in the drawing because he felt he would run out of time. He also didn't include a settler in the present section because he's "pretty sure there's a law passed down that I don't think people can do that anymore."

With his second drawing that focused on homes, clothes, and food, he again labeled each section with the titles past and present at the top. The past included a tan colored "cave" and a large modern home with eight windows. Justin believed that "their present home is actually like a mansion" because they "might be rich because of their art." For clothing, he simply wrote "fur clothes" under the past and six colorful articles of clothing for the present. Strangely, he "didn't feel like saying anything" about this section of the drawing, just that they were "normal human clothes." For Native American food, he included "fish and grapes" in the past and a McDonald's hamburger in the present with a McDonald's restaurant at the bottom. Though he included fish, it's "probably not true because most fish are poisonous" and "Athabascans do not eat fish or meat because they are bad for your body." He added McDonald's because "Native Americans might eat McDonalds, but they still might eat fish for food and eat berries."

With his drawings and explanations, Justin demonstrated a border understanding of Native American culture as well as their existence in the present. He was also one of the few students to mention a specific tribal name instead of just saying Native Americans. Further, his comments on Native American art leading to wealth shows that he saw it as valuable to them and

others as it was enough to make them wealthy. Another interesting aspect of this drawing was also his awareness of settlers and their negative relationship with Native peoples. This would explain why the settler was smiling and the Native American on the horse looked fearful or unhappy. In these drawings, Justin was able to show much growth in his understanding of Native peoples with some gaps in his understanding.

Sarah

Sarah's drawings from both the first and second session were a bit hard to decipher without the interviews as she stated that she "doesn't really like drawing that much." Fortunately, she enjoyed chatting and gave a lot of insight as to what she was thinking at the time of the drawings. Initially, when thinking about Native Americans, she drew a single man colored all brown with a label that read "bearskin" wearing a black headband. This is because Sarah believes that "brown is the color of all their skin" and "mostly wear bear skin and deer skin" but "no shoes." Sarah also added that "this is just what Native Americans look like." For her second drawing of homes, clothing, and food, Sarah made quick sketches depicting a brown log house because "logs are the only thing they had" but they "lived in specific houses like we do." For clothing, she created a "shirt that goes around your waist" that was colored in brown but could not give many details about it. Lastly, for food she drew a piece of yellow corn though she meant to draw apples as well but didn't have enough time. This was because "back then when Native Americans were alive, they didn't have stoves to really cook so they had to plant crops" because they "lived in nature."

Her second set of drawings also showed growth. In her portrayal of Native Americans, she drew two similar girls with long hair and uncolored skin. The first one was labeled "past" with brown clothes that said "fur" and a label on her shoes that said "seed." The second girl had

on a black shirt that said peace with black pants and black shoes. Sarah drew this because in the past “they wore any type of fur” but in the present they wore “everyday clothes” but “not all Americans have that head thing” so she left it out this time. While she included shoes this time, she knows they “wore shoes but didn’t know how to make them.”

The other drawing that included homes, clothes, and food was also significantly different. Here, Sarah chose to separate all sections into past and present. For homes, she now drew a teepee because “didn’t know about teepees and only longhouses” as well as a “regular house.” The clothing included “a bear skin thing” for the past and t-shirt and jeans for the present because “I kind of know what they wore because I’ve been studying.” The past and present food only included “some kind of an animal with meat” because she knew they “didn’t have stoves, oven, or cheese” but drew “a piece of grilled cheese for the present.” Notably, all the pictures drawn were colored in black but there was “no reason” for that according to Sarah.

While the drawings were not very detailed, Sarah was able to give information about her choices, even acknowledging that she had been studying. She did not draw teepees in her initial drawings because she didn’t know they existed but included them in her second set of drawings most likely because her tribe, the Cree, used teepees. While growth was evident, she did not mention her tribe during our conversations and instead used Native American. This, however, could have been affected by my questioning and use of Native American instead of using specific tribal names.

Jack

Before discussing his drawings, Jack made it clear that he “wasn’t the best drawer or colorer” but was “excited to talk” about his drawings. In his initial Native American drawing, Jack drew a single person colored orange and yellow wearing feathers and holding a bow and

arrow facing a deer. Jack created this because “I remember the stuff from second grade, but that's how I knew they had to hunt for the food. So that's where I drawed a bow and arrow in his hand and a deer.” The orange and yellow skin was because “I didn't have a peach so I tried to make it the best kind of skin color I could make.” His reasoning for drawing these specific objects was “Because I've watched a lot of movies and the first thing that popped in my head was them wearing feather headbands and necklaces made out of bear claws.” His specific movie reference was Peter Pan on Disney+.

For his second drawing that focused on Native homes, clothes, and food, he drew a variety of objects and colored all of them. For homes, Jack chose to draw a “dirt house and a tent” because his “second grade teacher told him they sometimes made dirt houses.” The tent was colored in black but was supposed to show “nature and stuff piled on.” For clothes, Jack drew five items all colored black, but he had trouble identifying what they were beyond “clothes that cover their spots.” Though he did recall adding a necklace and a headband, all the items were colored black because “it was the first color I saw in my pencil box.” Lastly, for Native foods Jack drew a variety of four items including a deer, fish, pig, and a loaf of bread. This was because he has “seen a lot of people visiting Native Americans in a video and it looks like they really like meat” but the “loaf of bread might be from someone passing by and giving them some bread.”

In his second round of drawings, Jack made significant changes. His first drawing showing what comes to mind when he hears Native Americans showed a singular, smiling person with “peach skin.” It shows “a Native American from the Yupik tribe and he’s happy.” He is dressed in all black with a coat and hat with red gloves because “he lives in the Arctic and all of his clothes have animal fur on it.” He chose to draw this because he “started studying about

Yupik more." Next, we looked at his drawings of homes, clothes, and food. For homes, he chose to draw an igloo instead of a dirt home because he "was thinking more of Yupik people and the Arctic people." His clothes followed this theme as he drew a large black coat and mittens because it "protects them from the coldness in the Arctic." The food Jack drew was a black seal and a piece of red meat because "when I was studying about Yupik food, I remembered they did eat the seals and meat" but couldn't remember what else. There was not much elaboration on his choices for clothes and food when prompted.

Looking at Jack's first set of drawings and his second set, it appears that his study of the Yupik people greatly influenced his drawings and ideas. He was also able to name a specific tribe rather than making generalized statements about Native peoples. Curiously, he continued to see the Yupik as "peach colored" though I did not see that myself in the resources that I provided to him. Because he cited media in his first interview, he could continue to draw from other media representations of Native Americans while also accommodating his new knowledge of the Yupik.

Michael

Michael is a student that was indifferent in learning about Native Americans at the start of the unit and grew quite invested in the learning process. For his first picture, he drew a smiling person with what appeared to be a crown and a skirt. While Isaiah could not recall what type of clothing it was, he knew "they have to hunt for cool clothing" made of deerskin. His crown was a "special hat with feathers on it" because "I think they wear that if they're a king." The person was "the peach color" because "when I see Native Americans, I think they're that color." He was very direct in his responses and didn't care to offer any more when asked.

For his second drawing focused on Native homes, clothing, and food, he had a little more to offer. For homes, he drew eight buildings which were meant to be "a council house, a winter house and a summer house." Outside the homes were barricades because "people try to attack their homes." For clothing, he drew a person wearing a brown jacket. This was a deerskin jacket that the man was trying on "so he can buy more and get more for his tribe." For food, he drew berries in a bush, a deer, and a pig. Michael believed that "where they live, they have a lot of nature so they got to hunt and get berries from the bushes, and they might have sawn a wild pig."

For his second set of drawings, he chose to draw less and write more. In the classroom, he typically does not enjoy drawing or coloring, so I gave students the choice to write if they preferred. His new drawing showing what he thinks when he hears Native American is split into two parts showing past and present. The past section features a single person that was not colored wearing a red article of clothing. Michael explained that "in their clothing and in their symbols that they have to recognize their tribe" but did not specify what the symbol was or what type of clothing he drew. He did add that clothes he drew "were before European contact." The person in the present is "peach colored" and is at a "powwow where they danced and performed so I think that's what they wore there." Like the image from the past, he wore a red tie around the waist. Michael, however, added more in conversation and mentioned that today they wore "normal clothes" which means "like same things that I wear." In speaking on his newer drawing of homes, clothes, and food, Michael also added a section of past and present within each part. The past shows a "small house that they probably made out of wood and deer hides" with the present showing a brown brick house because now "Native Americans have more capable things around like brick to keep the house together." They are also different because "In the past Native

American homes were like supposed to be protecting each other because they were in the same tribe and this one, they can have their family members and have their family members come and stay with them." The clothing portion included no drawings, but rather a list of items. In the past, he listed buffalo and sheep hides after European contact, socks, pants, and shirts with long sleeves. In the present, he listed shirts, jackets, shoes, pants, dresses, buffalo hides, and socks. Michael wrote these because "when I was studying about the Hopi, they had to wear hides and they had to go hunt the buffalo for their clothing." He wrote a similar list again because "our clothes are made out of animal skins now." He also added that shirts with long sleeves in the past were "because after European Contact they had sleeves and shoes to protect them from nature and something like that." The Native food he also chose to list instead of draw. On one side labeled past, he listed buffalo heads, berries, fish, corn, melons, chicken, nuts, bread, rice, beans, rabbit, deer, and elk. He wrote these items because "Hopi my tribe, I know about them." For the present, he listed McDonalds, Chick-fil-A, burgers, fries, and donuts. This was because he recalled "our guest speaker came, and she said that we eat the same thing as regular people because they don't want to think that they are the same as them. So I think that that's what they eat like us."

Like a few other students, Michael chose to reference the tribe he studied, the Hopi, when answering the questions and seemed to have learned a lot from his studies. Though all students were present for the guest speaker, Michael was the only one to have mentioned her and what he took from her visit. He also seemed particularly taken with European contact as he mentioned it more than once and some impact it had on Natives. I was happy to see that he was also consistent with his mention of past and present Native Americans and noticed a clear difference between the two with some exceptions in clothing.

Zack

Zack was another student that shared in the beginning of the unit that he was not particularly interested in learning about Native Americans because he had already "learned all about them in second grade." His first drawing showing what he thought about when he heard the word Native American included a person and a brown house. The man was colored "the skin color" and was wearing "feather things in his hair." The brown home was a "winter home with a doorknob and it's brown because they used logs." He opted not to say more about the picture, but he did "try his best."

The second picture focused on Native American homes, clothing, and food. Because he thought he was running out of time, he drew the same winter house as before in the same way. For food, he chose to write instead of draw and wrote "fish, deer, bears." This was because he "really didn't know how to draw animals." However, he had "no idea" why he wrote these things. Lastly, for clothes he chose to draw a single, uncolored triangle because he was "thinking for a really long time" and "couldn't focus because people were talking nearby" so he just wanted to "do something there." Even though he did not provide much in his drawings, he did explain to me that "didn't have a lot of clothes or food like we do now so they would have to find their food and steal food."

His second round of pictures were quite different but also challenging to decipher. This task got confusing for him because it appeared that he did the same thing on two different sheets of paper. On his drawing showing what he thought of when he heard Native Americans, he split his paper into eight sections. Two were blank and 6 were not. In one of the sections was a burger, fries, and chicken nuggets because "we have that in the present right now." Another section was labeled food and included three figures which were supposed to be a deer, a bear, and a rooster.

He drew these because he also “wanted to show past food.” The middle two sections were labeled clothes and had four uncolored objects. These showed “two pairs of pants, a shirt with feathers on it, and just a regular t-shirt.” They were left uncolored because he “just forgot about it” and in explaining why he drew those things; he knew that Native Americans “have a lot of feathers on them” when you see them. Finally, the bottom of the image showed a brown house “shaped like a hut because that’s what their houses usually look like in the past” and also drew a “regular tiny house that you would see like downtown somewhere” that was made of “wood and bricks.” He shared that his original pictures looked differently because “he wasn’t really thinking the right way” and wasn’t “being creative.” When pressed about his current pictures, he was unable to give me more information about his choices and stayed silent after thinking for a while.

While Zack’s pictures were hard to decipher, he was also hard to interview. Even with extra think time, he struggled to share his ideas and would simply say he forgot to move along in the process. This is behavior seen in the classroom due to his severe ADD that was not yet being treated at the time of these interviews. However, I did notice he was able to speak of past and present differences though he chose not to write that. It appeared as if he did gain an understanding of Native people today as opposed to only existing in the past as is common thinking for young children.

Alaya

Alaya was very excited to discuss her drawings with me and created drawings that were very clear. When asked what she thought when she heard the word Native American, she drew four adults wearing all brown clothes with feathers in their hair. Their skin was left uncolored. The skin was left this way because she “just ran out of time” but the clothes were brown because

"when there's Native Americans, they usually wear brown." The feathers were drawn because "I knew that when I see them, Native Americans, in pictures, they would have these colors in their head, and they look like feathers."

Her drawing of Native American homes, clothing, and food was also very clear. Under Native American homes, Alaya drew a house made of hay and a house made of sticks because "when I would look in 2nd grade at the pictures, they kind of reminded me about hay and sticks and the materials they used." For clothing, she drew "furry coats made from bear fur" and a scarf made from "bear skin," though she is not certain why she chose to draw these two items. Lastly, for Native American food, she drew a bear and a fish, both dead. Alaya's reasoning was because "that's what they eat" with those specific things being drawn because "those are the only two things I could think of that they could hunt for. And those were the two that just popped in my mind."

Her second round of drawings was very different. In drawing what she thought of when she heard Native American, she split that paper into two parts- past and present. Two different girls were drawn on each side. The girl in the past wore a skirt that "sometimes they use skin or a cloth or something to trade with" to make them. For the rest of that person, Alaya shared that she "just thought about it differently" and chose to draw green shoes and something that appears to be a crown but could not elaborate. The girl in the present looked very different, wearing sunglasses, a smile, a purple shirt, a pink skirt, and purple leggings. Alaya shared that it was because "I kind of wear this stuff at home" and "my pen pals look like they wear this kind of stuff too from when I saw them."

For her second drawing that focused on homes, clothes, and food, Alaya also chose to add art to the drawing. Her homes section showed three brown homes, including a teepee, a hut,

and a “regular home from today.” The teepee and hut she labeled as being from the past were inspired by what “we saw on the virtual field trip.” Her clothes included very detailed pictures of a bearskin coat, a black t-shirt “they might wear today.” and “headbands from the past with feathers.” When asked for more details about her drawing of clothes, she did not “really want to say anything else.” She drew a picture of a bear and fish again, along with a Happy Meal from McDonalds for Native American food. Alaya felt that this was because “in the present people eat these kinds of restaurants and in the past, they had to hunt only.” Finally, she chose to add Native American art because she knows that her grandmother wears jewelry today and “in the past and present, they might like these things too.” Her grandmother is not Native American but just had the idea that others might also like jewelry.

Her drawings and interviews clearly show that Alaya paid attention to the resources she had access to and recalled images from the virtual field trip to the Booth Western Museum focusing on Native Art. Additionally, she was the only student who referenced her pen pals and the knowledge gained from them. I also applaud her for including Native American art and wonder if art caught her eye the most that she felt the need to include it. Her work also shows me that she can differentiate between life lived in the past and present, but not quite how they might overlap today.

Maggie

Maggie’s love of drawing and coloring was very evident in the detailed work she created and discussed with me. For her first drawing showing what she thinks of when she hears the word Native American, her page is filled with labeled and colored images. They include a river, farm, tents, a large fence, a person wearing face paint standing by a fire, and a person fishing in the river. In drawing so much, she shared, "When I think about Native Americans, I do not just

think about the Native American. I think about the whole thing." This meant where they lived and what they did. The fence was meant to be "their defense," a fire where they cooked meat, and a farm because they grew crops. The person wore "a hat they put on like these cool shaped hats" and "face paint in fun colors." Finally, she shared "It's not really like what we do now, but there's lots of details about them. So like they all work together. All of them work together to build the wood to fence, to build the houses, to build the farm, and all of them work together to keep each other safe."

Her drawings of Native American homes, clothing, and food were just as detailed. The homes included two drawings. One was a brown house made of "hay, rock, and wood only" and the other a "tent made of animal skin that they only use when they are traveling because they might want to leave it behind." For clothing, she drew a man and a woman in different outfits. Both were "peach colored," but there "wasn't really a reason" for that choice. The man wore a skirt because "he has to cover his parts" and "that's all that boys have to wear" while the girl "was wearing a dress for no real reason" but didn't have shoes because "some of them didn't have shoes." Her drawing of food showed deer, fish, and pigs because "I know that deer lived a long time ago" and she guesses that "they used to put pigs on sticks over a fire and roast them." This was to "share with each other because they always cooperated and liked to get things from nature."

Maggie's second set of drawings evolved with even more details than before. For her depictions of what comes to mind when she thinks of Native Americans, she drew on both sides of the paper with one side labeled past and the other labeled future. The past includes a girl with a gown and boy with a skirt "just because" and "had no real reason" to draw those specific things. On the back in the present section, you see a girl wearing a swimsuit and a boy wearing

winter clothes because she “felt like drawing that but didn’t really have like a real reason why.” Also, their skin color was different. The ones in the past were colored brown and the ones in the present were colored to appear white. Though I pressed to get more details on these drawings, she didn’t “feel like talking more about it.”

Her final drawing also had many details. Her drawing of Native American homes had four varying homes, including a green teepee and a brown longhouse in the past and an apartment and house in the present. Maggie drew these because she “was thinking more active” and “would have drawn these things inside a village like last time but with more people.” Mostly it was “because I learned that they lived in more things than just in a stone house and a teepee.” Her section on Native American clothes, however, included eleven articles of clothing also labeled past and present. On one green dress, Maggie states, "I learned that the Seminole lived in Florida where most of the alligators are so I just tried to make it green kinda like an alligator.” Also included in the past were “a gown that’s more of a festive thing,” a cap for men “that they wear when they dance,” and outfits “all made of fur.” The present included “shirts, pants, and swimsuits really” because “I felt like drawing multiple things and couldn’t decide on one.” No real reason was given for why the specific clothes in the present. Maggie’s section on Native American food included an alligator, panther, frog, turtle in the past and pizza, chicken, and fruit salad in the future. The rationale was that she “learned that alligators live in Florida. I also learned that panthers live in Florida, so I drew that because they probably ate it. And then there’s probably going to be frogs in Florida and turtles.” The present included these drawings because “I learned more about the Seminole than before a month ago. So I actually just thought more into it this time.”

It was clear that Maggie's drawing showed that she can imagine a clear difference between Native Americans of the past and present, even if she had trouble verbalizing the details at times. She was also able to name her tribe and specified the parts of the drawings that related specifically to the Seminoles of Florida. This tells me that she was probably able to see differences between her tribe and others while also being able to see Native Americans as cooperative from the start. This mention of positive traits was rare in students.

Dilan

Dilan's first drawing showing what she thought of when she heard Native American filled the entire page. In her drawing, she includes three homes on fire, two people crying, and one person smiling and holding a torch. Surrounding them are apple trees. The pictures are left uncolored except for one burning house, which is orange. Dilan explained "when I think of Native Americans, I think about fighting. For some reason." The picture shows "European settlers are throwing fire on their houses because they got mad at them for some reason. So they are having to leave. That is why the Native Americans are crying." Also, "because they have to leave a lot of stuff behind in their houses." As far as other details in the photo with the homes and dress style, Dilan "just guessed."

For Native American homes, clothing, and shelter, Dilan was able to provide many details. Under homes, she drew two sets of similar looking homes. They show "a summer home and winter homes because I knew they had both, so I drew both of them." The brown homes were made of wood and the red homes were made of Georgia clay. She added "the shape of their home is I just guessed how it would look." For clothes, you again see a brown home, a person smiling, and a set of clothes. Dilan chose to draw two shorts and two shirts on hangers because "he had to hang up clothes outside." No reason was given for these specific articles of clothing or

why they were outside, but she was “sure they wore clothes.” She drew “four apple trees and some corn but I didn’t get to color in the apples.” Dilan chose this because “when we went on the field trip I saw a picture and I might have seen an apple tree I don’t know, but I’m sure I saw corn.” She also added that she wanted to draw more things but wasn’t sure what to add. However, she did know that “they were here for a really really really really long time. I also know they are really important.”

For her second set of drawings, Dilan made many changes. This time, when she thought of Native Americans, she “thought about Native Americans past and present.” The past shows “just a Native American girl” wearing an orange outfit, while the present shows “just a normal person like from now.” She could not elaborate further on these images besides stating that “this was the first thing that came to mind.”

For Native American homes, clothes, and food, they varied greatly from the first set. Dilan drew two homes, one green and one orange. One was made of clay, and the other was made of wood because they were meant to show past and present homes. This was because “It’s just the first thing I thought about. I thought about something different than last time.” For clothes, there were three orange pieces of clothing on one side of the page and three orange drawings on the other side of the page. They were all shaped like squares and were hard to decipher. She explained that the orange articles “were just clothes they wore in the past made of animal skins” but wasn’t sure what types of clothes they were supposed to be. The green clothes showed “the clothes we wear now. Like shorts, pants, t-shirts.” Dilan did not want to speak further on the clothes and asked to move onto food. Here you see fifteen different items colored purple, orange, or green. This was meant to show “the food when it’s off the trees since last time I drew it still on.” This was because “It's just that I thought about something different.”

It seemed from her drawings that Dilan possibly was not in the mood to draw since they lacked the artistry I typically see in class and what she created in art club. Fortunately, Dilan shared, "I learned like a lot of more interesting facts than I used to know, and I learned more than I already knew." However, she was one of the few students who mentioned tension with European settlers in her early drawings and displayed empathy for them and their experiences. You can also tell from Dilan's drawings that she sees a difference in Native American life from the past and present but is more in the emerging stages of that understanding since she couldn't give many reasons for her choices or did not recall them.

It is important to note that all participants began with an understanding that Native Americans were people that existed in the past, only to be confronted with new information that challenged these ideas. The existence, experiences, and humanity of Native Americans were realized through studying using various resources, guest speakers, field trips, and forming a relationship with their Native American pen pals, cementing the idea that Native Americans are alive today. Though students varied in their understanding and closeness to the topic, all students showed a change in understanding, with some even sharing that understanding with families. Notably, Justin's mother shared that he was so taken with his research on Athabascans and discovering that they exist today that for Christmas, he asked for a 23 and me set to find out if he was part Native American, hoping to be related to the Athabascan tribe. His interest continued to May, when he asked for books on Athabascan history for his birthday.

Looking at students' responses more deeply, I did see differences in responses between genders and race. My black students more often described them as "peaceful people" and described them as "living a normal life like a normal person" that were "all nice to each other." Also, "just because they're Native American doesn't mean they are different from other people."

My girls, however, more often mentioned Native American relationships with others, showing sympathy for their lands being taken. Maggie brought this up most often wondering "If we can't give them back their land, how will we pay them back?" A few others also mentioned their homes being taken, being forced to leave, and fighting with European settlers.

Native American Identities

One theme that appeared throughout the interviews, but particularly in the first and third interviews, was a focus on Native American skin color and origins, which I labeled as a preoccupation with Native American identity. During my first and third interviews, I asked students to draw a picture of what they think of when they hear the words 'Native American.' In response, five participants (Michael, Justin, Fato, Alaya, and Sarah), shared that they imagine Native Americans to be "a shade of brown," "dark brown," "all of them are brown," and "very black." They added that "brown is the usual color for people not from America" and "brown usually goes with Native Americans." Further, Fato, Jade, and Justin, shared that "Native American means soldiers and black people", "they are black people," and "Native American means native Africans or just Africans." While discussing his drawing, Justin in particular, noted that he wanted to know "what African Americans really are" while also noting that he drew "Indians or African Americans."

At the end of the Native American unit at interview three, Fato and Jade continue to grapple with how to see Native Americans racially. When asked to complete the same drawing task as interview one, they both stated that they think of "Native Americans" and "of black people for some reason." However, they both also state that "Indians and African-Americans are different" and "in the past I think of Indians…. but in the present, I think about black people." Interestingly, when asked to elaborate, neither Jade nor Fato can offer a rationale as to what leads

them to believe this, only sharing that “it’s just what my brain tells me is true” or “it’s just what pops into my head.”

Because the task at hand asks students to draw and explain their work, it follows that students might mention skin color. However, students were not pressed to specifically address skin color, race, or nationality in the interview, only to share what they drew. Additionally, Maggie, Zack, Dilan, and Jack did not make mention of skin color or race at all. However, Jack colored the people he drew “peach-colored,” and Zack not coloring any person in his drawing because he did not have “the skin color crayon” but was unable to elaborate on this statement. Though we have casually discussed race in the classroom several times across most subjects, in read-alouds, and classroom discussions, it has never been a prolonged topic. However, it is not uncommon for young children to have formed their own ideas of race as research shows that children as young as one begin to recognize race (Sullivan et al., 2020). As a third-grade teacher, many students asked me about their race or national origin because they were unsure. Because adults can also struggle with their own racial identity, these interviews may have been an opportunity for students to share their developed ideas on race and skin color. It stands that students would also confuse Native Americans with African American as they have similarities in their names.

While skin color and identity were great themes at the start of data collection, when asked towards the end of the unit what they thought of when they heard the word ‘Native American,’ no students mentioned skin color or race in their description. Because they could learn more about their histories and cultures, students may have had more to discuss in later interviews and skin color was no longer a focus.

While I acknowledge and understand that Native American Peoples' past and present as well as their identities, are interconnected, they were presented as separate themes because students saw them as two separate ideas. Initially, students understood Native Americans to have only existed in the past and were generally surprised to hear of their existence in the present. Their "normalness" became a focus when they discovered that they were. Were 'they' like 'us'? However, the theme of Native American identities focused on their struggle to understand Native American people regarding race, skin color, and even citizenship. Were they White? Were they American? Were they citizens too?

Native American Hardships

A discussion of Native American hardships was also an occurring theme. Though we discussed their enslavement and abuse from the European settlers in a prior unit, their hardships were not an explicitly large portion of the unit but were included and discussed in read-alouds. Students, however, continued to focus not only on their relationships with European settlers but the hardships of Native American everyday life.

At the start of the unit, students mentioned settlers "burning down Native American homes" and "doing the Trail of Tears in Oklahoma." They also recalled "European settlers trying to take their land." In thinking about the hardships of their everyday life in the past, students mentioned these fifteen different times in the early interviews. This occurred among all participants and was about equally spread among the boys and girls. Many of their comments focused on what they did not have- shoes, clothes, food, money, or even knowledge. In their eyes, "they just didn't have anything back then" and "didn't know how to do a lot." Life was "very hard for them to live back then" to where they had to "find and steal their food" or "wait and someone passes by and gives them bread to eat."

By the third interview, only two people, Justin and Alaya, mentioned hardships. However, the focus shifted solely to their relationship with European settlers instead of their own lack of resources and knowledge. Justin pointed out that "their life was probably harder because of settlers trying to take over their land," but for Native Americans today he's "pretty sure there are laws passed that people can't do that anymore." Alaya was more sympathetic, saying "they have struggles today and also have needs that other people have and we should help them." She also added that "people came to take their land, and I feel upset about that because they trespass on their land. I think they deserved a little more better than to have nothing."

In a later interview, two students- Jack and Michael- reiterated their antagonistic relationship with European settlers of the past, stating that "their homes got tooken and had to work for other people" and they "all got hurt because of them back then." Their comments, though, were focused on the past and did not mention Native Americans of today. After the unit formally ended, our work and learning about Native Americans continued with correspondence with pen pals, read-alouds, and watching Molly of Denali. In our final interviews, no student mentioned the hardships of Native Americans in any capacity in the past or the present. I believe this is due to the continued research they did on their own tribes that brought them closer to that group and gained clarity on how capable and intelligent Native Peoples were in the past. To add another layer to their learning and ensure that students were also hearing about Native lives in the present, I chose to do read-alouds of books that portrayed them as scientists, scholars, activists, and everyday people with lives they could connect to.

The interaction with their pen pals, I believe also added to a reduction in negative thinking and pity. Their letters between the students mainly focused on favorites, video games they liked playing, family members, school days, and upcoming events in their lives. Though the

discussions were not heavy, I believe this had an impact on their perception of Native Americans needing to be pitied or believing they lack so much. I do wonder, however, what led to their lack of mentions of European settlers. It's possible that more formal instruction on this topic would have cemented this part of Native American history for them.

Desire to Learn

One exciting theme that continued from the start of the formal unit to the end of the school year was a strong desire to learn about Native Americans. From the beginning, most students had a positive response to learning about Native American culture and history, particularly Alaya, Maggie, and Michael. Michael began with a strong desire to "learn more about Native Americans from Georgia" and "how Native Americans and European settlers worked together. "Alaya mentioned multiple times that she "just wanted to learn more" but "really wanted to know what they celebrated." Maggie echoed wanting to learn about Native American holidays but went further saying "I think Native Americans might need help and if they do, maybe I can help save them."

As the unit went on, students continuously shared with me, their families, and others how much they had learned about their tribe as well as the questions they still had. Every student made comments saying, "Now that I've learned more, I know that…." This was one of the most common comments made both in the classroom and during interviews. One of the main comments made about what they learned was "I didn't know there was such a thing as a tribe" and "Native Americans interest me because…"

As the learning continued, their questions continued as well. They wished to know things like "How tribes picked their names," "How did they pick their leaders & did it always have to be a boy?", "What did Native American children do all day," and "How could the European

settlers just take over a whole place & how did Native Americans try to protect themselves?" One of the most captivating questions asked during a Morning Meeting discussion was "If there were so many tribes back in the day, how did they all connect with each other and how do they all connect today?" This led to a long pause and students trying to make sense of this idea. In all their studying of their own individual tribe, it was never considered how they might work together, interact, or connect for common causes either in the past or the present.

As the school year came closer to an end, more questions arose. All but one student, Zack, continued to ask questions about their own tribe and others, focusing on history, leaders, and other tribes they did not study. Zack noted that he "Didn't want to learn more about Native Americans" because he "knew enough." Though I was disappointed that I was not able to answer more of their questions and were left wondering more, I was glad that Native American history and culture continued to be on their mind as a topic of interest.

More Engaged in Learning

As my students worked on their research with their partners, our approach was more open-ended and student-centered than it had been in the past. In describing the changes, every student had positive comments to make on instructional changes made that centered on their preferences for student learning and culture. Students were excited because "projects are more interesting," "we normally don't get to draw stuff", and "normally don't try to become experts. Additionally, "work is usually funner on the computer or iPads." As the projects progressed, students commented while they worked with their partners that they liked using digital tools and the chance to "keep on getting ahead" as well as putting in more effort than typical because they were hoping to upload their work on YouTube. The changes allowed students to focus more, get help from their partner, and even become competitive with other groups. While Jack and Justin

commented that they did not enjoy the experience of "having to figure stuff out themselves" and "we used to not be pressured about learning but now we are", students were overall happy with the changes with Jade feeling that "school is way better than I think it is now."

As the unit progressed, some student opinions changed. It seemed that students had a hard time reconciling their talents and interests with learning about Native Americans. While Sarah enjoyed drawing, "if you draw in math it won't help you all the way." Jade agreed with her line of thinking adding that "video games and other games are fun, but they don't help you learn school related things."

These responses led to a class discussion about further changes which led to a Social Studies Fair where they presented their work to their third-grade peers. Students enjoyed the compliments from friends and teachers, making others laugh and learn with their work, showing off their work, and "getting to be the teacher for once." After this fair, students again shared the positives of getting to learn with groups and choosing how to present their learning to others. However, in their responses I noticed that my girls were more vocal about these changes stating that "sharing is something I like to do", "I think I have been doing really well with the changes because my partner and I learned a lot together", and "It made me research a little more than I normally do."

From their responses, I can deduce that students enjoyed the changes and felt that it had a positive impact on their learning of Native Americans. This affirmed Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti's (2005) research on funds of knowledge that "classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases that students can manipulate to enhance learning in mathematics, social studies, language arts, and other content areas" (p. 43). However, some struggled to understand the connection between their love of YouTube, games, art, and collaboration as

possibly having a role in their learning process. It is possible that I did not make that connection explicit enough for students. Though students were actively involved in the decision-making process while the unit was taking place, I wonder if making students aware of my goals to use their funds of knowledge to learn more about Native Americans would have strengthened that connection and supported their academic success.

In- and Out-of- School Curriculum

In my interviews and conversations with students, there were many opportunities where we discussed their knowledge of Native Americans and the sources that influenced their ideas. Prior to the start of the unit when students discussed their perceptions of Native Americans, they cited outside experiences such as field trips and museums, family members, books, movies, and school. The field trip to the Atlanta History Center focused on Native Americans in Georgia in the past and present and occurred a month before the unit to give students some background knowledge before starting our studies. Three students cited this trip as having impacted their ideas. (Interestingly, despite all students attending the field trip, half of the students claimed to have never heard the word Native American before). All my male students cited books as having an impact on their knowledge as well. Jack and Alaya cited movies as another source of knowledge having watched Peter Pan on Disney +. Maggie was the only student that cited her family as a source of knowledge saying, “We come from the Cherokee” and “My mom says we are Native American. We got a piece of paper in the mail a little while ago that says we’re part of the Cherokee tribe.” Overwhelmingly, every student cited their knowledge as coming from their second-grade teacher and the books they read in class.

As we continued in the unit, we utilized many varied sources for our learning including movies, videos, trips, speakers, and books to give students access to multiple sources,

perspectives, and allow students to be engaged with media that best suits their learning needs. Additionally, I sought to engage parents so that the learning and conversations continued at home. Towards the end of the unit, we discussed again what we knew about Native Americans and where they recall getting their information from. To my surprise, my students all cited the books read in class and myself as their main source of information. Many students shared "You taught us that…", "The book you gave me said….", and "When you read us that book, I saw…" Though some students still cited the guest speaker, their pen pals, and Molly of Denali, the learning that took place in class dominated their minds as their main source of knowledge on Native Americans. While I acknowledge that their answers could have been influenced by their teacher interviewing them, the conversations we had were quite honest. I also acknowledge that it can be hard for any person to be able to cite all sources of their knowledge when asked. It was surprising, however, to hear that I was their main source of information as well as eye-opening. This makes the sources I used, the books I read, and the statements made in the classroom even more important as they are considered more memorable to my students as an official source of knowledge.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS ON INQUIRY

Overview

In my ethnographic inquiry, I explored the third-grade social studies curricula focusing on Native Americans. Theoretically building upon such works as culturally responsive/culturally relevant/culturally sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2000/2010 González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017) and critical social studies (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Parker, 2015; Ross, 2014; Zinn, 2015), I used students' funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) to teach the third grade standards on Native Americans to promote and build student academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. While serving as a teacher-researcher and facilitator of the unit, my students participated in the planning process of the unit to better cater to their learning needs and talents. During the six-week unit on Native Americans, students could select a tribe to study in-depth. Using a student-created choice board, students and their partners created iMovie trailers, posters, Google Doodles, board games, or anything else to display their learning to their peers. Through the use of carefully selected books and a few digital resources, students researched their tribe's clothing, food, shelter, and any other interesting cultural aspects from both the past and the present. Through multimodal learning experiences, including writing letters to pen pals, a TV club, field trips, guest speakers, and a social studies fair, students built a new understanding of Native American cultures and histories by confronting their stereotypes and misconceptions and began to build cultural competence.

It is important to note that the way I discuss my findings strays from the more traditional, linear response to my main research questions. This was done to keep the focus of my findings

on my students and their work instead of solely centered on my driving research questions. Additionally, this presentation of my findings also brings back the literature review and ties the student work in the classroom to the literature, creating a bridge between practice and theory.

Eight findings have emerged from my dissertation inquiry: (1) Inviting members of Native American communities to share their experience with the third graders helps overcome students' misconceptions and stereotypes of Native Americans and promotes their understanding of Native American existence and identities. (2) Multimodal approaches to instructional strategies validate students' funds of knowledge and engage them in deep learning, which leads to academic success. (3) In-and out-of-school curricula are equally essential and interdependent in promoting active student learning. (4) There is a need for cultivating *creative insubordination* (Baszile, 2023; He, 20230; Schubert; 2023; Schultz, 2023) strategies to advance a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining curricula for elementary social studies in today's restrictive school environments. (5) The funds of knowledge from teachers and students play essential roles in developing their cultural competence and critical consciousness, which is crucial to developing a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining third-grade social studies curricula. (6) Overcoming stereotypes and misconceptions of Native Americans and developing cultural competence and critical consciousness is an ongoing process. (7) Doing ethnographic research with young children, researchers need to be flexible, build a trusting relationship with them, and find ways to actively engage young children in the research process. (8) Conducting this research enables me to overcome my ignorance about my ancestries and histories, inspires me to explore deeper into my own cultural heritages, and motivates me to become a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining educator for all.

Inviting members of Native American communities-to share their experiences with the third graders helps overcome students' misconceptions and stereotypes of Native Americans and it promotes their understanding of Native American existence, identities, and curricula (**Finding 1**). This is evidenced in student interactions with the guest speaker and their pen pals. I found that developing cultural competence from its members themselves significantly impacted students. In interviews, many students discussed their relationship with their pen pals and how positive it felt to have friends who cared for them so far away. For example, some student participants commented during my interviews: "It is nice to have someone else to trust." I feel like over time, you just become really good friends.". "I loved that I could teach them new things that they did not know." "It's really cool getting to know someone you were learning about." When students were asked what they had learned from their pen pals, almost all of them shared that they taught them a few things about their tribes and languages. Unfortunately, the students recognized that they "forgot all of it already." (See Chapter 4, p.120 & p. 124 for details) However, they deeply remembered their pen pals' stories about their siblings, sports, video games, and school days. They could also discuss much on their selected tribe as they had spent many weeks studying and creating products of their learning. In this way, I believe that all students did get the chance to experience academic success, which is a question that culturally relevant pedagogy commits itself to asking (Scherff & Spector, 2010).

In reviewing the pen pal exchange letters, many students, both the writers and recipients, attached to their letters unique drawings, small gifts such as Pokémon cards, and their screen names in video games, in which they frequently mentioned being "best friends." These personal stories and authentic conversations connected the students with their pen pals in a memorable

way. Mainly, it solidified to my student participants that Native Americans still exist in the United States.

Students also spoke highly of their guest speaker, Dr. Laura Cummings Balgari. During the one-hour session, students were shown artifacts and discussed Native cultures from the past and the present, specifically the Pee Dee and Natchez tribes. Students were actively engaged in the presentation by asking multiple questions. Their curiosities were respectful and very much focused on the present. They listened intently to Native folktales, closely examined artifacts as they held them, and even counted down the time to her arrival throughout the morning. In later interviews, students could only partially recall what she presented, primarily the art and folktales, but they did share that the presenter was-intelligent, creative, and kind. I believe they also became more aware of the variations that exist within cultural groups (Merchant, 2018) having studied a particular tribe, formed a relationship with a child of a different tribe, and heard from our guest speaker who was a member of the Pee Dee and Natchez tribes.

While my students could not recite facts and figures about different native cultures, student interviews proved they were building meaningful relationships with their pen pals, developing a genuine desire to communicate and learn in a risk–free cultural exchange. In this way, I saw students from different worlds become border-crossers, engaging in shared experiences (McMillon, 2009). In these conversations (as well as the Zoom meetings), they realized they had more in common than they initially thought. In asking questions of their pen pals about who they are and how they live their lives, students began to examine and become aware of their lifestyle and culture. Additionally, like adults, students may not be aware as they build friendships with others that they are breaking down their stereotypes and misconceptions.

In participating in this genuine cultural exchange, students slowly worked to build cultural competence and critical consciousness.

This research adds to the literature in a few ways. As Gay (2020) reminds us, the site for success is in interactions between students and teachers. The way in which we engage in dialogue and about what forms the foundations for learning in our classroom space. What are creating, deciding, and sharing together? Because I wanted students to build cultural competence in a group many had just learned existed, I wanted students to engage in dialogue with members of that group directly. Though Gay (2000/2010/2018) believes it is crucial for students to engage in dialogue about conflicts with other cultures, in my case, I began the process by participating in friendly dialogue first. Later, I thought further about my lack of Indigenous cultural knowledge and knew that my students' interactions needed to include an additional teacher with this expertise. Because of this, I relied on the knowledge of a community member, Laura Cummings Balgari, to visit the classroom as both a visiting teacher and an expert in the field. This also aligns with Schultz's (2008) work in encouraging teachers to use the community's knowledge and seek allies. Allowing Indigenous Peoples to tell their own stories is also considered good practice in supporting students (Hummel, 2022; Kruger, 2019) as it prevents them from being limited to hearing only stories of 'damaged' Native Peoples. Tuck (2009) advises teachers to be aware of this representation and to ensure that Native communities are also recognized as being complex, with their hopes and dreams. Additionally, having the opportunity to hear from tribal members' ways of being from children and adults allows students to begin to explore the multiple perspectives that exist within Native communities instead of just being handed this information (Ross, 2014). However, my work also adds an exciting and missing piece of literature wherein children build their cultural competence with the help of other children instead

of adults. How might adults have led this learning process differently than their peers? In student interactions with various tribal members, both virtually and in person, I am reminded that the classroom is the real place for integration (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009).

Multimodal approaches to instructional strategies validate students' funds of knowledge and engage them in deep learning, which leads to academic success **(Finding 2)**. In creating a rich, experiential context using a variety of modalities such as books, images, letter writing, videos, field trips, and guest speakers, students were able to translate and demonstrate their new knowledge of Native Americans using their funds of knowledge to create a series of drawings, iMovie trailers, reports, trivia, and board games. These many modalities provided students access to the standards in a meaningful way, regardless of reading proficiency, giftedness, or learning disability (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). This was notable in the academic success students displayed, which included greater interest in Native American tribes and cultures, a desire to continue in the learning process themselves with independent study, increased awareness and understanding of tribes' cultural practices from the past and present, and the ability to share their new knowledge with others. One student in particular, Justin, started the unit holding many misconceptions about Native Americans without having a strong desire to learn more about them (see Chapter 4, p. 121 for details). However, during the holidays, his mother told me he had asked for a 23and Me DNA kit to check for Native American ancestry. He said he hoped that one of his ancestors was Athabascan because he felt interested and connected to them. At the end of the school year, Justin made a short list of things he still wanted to know about Native Americans and personally asked me to please teach him more about the items on his list, including Athabascan wars, generals, and art. His wish list for his birthday in May included nonfiction books about Native American history. Though all students showed significant growth

in their ways, Justin sought knowledge well after the unit of study ended, even seeing himself in the Athabascan culture. This was a distinct change in attitude towards Native Americans. I believe that the multimodal approach to learning and teaching allowed him to connect with his tribe and new content more profoundly than a more traditional textbook approach.

This multimodal and student-centered approach is consistent with the literature where students are allowed the freedom of discovery and collaboration and are respected as individuals with funds of knowledge with individual authority (Marvell, Simm, Schaaf, & Harper, 2013; Talbert, Hofkens, & Wang, 2019; Turner, 2011; Wang et al., 2013). Additionally, it was found to positively impact the areas of tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism (Salinas & Garr, 2009), leading to gains in student learning (Fletcher & Shaw, 2012; Wang et al., 2013). In my research, students were encouraged to work with their partners to carry out a research project using methods of their choice. They were given expert status to study specific tribes while being responsible for educating their peers in whatever manner they chose and presenting (or not presenting) this information to them. This approach made students more aware of their learning (Marvell et al., 2013). It also shifted the responsibility of designing learning opportunities and learning environments from the teacher to the student. As Gay (2000/2010/2018) points out, all students are competent, whether their talents are valued or not, and must be given the chance to become a teacher themselves. In this research, each student became a teaching artist (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009).

The findings are also consistent with the success of using student funds of knowledge to validate the many intelligences they bring to the classroom that can be used as a tool for academic growth. Using students' funds of knowledge activates prior knowledge, legitimizes students' experiences as valid, and allows students to make connections that enhance students'

understanding of content (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Roe, 2019). When done consistently across subject matter, it allows students (and teachers) to see the bigger picture outside of scores and standards and focus more on growth and learning (Schlein, 2015). Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti's (2005) work focused primarily on the funds of knowledge that came from family practices, specifically Mexican immigrant families. This work leaves out the idea that children participate in cultural practices that differ from their families' practices (Joves et al., 2015).

Additionally, students have a hand in creating culture themselves. In this research, the funds of knowledge of a diverse group of students, specifically youth culture, were more of my focus. Based on student interest surveys and my interactions with students, they were always eager and vocal about the cultural groups they were affiliated with, such as gamers and theatre. My research adds to the literature by showing how students use the cultural groups they choose to be a part of (such as gaming, YouTube content creation, art), rather than only citing familial cultural practices, to connect to the content being taught and to use it as a tool to educate others. This differs from the more traditional approach to funds of knowledge, which uses the culture of the parents and family that is taught to their children (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). While I acknowledge that students carry their familial culture to school and cannot fully separate themselves from them, my work asks students to select a subculture they strongly identify with. My work also aligns with the literature in that it affirms that multiple methods of instruction that attend to and use student knowledge help to address learner deficits (Turner, 2011; Wang et al., 2013). Considering a purer definition of student-centered learning, though multiple methods were used to explore learning to give all students access to the content (Garrett, 2008), students were only given some freedom as I had to set parameters based on the time allotted to teach and the specific standards I was responsible for during that time. I believe that for my students and

I's first foray into student-centered learning, these parameters contributed to our success because they allowed us to try something new within parameters that both parties were familiar with.

In-and out-of-school curricula are equally essential and interdependent in promoting active student learning **(Finding 3)**. At the start of my research, students eagerly shared examples of where they gained knowledge of Native American cultures and histories. Their answers varied from media such as Disney movies and books, family outings at Stone Mountain, a third-grade field trip, and school. Curricula derives from many sources (Gay, 2000/2010/2018), so their answers did not surprise me. Additionally, the interviews revealed whether their source of information was from in or outside of school when home visits were not an option for me (Cun, 2020; Esteban-Guitart et al.,2019). Though the research is evident on the benefits of home visits and interactions with community members in understanding outside curricula further (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Fitchett et al., 2010), I was not ready to take on this added instructional challenge at the time. These experiences may have accurately and respectfully represented various Native Nations (privileged over the word tribe whenever possible because of the historical association with inferiority (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2016)), introduced or reinforced stereotypes, or both. Regardless, one can assume all these sources of curricula were impactful enough that students could recall them. However, every student expressed that they learned about Native Americans mainly from their second-grade teacher. In Georgia Social Studies, second grade is the first year that students formally learn about Native Americans that lived in Georgia in the past, the Creek (Muscogee) and Cherokee, so it follows that most students referred to this specific grade level.

However, we know that curricula go beyond the walls of our schools and that the curricula that students experience at places like daycare, sports teams, family members' homes,

and places of worship may challenge the curricula students are learning at school (Schubert, 1981). It can also be enhanced by parent knowledge and experiences. For example, before Maggie participated in this study, her parents researched their background. They found their family descendants of Afro-Seminoles who lived in Florida and had their tribal membership revoked. According to her family, it was recently restored. Maggie's family shared this process with her and its importance to their family, giving her background knowledge on the existence of Black Seminoles and perhaps a positive image of Native cultures. Others, like Justin's and Dilan's families, chose to enhance the classroom study of Native Americans by buying and reading books together on various tribes and taking family trips to the Ocmulgee Mounds in Macon, GA.

Because these out-of-school curricula are constantly revised, teachers must always be in contact with students about their lives and experiences outside of the classroom. However, I understand that even in this endeavor of including students' out-of-school curricula, I am still only interpreting my understanding of the experiences they choose to tell me about. In interviewing students in five different instances, the knowledge they chose to share changed drastically as time passed. In experiencing the in- and out-of-school curricula, students had to make sense of these and create their understanding of Native American cultures and histories to incorporate new knowledge, even if their understandings were, at times, competing ideas. For example, students began to share that they believed Native people were still alive today, living ordinary lives, but continued to speak about Native Americans in the past tense. As an educator still involved in building my cultural competence, I can understand this state of intellectual disequilibrium. I also understand that although students were given access to the same quality resources and learning experiences, the information was taken in differently based on their

background and already-held knowledge (Schubert & Schultz, 2015). Hearing students discuss their experiences and what they learned about Native Americans and their specific tribes supports the idea that the out-of-school and in-school curricula exist together in a dynamic, interdependent relationship (Schubert, 1981) that continues even after students have left the classroom.

There is a need for cultivating *creative insubordination* (Baszile, 2023; He, 20230; Schubert, 2023; Schultz, 2023) strategies to advance a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining curricula for elementary social studies in today's restrictive school environments. **(Finding 4)**. Currently, there is an ongoing 'conflict campaign' that seeks to "restrict, ban, abolish, censor, and control a wide set of school conversations on race and inclusion" through concerted attacks and intimidation on school boards, education officials, and teachers themselves (Pollock et al., 2022, p. iii).

In my research, there were many instances where my resources and ideas were censored, bound by district policies and the Divisive Concepts law. In learning about atrocities like the Trail of Tears or land theft, students wanted to know more about who was responsible for these atrocities and why. However, beyond a vague answer, I could not engage them in that discussion. This was due to my district's Social Studies coordinators advising me to specifically not blame or name White people as culprits responsible for fear of violating the Divisive Concepts Law. I am bothered to admit that all these supported and maintained efforts to keep students from completely understanding United States history. What is worse is that my students began this unit holding many stereotypes and misconceptions about Native people: "Native Americans are the same thing as Black people." "I have never heard of them before." They all like to wear feathers in their hair and think hunting is fun." "They have to wait for people that pass by to give

them bread to eat." "They lived a long time ago.". "They did not have anything back then and did not know how to do anything." (See Chapter 4, p. 141-165 for details).

This is where creative insubordination supported my goals of developing cultural competence and critical consciousness. Schultz (2023) defines creative insubordination as "an approach to navigating classrooms that honors both the content expertise and pedagogical acumen of teachers" (p. 47). As a form of noncompliance, teachers are focused on doing right by their students while navigating national, state, and local rules and regulations (Schultz, 2023). It also requires teachers to make space for students in the co-construction of curricula, choosing what they might want to focus their studies on and their representations (Scherff & Spector, 2010). My students could engage in curricula-making this way, using their interests to guide their learning and asking questions about Native American cultures and histories. As unknowing accomplices, my students were able to be somewhat anchored by the standards while more freely exploring their selected tribe and their ways of life, past and present, using resources that exposed them to truths about their tribe's cultures and histories. These particularities were not explicitly stated in the standards.

Again, while I chose creative insubordination strategies by using resources that shared a Native perspective on historical events, resources by Native writers and artists, and forming relationships with Native people to authentically learn about a person's way of being, creative insubordination as it existed in my classroom did not encompass anger or meetings with administrators where I aggressively pushed back. Instead, it took a calmer more strategic approach. This included the use of more accurate and respectful learning resources and conversations about Native histories that were not named in the standards. As Schubert (2023) shares, creative insubordination can take a less aggressive approach wherein teachers maintain a

sense of grace and demonstrate to administrators and decision-makers the positive consequences of knowing students and building on their strengths and what they already know. With my seniority status and my personality in mind, I quietly challenged the mandates, rules, and expectations, striving to prioritize the educational well-being of students by getting out of the line for the greater good (Baszile, 2023).

However, this process was full of "complexities and contradictions that blurred boundaries" (He, 2023, p. 61) of my roles as a teacher, researcher, and community member. At the same time, I had to adhere to policies, challenge policies, and focus on my students' best interests. Additionally, I faced the personal challenges of intellectual suppression as I had to carefully navigate what I was willing to say and do and what fight I might save for another day. For this research to be successful and center on the extraordinariness of my students, I had to live in the space of continuously embodying contradictions (Shubert, 2023) and remain there currently as I reimagine creative insubordination for a new school year.

The funds of knowledge from teachers and students play essential roles in developing their cultural competence and critical consciousness, which is crucial to developing a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining third-grade social studies curricula **(Finding 5)**. As my students shared in their interviews and interest surveys, they held a variety of knowledge on art, games, social media, and technology, which was then used to educate themselves and others on their selected tribe. In particular, my students spoke frequently about graphic novels, creating things on iPads, building their YouTube channel, working on projects with friends, and art projects. Not only did using their funds of knowledge help them make sense of the content and make connections to their ways of life, but their presentations also helped their 3rd-grade peers as these students were presented with new knowledge that spoke to their knowledge of art, games, social

media, and technology. After their presentations, students shared, “People watched my videos and told me what they thought, and I liked that part.” “There was nothing I didn’t like about the Social Studies Fair.” “I liked teaching people new things and making them laugh with what I made.” “I met new people, and they complimented my work.” (See Chapter 4, p. 167-168 for details). As part of the original creative insubordination process, by educating others on their newfound tribal knowledge, students could play a part in building the cultural competence of others and hopefully breaking the visiting students’ and even teachers’ misconceptions.

While the funds of knowledge of students are varied and vital in developing their cultural competence and critical consciousness, the funds of knowledge of teachers, including their cultural practices and knowledge passed down from their families, professional knowledge, and lived experiences, are also crucial as teachers develop their cultural competence and critical consciousness (Karabon, 2021). Their biases and perceptions of students also impact the students academically and beyond (Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). The funds of knowledge of teachers must all interact in developing and enhancing the learning context for their students (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In thinking about the funds of knowledge they hold, teachers must seek to make connections between what they bring to the table and the content they are responsible for teaching, ensuring they are keeping their students in mind as they plan. Teachers must continuously engage in a personal and ongoing journey of questioning their teaching practices and beliefs while considering how this impacts their students (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Why do I have the grading policies that I do? What made me choose the curriculum resources I use with students? How do I decide if students are successful, and what opportunities am I providing? Further, teachers should continuously be engaging in self-study, considering how their identities

and life experiences inform their practice and making the move to educating others (Reidel & Salinas, 2022).

One vital question that should continuously be asked about our practices is if we are privileging one way of knowing over another (Smith, 2020) and the ways in which this might be upholding inequities inside and outside of the classroom (Scherff & Spector, 2010). How might teachers fight against creating and supporting the cultural desynchronization that is present in many schools? They should continue to assume that resources and standards are not neutral and understand that approved resources are missing many things (Knight-Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Sibbett & Au, 2018). As our students continue to change yearly, so must our approach to teaching them. In this way, the culture and knowledge that students and teachers bring to the classroom can expand the cultural understandings of both students and teachers, making their world a bit bigger.

As I sought to create a more culturally responsive and culturally relevant classroom, I drew on my own experience of attending a bilingual school with a teacher who understood who I was and where I came from, as well as my move to Georgia that sought to Americanize me and devalued the knowledge set that I held. Beyond my schooling experiences in Texas, I have not experienced a culturally relevant or culturally responsive classroom. My connections as a well-known member of my school community allowed me to invite a guest speaker into my classroom and establish a pen-pal partnership with an Indigenous Elementary School. Additionally, my ongoing process of re-education of United States history as a minority teacher, specifically in Native American cultures and histories, was a requirement before, during, and after teaching this unit to ensure that I selected the best resources, tools, speakers, and locations that would accurately, respectfully, and wholly represent many tribes. I used books written by Native

authors, presentations, and conversations led by Native people, read history books and professional development books written by Native authors, and engaged with various Indigenous groups on social media daily. In doing so, my re-education process allowed me and my students to build our cultural competence and critical consciousness of Native American cultures and their existence. As teacher attitudes and expectations are a huge component of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000/2010/2018), If we are to support students as they become adult citizens of a diverse society (NCSS, 2023) where they work to understand each other and challenge the structures that uphold inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 2017), this was a critical first few steps.

I believe that my research differed from the literature in my approach to culture and the aspect of culture that I focused on in my work. Firstly, like many asset-based pedagogies, the framework of funds of knowledge seeks to alter our teacher perceptions of poorer and working-class families (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). However, this framework was used with students from diverse backgrounds that were mostly middle-class students of color. They were not necessarily devalued by me, their teacher, as I am also currently a middle-class minority. This differs from the goals of the original research.

I also looked at a different cultural aspect to focus on that was not ethnic. From my experience as an elementary school teacher, I recognize that it is expected that young students' egocentrism leads them to believe that others' lives are like their own. Not only are they beginning to learn about others' ways of life, but they are also learning about their practices from their families and communities. As we begin to see more second-generation immigrant children, it has become more common for these students to not speak their parent's native language, particularly in the Hispanic community. This can be due to parents' insistence on students

becoming fluent English speakers and students' rejection of Spanish in favor of English (believing they cannot have both). Because of this, I chose to focus my research on the aspect of my students' cultures, which I knew they strongly identified with and had an understanding of. I concede that Paris & Alim (2017) have critiqued this practice of teachers choosing what aspects of students' culture to include in instruction, believing that a person's culture should not be picked apart but entirely accepted. While I understand this belief, the research Paris & Alim (2017) shared primarily focused on older students with a more realized sense of self. My students' age led me to utilize youth cultures before delving into other cultural aspects. As Paris & Alim (2017) remind us, idiocultures and subcultures should also be considered worthy cultural practices, Keeping in mind the constantly changing nature of the community's culture and an individual's culture (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2008; Paris & Alim, 2017), teachers would be better able to connect with and understand their students authentically. Additionally, I believe my approach of not highlighting critical consciousness would also go against Ladson-Billing's (2017) research that identifies this as a critical aspect that classroom teachers typically leave out. Further, Ladson-Billings (2021) describes student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness as being "like three sides of an equilateral triangle- equally important and equally necessary" (p. 4). Though I understand this perspective, for teachers that are new to culturally relevant teaching and having to work within and around harsh state laws and district policies, the triangle may sometimes have to temporarily transform into a scalene or isosceles triangle, bending to one aspect more than another but never wavering in its inclusion of all.

Overcoming stereotypes and misconceptions of Native Americans and developing cultural competence and critical consciousness is an ongoing process **(Finding 6)**. In my research, students made significant progress in their understanding of Native American cultures,

from believing Native Americans were a people of the past to recognizing the existence of their cultures today. However, I concede that my unit has not done enough. In my analysis of student responses, I found that some students still held misconceptions about Native Americans. Some believed that "Native Americans all love nature." (See Ch. 5, p.19, p. 32, p.41, p.43 for more details). "They like to live in cabins mostly." (See Ch. 4, p. 36, Fato). This may be attributed to the students watching Molly of Denali towards the end of the unit, which depicts the Alaskan Native people of today. Because this was the last region we discussed as a class, students have held onto this knowledge more or referenced it more in interviews because it was more recently in their minds. This could have also been attributed to the books we had recently read as a class during the environmental unit in science on the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Native protests. Though all students engaged in a deep, long-term study of their chosen nation, students were, at the same time, able to confidently discuss all that they had learned while still repeating some of their initial generalizations. Additionally, though students felt that they learned much about Native Americans, some felt they had not had the opportunity to further their research in areas they were interested in because of lack of time. As their teacher, I know the constraints of the standards and Georgia law also contributed to this. For example, Justin expressed an interest in learning "their timelines, their history… who their leaders were, their languages, and I want to learn famous Athabascan people and even more art and even more everything." (See Ch. 5, p. 15, Justin)

There was not enough time to accomplish these goals during several months of study. I introduced some historical events centered on Native People, such as boarding schools and ongoing land theft, but only in a surface-level manner. As a class, we did not deeply discuss why these events happened, their importance, who was responsible, and the connections they might

make to current events and their lives today. Though we were able to begin to create meaningful friendships with Native students in Wisconsin, most relationships ended in May with the end of the school year. To build cultural competence, these relationships must be ongoing and meaningful to them rather than just as a part of a unit of study. As Ladson-Billings (1994/2009) reminds us, "the classroom itself, where students come face to face with others who are different from themselves, is the place for real integration" (p. 7). The Native students and their teacher were given a space in the classroom via Zoom and handwritten letters. While I cannot control the diversity in my classroom, I can invite diverse voices through media, guest speakers, and outside partnerships, as culturally responsive pedagogy calls for (Gay, 2000/2010/2018). Gay (2000/2010/2018) believes that because of children's curiosity about the world, these formative years (a student's elementary years) should be used to ensure they acquire positive attitudes about and form relationships with people of different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds from the beginning. This allows students to "understand that human differences are natural and normal and should always be acknowledged, respected, and valued as part of dignifying the humanity of self and others" (Gay, 2000/2010/2018, p. 285).

Luckily, scholarship in Indigenous and Native American studies has grown significantly in the past few decades, leading to broader audiences than before in lectures, books, and other media that are now more accessible to researchers and the general population (Sleeper-Smith et al., 2015), giving educators access to more accurate information and resources to use with their students. Though I acknowledge that my work was not at all comprehensive, I worked to dismantle myths about Indigenous peoples that "work to keep non-Natives in a state of ignorance, forever misinformed" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2016). My research addressed this need and began to build a foundational understanding built on accurate and respectful understandings of

Native cultures. Students were able to begin the process of building fluency in a culture that was new to them and becoming aware of their histories, which is a vital first step in building cultural competence and critical consciousness (Gay, 2000/2010/2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021)

My work aligns with the same thinking as Gay's (2016) belief that building cultural competence is ongoing. It does not contain itself to a single unit of study, but it aims to transform classrooms by giving every student and teacher a chance to carve their own space in the classroom where, by using diverse, appropriate, and rigorous materials, they can work towards academic success.

Doing ethnographic research with young children, researchers need to be flexible, build a trusting relationship with them, and find ways to actively engage young children in the research process **(Finding 7).** As a classroom teacher, my typical approach to teaching is one that is more structured and predictable for my students. However, in aiming to be more student-centered, this was not always possible. Instead, I created a loose structure for them to work within and, with regular check-ins about how their own research was going, we made changes as we went along. This meant constantly changing plans, timelines, resources, and even the structure itself. It was important to me that my students were not just "being studied" but, in a sense, co-researchers themselves. As Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell (2015) point out, involving children should not be tokenistic inclusion, but rather "a genuine effort to incorporate the perspectives of children and young people" (p. 12). Because classroom teachers are always taught the importance of being in control of the classroom, keeping to the curriculum timelines, and making sure benchmark scores are high, it can be unnerving to let go of this structure, especially when, at the start of this research, this strong sense of structure continued to exist in the other subjects. However, Valdes' (2001) work with ESOL students reminded me that the goal of ethnographic

research with children is not necessarily to have a positive, success story to tell, but rather an honest one.

Working with them also required much trust on both sides. In addition to giving them ample information about the research and checking in with all students, I started building trust from the first day of school. Additionally, I had an advantage as having been a figure in my school for many years and having taught many of the participants' siblings and cousins. For us to understand each other during this research process, trust was a necessary component (Van Maanen, 1988/2011). Though I never questioned their trust in me and assumed it was something I held (as many elementary teachers do), I questioned how difficult it was for me to trust in their decision making and if they would go in the 'right' direction. Each day of research, I had no direct plan for social studies because students were working so independently that it almost seemed as if I wasn't teaching because I had no 'real' lesson prepared. Would students take this seriously? Was there a right and wrong way to learn? Would students go along with my agenda of building cultural competence or did they have their own goals? This is something I believe I and other teachers do not ask enough. Because students are competent interpreters and participants of their world (James, 2011), they can also have their own agenda of what they would like to learn, what they are and are not willing to do as participants, and how much they are willing to share during interviews (Groundwater- Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015). As Igoa's (1995) ethnographic research with immigrant children pointed out, conducting research with children requires you to always continue to question yourself, your goals, what you believe to be true, and the perspectives and experiences of the children.

Like Schultz (2018), students had a hand in their own course of study and were vocal in their decision as they engaged in their own curriculum making. With the exception of their

chosen tribe and an end date, students were free to decide how they wanted to present their work, their preferred resources, and all materials. The creativity soared in this unit and students creatively chose to make things like a Seminoles Facts board game to show what they learned and engage others in that learning process. This freeness also allowed me to see what aspects of their chosen tribe they were drawn too and how they understood it. In choosing to center trust in this process, it allowed me to engage students in a more flexible approach that I am used to and provide students an opportunity to creatively explore a topic further.

Conducting this research enables me to overcome my ignorance about my ancestries and histories, inspires me to explore deeper into my own cultural heritages, and motivates me to become a culturally relevant/ responsive/sustaining educator for all **(Finding 8).** As a Mexican-born American citizen that received all my formal schooling from the United States (Texas and Georgia, specifically), my social studies educational experience I expect was typical. I learned about great American heroes and facts and figures about American history from Eurocentric textbooks. Unfortunately, I was not included in the texts. Except for mentions of the Mexican American War, my ancestors and mentions of Mexico were nonexistent. Additionally, in the public schools I attended, students were only allowed to speak English during school hours. As someone that began the acquisition of English in school, this made my schooling and academic achievement more difficult. These attempts to Americanize me and my immigrant peers were certainly effective, creating students that were focused on perfecting their English and learning about their new home country. In wanting to fit in, many of us never gained any knowledge on our ancestral roots, heritage, or even a basic understanding of our home countries, an ignorance that followed many of us into adulthood. Presently, I am unable to confidently state even how many states make up Mexico. It is always a shameful and confusing experience when immigrant

students realize how little they know about their roots while continuing to live with its culture, values, ideas, and (sometimes) language in their daily life.

It was during the research process, specifically in reading *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) and its discussion of the Indigenous People of Mexico as well as the Cherokee's origin stories which claim descendants migrating from present day Mexico, that piqued my interest in learning about my own ancestral past. I began with simple online research focusing on Mexico's history to present day to give myself a better idea of where my family came from. Then, I turned to reading learning about the rebels of the Mexican revolution (Hernandez, 2022) and the tension at the borders. Because of my background as living on the border of Texas and Mexico, this text made me reflect on my own sense of self as living between two worlds. The past works of Anzaldua (1990, 2009, 2015) and present anthology of Troncoso (2021) are supporting me in this reflection. In conferences, I now intentionally seek out Hispanic researchers to gain different perspectives on those outside of Mexico and how they live and experience their Latinidad.

While this is a very personal and eye-opening journey, it's very hard to navigate your past alone. Though both of my parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents grew up in Mexico, they rarely discussed their previous life. (I will admit, though, that as a child I also was not very interested in asking). My dad was different. With a great love of Mexican history and deep admiration of Aztec culture, I had access to a wealth of knowledge. My deep desire to assimilate as well as my age did not allow me to take advantage of this opportunity. Because of my father's passing in 2015, I must now undertake this challenge to reeducate myself on my own. I thought of this often as I read books on Mexican history and wondering what his perspective might have been? What did he recall being taught in his schooling and what was learned through his own

readings? Though I have lost that wealth of knowledge, I take comfort in knowing he would approve of my journey.

Implications for Future Possibilities

My work has many implications for future research and possibilities within a classroom. First, the positive results of the research prove to researchers and teachers that change within constraints is not only possible but effective in supporting student academic success. It shows readers that an everyday classroom teacher in a public school setting can experience success when making changes they believe in despite the laws and policies in place. Though I saw this work as (mostly) manageable, it requires the community and outside support to strengthen the experience for both students and the researcher.

Additionally, the results were positive in a very diverse classroom setting. In many other ethnographical inquiries (Igoa, 1995/2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Schultz, 2018; Valdes, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), the participants were majority minority while my participants were diverse in race and class. As Gay (2000/2010/2018) states, more empirical research is needed to show how multicultural curriculum impacts student achievement, whether that achievement be increased interest in the topic, knowledge gained on a specific tribal nation, or even a personal connection to the topic. This work proves that a more inclusive curriculum benefits all students and should continue to be studied. Additionally, the focus being on elementary students adds another layer of interest. As Gay (2000/2010/2018) would refer to this classroom-level research as a micro-level change, building research on these micro-level changes allows teachers to see the possibilities in their rooms from other everyday classroom teachers. This research shows that not only did students experience academic success, the micro-level changes and individual student interviews allow me to see the types of academic success that each student experiences

ranging from improved test scores to an authentic enthusiasm for the topic. Moreover, it would prove to decision-makers the validity and worth of asset-based pedagogical practices.

As a veteran classroom teacher, I can undoubtedly say that this research would have been more attainable to me had asset-based pedagogies been a part of my teacher education program. Education programs have a real opportunity to include courses focused on culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogies and for students to experience it themselves in their courses and in their student-teaching classroom placements with their cooperating teachers. This is one reoccurring critique from current educators of the phenomena where instructors of pre-service teachers train students on 'best practices' that they themselves do not follow. Pre-service teachers need courses to train them while concurrently experiencing how these pedagogies impact them as learners. They need more in the classroom than encouraging them to use multicultural books during read alouds and nothing more. This serves to trivialize and water down the importance of knowing our students and better understanding the perspectives and experiences of the writers and students themselves. A teacher program that positively centers on students and community would support pre-service teachers as they ready to meet their students.

My work asks teachers to challenge traditions, training, admin expectations, district policies, and even their personal beliefs. If teachers are patient with themselves and stay focused on doing right by their students and their families, this work will begin to be attainable. Further, teachers they continue to challenge themselves beyond the classroom setting to sharing knowledge within their circles and spheres of influence,

Challenges

My work has many significant challenges, with the Divisive Concepts Law and district policies being the greatest. Written and supported as a response to quell citizen calls for social

justice, equity, and change in our approaches to educating our children, public school teachers are under more scrutiny to not step out of line under the guise of protecting students. Instead, the radical ideas of extremists remain protected while our students remain unseen, attacked, and receive an incomplete educational experience. As Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti (2005) remind us, passing specific laws illustrates the ideological conditions under which children are educated and the constraints teachers must work with (or around). The passing of these laws and policies also reminds us that schooling practices are always related to broader issues, such as the need for more inclusive and equitable education for all students.

Admittedly, we teachers are a challenge to ourselves. While it is true that there are laws and policies in place that are actively keeping some teachers from doing what they think is best for students, teachers (like the education system itself) can be known to hold onto their traditional ways of teaching and being very resistant to change, especially when the message comes from non-classroom teachers. Because calls for grand change are a yearly experience, we are not quick to adopt new approaches, even if they intrigue us, due to lack of training, time, and support. However, I challenge teachers to ask themselves how much of the censorship in the classroom is self-imposed. What fears stem from the consequences of losing our jobs, and which ones stem from trying something new and not feeling successful? How do teachers work through these difficulties and get out of our own way? As hooks (2013) reminds us, schools should always be in states of re-envision because of our ever-changing societies and the children they serve.

Another great challenge was the lack of resources. Because Native American histories and cultures are typically ignored in many curricular resources, finding resources that address our state standards was complicated. Further, the resources and lesson plans from reputable sites

such as the Smithsonian's Native Knowledge 360 targeted primarily high school students with some middle school resources and few elementary resources. Other resources like videos and books were either too difficult to read or too complex for an elementary audience. Because of this, I had to rely mostly on picture books that were difficult to find and expensive to purchase out of pocket.

One of the biggest challenges when attempting to do different work like my students did was the intense demands it placed on me as an educator. With our limited planning time that typically gets taken from us for meetings and professional development, most of my planning included late school nights. In addition, another Georgia law required me to receive literacy training working through a laborious online program that had to be done on my own time. Further, a change in the state mathematics standards meant learning new standards, a new curriculum, and independently creating all math resources and plans from scratch. It can be daunting to decide to upend your teaching practices and create something new for my students with so much new already on the horizon. While the work is worthwhile, researchers fail to mention the personal, physical, monetary, and emotional challenges that come with doing this work.

Conclusion

With the heaviness of needing to create a culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining classroom bearing on my teacher's mind, it can seem overwhelming in what it asks of teachers and nearly impossible when considering the state legislation and district policies designed to keep me from doing just that. After all, a quiet, creative insubordination is not a light task. I remind myself that I am not the first person to attempt grand change, sometimes on their own. In this mindset, I think of Certeau's (1984) idea of *la perruque,* which focuses on the idea that the

practice of everyday life is about responding to the immediate situation at hand and not waiting for the revolution to come. Teachers and students can continue to do the work that needs to be done disguised as work for administrators and employers, according to Certeau's ideas. A plan that focuses on the day-to-day makes any change much more attainable to all teachers. I also take comfort in knowing that a process focused on "slow learning, deep curiosity, mutual respect, and a comfort with not knowing" will eventually lead me to the right path (Mithlo, 2022, p. 235). In considering the findings, implication, and challenges of my work, one theme continues to hold: The task of developing cultural competence and critical consciousness is an unfinished story.

Epilogue

When the school year ends, classroom teachers take a moment to reflect on the year, taking inventory of their wins and unmet goals. What did I get right? What needs to continue next year? What do I need to improve? It is a moment of deep reflection that significantly impacts incoming students. I repeated this same process with my research and with my classroom. After the research period "ended," the learning continued. Though there was much positive change, it is also true that many problematic situations persisted.

My students were never aware of when the data collection period officially ended. We continued to write to our pen pals and Zoom with them every other week, made cross-curricular connections, and genuinely desired to learn more about Native Americans, past and present. Our pen pals activity was by far the most popular activity we did in the classroom that year. Students generally claimed not to have "learned anything" from their pen pals, but I saw tremendous growth. Students now understand that Native Americans still exist in our nation today. The Pen Pal activity solidified this fact in the minds of my students by putting names and faces with Native American students living a similar and modern lifestyle to that of my students. Also, many of the students formed genuine friendships with one another. They also spoke outside the classroom, interacting with video games and sharing phone numbers. Some students continued to engage in their research and readings, checking out (outdated) books from the school library for their independent reading.

Students continued to lead many other classroom changes. Because of the success of the social studies fair, students were vocal about their preference to expand this into other subject areas. We negotiated a writing fair on the research topic of their choice and a math fair to present their problem-solving strategies to other third graders. Further, we also re-negotiated the

classroom structure regarding the curriculum decision-making. Instead of being solely teacher-led, we discussed as a class the projects, resources, speakers, and any other approaches to learning that they found exciting and supported their learning. This change led to the utilization of many more guest speakers and tech-based products and projects and increased student engagement and excitement to attend school.

My reeducation was an integral and most challenging part of this research journey. As my literature review illustrates, the mindset, biases, lived experiences, and teacher knowledge have a massive impact on a child's education. One of my main goals was to continue my reeducation process to build my cultural competence in Native cultures, histories, and current social issues. Reading played a large part in this process, particularly those texts written by Native authors. Dunbar-Ortiz's (2014, 2016) work set the foundation for my understanding of Indigenous Peoples' history in the United States. They addressed and challenged a wide range of common myths about Natives, pushing me to reevaluate my still-present biases and misconceptions.

Social media also played a more prominent role than I had anticipated. Because I sought to stay abreast of Native issues, I subscribed to many pages on Instagram and Facebook, including the Society of Native Nations, Indigenous Cultures Institute, Lakota People's Law Project, and the Atlanta Indigenous People's Association. Because I was disappointed that not enough discussion was done in the classroom to address current events and issues that affect Native Peoples, I sought to explore this further myself. While I stayed current on new or proposed laws around the country, particularly the Supreme Court case concerning the Indian Child Welfare Act, I realized my error in wanting to learn about "Native issues." In reading about clean water, affirmative action, representation, plastic pollution, and climate change, I

realized that issues for Native communities are issues for all communities. Despite all the reading and teaching I had done for months, I was disappointed that I had not made the connection before.

The permanent instructional changes I made also impacted fellow teachers. I included my grade level teachers in my efforts to allow students to showcase their learning through fairs and discussed the instructional changes I made with them at length. I shared resources and advised them on a better approach to teaching Native cultures, and they were receptive. My work also came to the attention of other staff members in the school, which, fortunately, raised questions about my research and provided opportunities for me to discuss my research with other grade-level teachers and staff. My hope is that this leads to a different approach to multicultural education, at least within my own team, that goes beyond seeing the inclusion of Native Americans as 'one more thing for teacher to do' to be in 'compliance' (Janis, 2012) with the "diversity by the month" approach that so many schools adhere to.

Unfortunately, my research is not a story that ended with complete success. While many things changed, some issues remain. The problematic state standards must continue being taught, with no call for standards revision. The state curricular resources continue to focus on Natives only in the past tense and contribute to student misconceptions. Even worse for classroom teachers, an elementary teacher in Georgia was recently fired in violation of the state's Divisive Concepts Law. We continue to be closely scrutinized and subjected to such actions as book bannings and strict resource approvals in the name of student safety. In fear of lawsuits (and an angry minority of constituents), my district continues to remind us only to use district-approved resources or risk facing outside persecution with no district support.

Georgia is not alone in these problems. Teachers are facing these same challenges nationwide. Native American cultures and histories remain ignored. Teachers continue to be closely surveilled by their employers, deepening the level of micromanagement they experience and stifling their creativity. This ultimately impacts the intellectual growth of the students who miss out on a broader and more meaningful educational experience. In these times of extremism and educational instability, it seems impossible to stray from the prescribed curriculum. However, I push forward. I will continue to reexamine my closely held beliefs and practices, breaking through my denial in admitting that I have not always acted in the best interests of students out of ignorance but striving to make fewer mistakes. I will listen to and involve my young students in constructing curricula and challenge the belief that teachers always know how students should learn. I will continue to struggle to create a better learning experience for my students, refusing to use politically motivated laws and districts as an excuse for some of my self-imposed censorship. I will seek out allies as I pursue to do something different, understanding that the tasks involved are not manageable by a single individual. Finally, I will free myself from self-imposed constraints and explore the new educational territory bravely and hopefully.

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APPENDIX

CHILDREN'S BOOK READING LIST

Fiction

Thunder Boy Jr- Sherman Alexie

Day with Yayah- Nicola Campbell

The Range Eternal- Louise Erdrich

Birdsong- Julie Flett

My Heart Fills with Happiness- Monique Gray Smith

Anna's Athabaskan Summer- Arnold Griese

Berry Song- Michaela Goade

When the Shadbush Blooms- Carla Messinger & Susan Katz

Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest- Gerald McDermott

Jo Jo Makoons: The Used-To-Be Best Friend- Dawn Quigley

Tanna's Owl- Rachel Quitsualik-Tinsley

Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids- Cynthia L. Smith

At the Mountain's Base- Traci Sorell

Powwow Day- Traci Sorell

Nimoshom and His Bus- Penny Thomas

Non-Fiction

The Aztec People- Sunita Apte

The Shawnee- John Bankston

DK Eyewitness Books: Aztec, Inca & Maya: Discover the World of the Aztecs, Incas, and Maya-

Elizabeth Baquedano

Inuit- Valerie Bodden

Seminole- Valerie Bodden

The Seminoles of Florida: Culture, Customs, & Conflict- Wendy Conklin

The Inuit- Kevin Cunningham

The Wampanoag- Kevin Cunningham

Cree- Trevor Grailey

Shawnee- Kadeem Jones

The Journey of the Freckled Indian: A Tlingit Story- Alyssa Kalyn London

If You Lived with the Hopis- Anne Kamma

National Geographic Kids Encyclopedia of American Indian History and Culture: Stories, Timelines, Maps, and More- Cynthia O'Brien

The People Shall Continue- Simon Ortiz

The Hopi People- Therese Shea

The Hopis- Virginia Sneve

*Young Native Activist: Growing Up in the Native American Rights Movemen*t- Aslan Tudor

Young Water Protectors: A Story About Standing Rock- Aslan Tudor

We Are Still Here!: Native American Truths Every Person Should Know- Traci Sorell

We Are Grateful- Traci Sorell

Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians But Were Too Afraid To Ask: Young Readers Edition- Anton Treuer