

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: DISRUPTING EUROCENTRISM IN THE
FIFTH-GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES
CURRICULUM

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Persistent concerns regarding equity in social studies education remain evident across national, state, and local contexts. Although policy frameworks increasingly call for inclusive representation and culturally responsive pedagogy, required curriculum materials often reproduce Eurocentric narratives that marginalize or superficially include historically underrepresented groups. This capstone examines how history is represented, framed, and enacted within Grade 5 Social Studies Unit 2: *Our Changing Nation* in the Howard County Public School System.

Guided by HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity, this qualitative multi-phase study included (a) systematic document analysis of eight district-developed lessons using a deductive–inductive coding framework and (b) semi-structured interviews with five fifth-grade educators teaching the unit. Cross-phase triangulation informed development of an educator-facing Curriculum Equity Framework.

Phase 1 findings document uneven and episodic representation of historically underrepresented groups. African American perspectives appear most frequently in abolition and Civil War lessons rather than across the unit's full narrative arc. Indigenous, Asian American, Hispanic/Latine, and women's perspectives appear infrequently or indirectly. Narrative framing frequently centers institutional figures as the primary drivers of change, while marginalized agency appears exceptional. Equity analysis is often optional or supplemental rather than structurally embedded.

Phase 2 findings indicate educators recognize representation gaps and frequently supplement instruction; however, equity enactment depends largely on individual initiative and perceived institutional constraints. Analysis of coded interview segments identified recurring cross-interview patterns that were elevated through cross-case comparison into four analytic categories: Afterthought Integration of Marginalized Perspectives, Equity Work as Curricular Supplementation, Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent, and Systemic and Institutional Constraints. Together, these findings reveal a design-to-enactment gap in which policy commitments to educational equity are not consistently embedded within required curriculum structures, leaving equity-centered instruction dependent on teacher mediation rather than systematic curricular design.

The resulting Curriculum Equity Framework translates these findings into a structured tool that supports equity-centered curriculum review and instructional mediation, aligned with Policy 1080. While not claiming causal student outcomes, the study offers a replicable, policy-anchored model for disrupting Eurocentric narrative dominance in elementary social studies.

DISRUPTING EUROCENTRISM IN THE FIFTH-GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES
CURRICULUM

by

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Preface

Over nearly three decades, I have dedicated my career to ensuring every student's identity is celebrated and their potential nurtured. My role as an educator across diverse communities in central Maryland has provided me with a profound understanding of the challenges, privileges, and opportunities within our educational system. This experience has solidified my commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy that integrates diverse perspectives and promotes inclusive, equitable practices. I strive to build strong relationships that empower students, engage families, and support staff in meeting students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

As a White female from a middle-class background, I am acutely aware of the privilege of seeing my identity reflected in curriculum narratives. This awareness fuels my commitment to disrupt harmful Eurocentric frameworks and foster inclusive practices. By challenging biases and advocating for systemic change, I aspire to create equitable educational opportunities that inspire all students to thrive in a diverse and just society.

A defining moment in my leadership journey occurred when a group of fifth-grade students expressed their frustration with the narrow, Eurocentric perspectives in their curriculum. Their voices highlighted the urgent need for change and ignited my passion for advancing equity through curriculum supplementation—remaining aligned with required standards while intentionally incorporating diverse perspectives that offer students a broader and more complete historical context. This pivotal experience underscored the critical role of educators in challenging systemic barriers and creating inclusive learning environments where all students feel seen, valued, and empowered.

Recognizing that transformative change required a broader scope of influence than my role as an elementary school principal allowed, I pursued the Educational Leadership and Policy EdD program at the University of Maryland. This program has deepened my understanding of systemic inequities and strengthened my resolve to bridge the gap between district policy and practice. My goal is to equip educators with tools and strategies to design and implement curricula that integrate diverse cultural perspectives, fostering inclusivity and equipping students to critically engage with content and deepen their understanding of equity and justice.

Dedication

I dedicate this work first and foremost to my Fab Five Family—my husband, Dennis, and our children, Kailey, Gracen, and Jacob. Your unwavering faith in me, your quiet sacrifices, and your willingness to shoulder more so that I could pursue this doctorate have been the steady current carrying me forward. Through long evenings, early mornings, and countless moments of “just a few more minutes,” you offered patience, humor, grace, and unrelenting love. You are my anchor and my greatest joy, and every accomplishment I celebrate is rooted in the strength of our family.

To my parents, Duane and Bonnie Wright, thank you for building a foundation that allowed me to dream boldly and grow with confidence. Your steadfast encouragement, enduring love, and pride in my journey as an educator and leader have shaped who I am. To my sister, Holly—my constant champion and trusted confidante—your enthusiasm and belief in me have lifted me more times than I can count. To my extended family on both the Gates and Albright side—I am deeply privileged to be loved by you and to journey through life together. The laughter, traditions, and unwavering connection we share are a gift I never take for granted. We are truly something special.

To my friends who listened to my endless reflections on coursework, research, and constant and repeated revelations—your patience, check-ins, and encouragement have meant more than words can express.

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I begin with deep gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Segun Eubanks, whose steady guidance and intellectual rigor pushed me to think more expansively and critically. Your mentorship strengthened both this work and my growth as a scholarly practitioner committed to equity and systemic change through the lens of Improvement Science.

I am equally grateful to my committee—Dr. Douglas W. Anthony, Dr. Christine Marie Neumerski, Dr. Cherise Janelle Hunter, and Dr. Sarah McGrew—your collective expertise elevated this work and ensured its rigor and clarity.

To the professors of the EdD program, thank you for transforming my lens from that of a school leader to that of a systems thinker. You challenged me to examine policy, power, and practice with greater depth and nuance, refining my analysis and strengthening my voice.

To my Cohort Eight colleagues, the place you hold in my heart and mind is immeasurable. We laughed, wrestled with complex ideas, supported and challenged one another, and grew in profound ways. The bonds formed in this journey will endure well beyond this degree. Cohort Eight is Great—*forever*.

To the staff of Centennial Lane Elementary School, thank you for walking alongside me in this work. Your commitment to equity, courage in confronting systemic barriers, and pursuit of instructional rigor and access for every child continue to inspire me. It is a privilege to lead and learn with you.

And finally, to my students—past, present, and future—you are at the center of this work. You are the reason it matters. Your brilliance, resilience, and potential compel me to strive for something better. This is for you—for a more just, inclusive, and hopeful tomorrow, and for a time when all histories are told, honored, and understood in their full humanity.

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Section 1: Introduction

National Problem of Eurocentric Curriculum

Since the establishment of public education in the United States, curricula across disciplines have predominantly reflected Eurocentric narratives, disproportionately privileging Western European achievements while marginalizing the histories, contributions, and perspectives of African Americans, Indigenous peoples, and other underrepresented groups (Loewen, 2007; Sleeter, 2011; Levy et al., 2023). This legacy, rooted in colonial ideologies and reinforced through post-World War II educational reforms, continues to influence the content taught in elementary schools today (Spring, 2021; Bae & Baker, 2025). The Civil Rights Movement and efforts before that time emphasized the need for an education system that recognized and valued the contributions of historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, advocating for curricula that reflected the diverse experiences and cultures shaping the United States (Banks, 2008). African American leaders and educators, alongside civil rights advocates, pushed for the inclusion of Black history and the histories of Indigenous peoples, Hispanic/Latine¹ communities, and other underrepresented groups in school textbooks and lesson plans. This movement not only challenged the dominance of Eurocentric narratives but also laid the foundation for multicultural education as a framework for promoting equity, inclusion, and a more accurate understanding of history in classrooms nationwide (Araujo & Henderson, 2024; Martin & Mulvihill, 2025).

¹ In this study, the term Hispanic/Latine is used to acknowledge both the federal demographic category commonly used in educational reporting (Hispanic) and the gender-inclusive term Latine. When referencing prior research, the terminology used by the original author (e.g., Latin, Latino, Latina, Latinx, or Hispanic) is retained to preserve the original source's language.

Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, the U.S. curriculum functioned as a tool of assimilation and social control, deliberately centering Western European histories, values, and identities while marginalizing or erasing the knowledge systems and experiences of non-dominant groups. Curriculum, as Apple (2004) argues, is never neutral but reflects the ideological interests of dominant groups, while Spring (2021) further explains how schooling has historically operated as a mechanism of deculturalization, particularly for Indigenous communities and immigrant populations. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1998) highlights how educational structures reproduce racial inequities by normalizing dominant cultural knowledge, and Loewen (2007) critiques how textbooks sanitize and omit complex historical truths. While some scholars defend traditional curriculum for its role in promoting shared cultural knowledge and a coherent national narrative—arguing that a common body of historical understanding is essential for civic participation and social cohesion (Hirsch, 1987; Schlesinger, 1992)—such perspectives often prioritize consensus and continuity over the inclusion of diverse and contested histories. Taken together, this body of scholarship underscores that curriculum has long operated within systems of structural racism and white supremacy, shaping whose knowledge is legitimized and whose perspectives are excluded. These historical patterns established enduring conditions in which Eurocentric narratives are disproportionately centered, patterns that continue to influence curriculum design and instructional practices today. These historical and ideological foundations directly inform the structural and systemic factors identified in the causal systems analysis that follows.

The push for integrating diverse histories and perspectives into the curriculum gained significant momentum during the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Landmark events such as the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—particularly Title VI, which

prohibited discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in federally funded programs—signaled a broader national reckoning with systemic inequities, including those within the public education system (Spring, 2021). Although the Act did not explicitly mandate curricular reform, it laid the legal and social groundwork for future advocacy efforts challenging the exclusion of marginalized voices from educational content.

Following the Civil Rights Act, scholars and educators continued to expand calls for curricular transformation through the development of multicultural education frameworks. During the 1970s and 1980s, scholars such as Banks (2008) and Nieto (2000) argued that equitable education required not only the inclusion of diverse historical figures but also the restructuring of curricula to reflect multiple cultural perspectives and experiences. These efforts emphasized that students should learn to critically examine historical narratives, recognize systemic inequities, and understand the complex social dynamics shaping American society.

These efforts were driven by a growing awareness that racially equitable schooling required not only desegregation, but also the inclusion of diverse perspectives in what students learn. Yet, despite decades of advocacy and reform, the dominance of Eurocentric curricula persists in contemporary classrooms, limiting students' exposure to multiple perspectives and hindering the development of inclusive civic identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martin & Mulvihill, 2025). Recent scholarship further highlights that social studies curricula remain critical spaces where decisions about historical representation shape students' understanding of national identity, democratic participation, and civic belonging (Bae & Baker, 2025; Hornbeck, 2025; Martin & Mulvihill, 2025). Scholars also emphasize that efforts to decolonize the curriculum and incorporate historically marginalized perspectives are essential to disrupt

longstanding epistemic inequities embedded in traditional curriculum structures (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023; Omodan, 2023; Levy et al., 2023).

Such a narrow curricular focus is particularly concerning during the formative PK–5 years, as students begin to shape their understanding of diversity, inclusion, and civic identity (Banks, 2008). Research indicates that this systemic bias not only perpetuates stereotypes but also limits students’ ability to critically engage with diverse perspectives, hindering efforts to foster equity, inclusion, and social justice in education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2011).

Contemporary studies examining culturally inclusive curriculum initiatives further demonstrate that when diverse historical perspectives are integrated into social studies instruction, students show stronger multicultural attitudes, greater civic engagement, and deeper exploration of identity (Gillespie et al., 2025; Iweuno et al., 2024; White & Schoenfeld, 2023). These findings reinforce the importance of curricular representation in shaping how young learners understand democracy, justice, and their roles as civic participants within a diverse society (Levy et al., 2023; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2025).

Elementary School Social Studies Curriculum

Social studies curricula in elementary schools across the United States remain disproportionately Eurocentric, privileging Western European achievements while marginalizing the histories of African Americans, Indigenous peoples, Asian Americans, Jewish Americans, and other underrepresented groups (Banks, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995). During the formative PK-5 years, when students begin shaping their understanding of diversity and inclusion, this narrow focus stifles the development of a holistic civic identity, a comprehensive understanding of oneself as a civic participant that integrates personal identity, values, community belonging, and responsibility to society. By excluding the full spectrum of cultural and historical

contributions, such curricula perpetuate inequitable education and hinder all students' ability to understand their roles in a diverse society.

Recent research highlights that the elementary social studies curriculum plays a foundational role in shaping students' civic knowledge and democratic participation, making the representation of diverse histories particularly consequential during the early grades (Martin & Mulvihill, 2025; Halverson et al., 2024; White & Schoenfeld, 2023). Scholars further note that decisions about which historical narratives are included or excluded in the social studies curriculum significantly influence how students understand power, culture, and belonging in democratic societies (Bae & Baker, 2025; Levy et al., 2023).

The consequences of this systemic bias are profound. Traditional Western narratives dominate textbooks and curriculum, glorifying European colonization while minimizing or ignoring the groundbreaking accomplishments, transformative discoveries, and contributions of marginalized groups and narrowly focusing on their exploitation and oppression (Loewen, 2007; Banks, 2015; Sleeter, 2011). This exclusion perpetuates stereotypes, reinforces systemic inequities, and denies students the critical thinking skills required to navigate and appreciate diverse perspectives. Without deliberate intervention, these biases in content and representation shape a limited and incomplete worldview, undermining efforts to promote equity and justice in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Gay, 2000).

Emerging scholarship on curriculum reform and culturally responsive pedagogy further suggests that integrating diverse historical narratives into social studies instruction supports students' development of multicultural competence, historical inquiry skills, and democratic reasoning (Edmondson, 2023; Halverson et al., 2024; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2025).

Student Engagement and Identity

Student engagement is deeply intertwined with identity, as students are more likely to participate actively in learning when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Foundational research on culturally responsive teaching emphasizes that connecting curriculum to students' cultural identities and lived experiences fosters a sense of belonging and motivation, enabling students to engage more meaningfully with academic content (Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2011). Recent studies examining teacher preparation and culturally responsive pedagogy further reinforce these findings, demonstrating that educators who intentionally integrate identity-affirming instructional practices are better equipped to support student engagement and cultivate inclusive classroom environments (Pevec-Zimmer et al., 2024; Ulbricht et al., 2024; Osei-Tutu, 2025). Together, this body of research highlights the critical role of culturally responsive curriculum and instruction in promoting equitable learning opportunities and strengthening students' connection to the learning process.

When curricula predominantly center Eurocentric narratives, students from historically marginalized communities may experience feelings of alienation, which can contribute to disengagement and diminished academic confidence (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Foundational scholarship on multicultural and culturally responsive education emphasizes that integrating diverse historical perspectives supports students' critical thinking, strengthens civic identity, and promotes more equitable learning experiences (Banks, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2011). Recent research continues to reinforce these findings, demonstrating that culturally inclusive curricula and ethnic studies initiatives promote greater identity exploration, multicultural attitudes, and civic engagement among students (Gillespie et al., 2025; Iweuno et

al., 2024). Scholars also highlight that when social studies curricula intentionally incorporate historically marginalized perspectives, students develop deeper understandings of democratic participation and social responsibility (Bae & Baker, 2025; Levy et al., 2023; White & Schoenfeld, 2023). Collectively, this body of research underscores the powerful connection between curriculum representation, student identity development, and sustained academic engagement.

By addressing the Eurocentric focus of the district-developed curricula, educators can create more inclusive environments that validate students' cultural backgrounds and encourage deeper intellectual engagement. This connection between identity and engagement underscores the urgent need for curriculum transformation to support all learners equitably.

Purpose and Research Focus

The purpose of this capstone is to empower educators to critically analyze social studies curricula for content gaps and skewed representation, ensuring a more inclusive depiction of history. By equipping teachers with tools to identify these disparities, this work seeks to foster equitable learning environments where all students can see their identities reflected and valued. Specifically, the capstone focuses on the district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum, evaluating its alignment with Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020).

1. What gaps in content and representation exist about historically underrepresented and marginalized groups in Grade 5 Social Studies Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*, and how does the curriculum's narrative framing align with the equity standards outlined in HCPSS Policy 1080?

2. How do fifth-grade educators interpret, adapt, and enact Our Changing Nation in classroom practice in response to representation gaps and equity expectations?
3. How can findings from Unit 2: Our Changing Nation document analysis and educator interviews inform a low-lift, high-impact framework that helps elementary educators identify and address representation gaps through inclusive, equity-aligned instruction?

This capstone employs a three-phase design grounded in qualitative inquiry and improvement science practice. Phase 1 involved a systematic document analysis of the fifth-grade social studies curriculum to examine patterns of representation and identify potential disparities in the inclusion of diverse historical narratives. Phase 2 consisted of semi-structured interviews with elementary educators to explore their experiences implementing the curriculum and their perceptions of gaps in representation and inclusivity. Together, these qualitative methods provided complementary insights into how Eurocentric narratives may be embedded within both instructional materials and classroom practice. Phase 3 builds upon the findings from the document analysis and educator interviews to develop an equity-centered curriculum framework designed to support educators in identifying and addressing systemic bias within elementary social studies instruction.

Roadmap

This capstone begins with a review of the literature, exploring the roots and impacts of Eurocentric biases in curricula and their implications for equity and student engagement. Next, a Causal System Analysis (CSA) investigates the systemic factors perpetuating these biases within the fifth-grade social studies curriculum. The Local Context section highlights current curriculum practices in Howard County and their influence on students. A Theory of Improvement presents actionable strategies and expected outcomes, grounded in data and

educator insights. The Capstone Design and Methodology section outlines the study's two-phase qualitative approach, which includes a document analysis of the fifth-grade social studies curriculum and semi-structured educator interviews to examine how teachers navigate and address curricular gaps. Finally, the findings and conclusions will synthesize the capstone's results, offering recommendations for curriculum transformation and professional development initiatives. By challenging entrenched narratives and promoting inclusivity, this capstone seeks to transform how history is taught, equipping students to thrive in a multicultural society.

The Problem of Practice

Addressing Eurocentric Bias in Curriculum: Problem of Practice

The problem of practice guiding this capstone is: *The district-developed social studies curriculum for fifth-grade students disproportionately reflects Eurocentric perspectives and narratives.* Disproportionate representation is defined in this study as representation that does not reflect the breadth of historical contributions, the diversity of lived experiences, or the demographic representation of historically marginalized groups within the broader historical context. This disproportionality is not simply a matter of representation, but a structural issue that shapes how students understand history, whose knowledge is legitimized, and whose experiences are positioned as central or peripheral to the national narrative.

By centering European historical narratives, this curriculum perpetuates systemic inequities, privileging dominant cultural groups while marginalizing others. This approach not only limits students' exposure to diverse historical perspectives but also hinders the development of an inclusive educational environment that values diverse identities and lived experiences.

Fifth grade is a critical grade in students' academic and social development, as they begin to engage with more complex historical narratives and develop their civic identities. According

to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Grade 5 Social Studies Framework, instruction at this level is designed to deepen students' understanding of American history by examining the nation's founding and expansion while fostering inquiry and critical thinking (MSDE, 2020). Fifth-grade students can recognize gaps and biases in the curriculum, as evidenced by a defining moment in my leadership journey when a group of fifth-grade students voiced their frustration with the narrow, Eurocentric perspectives in their social studies lessons. Their concerns underscored the need for curricular transformation that remains true to Maryland's social studies standards, which emphasize historical inquiry and multiple perspectives, while integrating diverse narratives to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive portrayal of history (MSDE, 2020). Research suggests that when students encounter a curriculum that lacks diverse representation, their engagement and motivation decline, as they struggle to see the relevance of historical narratives to their own lived experiences (Banks, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The fact that these young learners could articulate their dissatisfaction highlights the importance of student voice in shaping educational practices. Their insights serve as a powerful reminder that students are not passive recipients of knowledge but critical thinkers who deserve a curriculum that reflects and respects all historical narratives (Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2011).

This capstone seeks to confront these challenges by advocating for curriculum transformation that integrates diverse perspectives, empowers educators to address these biases, and fosters critical engagement with historical narratives. Ultimately, the goal is to promote equity and inclusion in educational practices while challenging the status quo.

National, State, and Local Contexts

The Eurocentric bias in educational curricula reflects broader societal structures that uphold racial and cultural hierarchies. Nationally, studies have shown that traditional curricula predominantly highlight European achievements while neglecting the contributions of African, Asian, Indigenous, and Latin American peoples (Woodson, 1933; Ladson-Billings, 2018). At the state level, frameworks such as Maryland's social studies standards have been critiqued for their limited inclusion of diverse perspectives. Historically, these standards have emphasized Eurocentric narratives while marginalizing the histories and contributions of underrepresented groups, raising concerns about systemic inequities in curriculum representation (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2025). MSDE has proposed revisions directed at integrating diverse perspectives, fostering critical thinking, and promoting civic competence in social studies education (MSDE, 2025). Locally, Howard County's fifth-grade social studies curriculum exemplifies these issues, emphasizing European narratives at the expense of broader representation. Based on my experience as an elementary school principal and my direct interactions with fifth-grade teachers and students, I have observed how Howard County's fifth-grade social studies curriculum prioritizes European narratives at the expense of broader representation. I have listened to students question the limited perspectives in their lessons and engaged in discussions with teachers about the challenges they face in incorporating diverse historical narratives within the constraints of the district-developed curriculum. These first-hand experiences have reinforced my understanding of how the curriculum's narrow focus impacts students, underscoring the urgent need for curricular transformation. These systemic biases have significant implications for all students, influencing their understanding of society and cultural diversity. This disconnect between policy aspirations and curricular realities in Howard County

underscores the urgent need for educator-led curriculum analysis—an issue this capstone directly addresses.

One School's Reform Efforts and Systemic Implications for Equity

As a result of these experiences, several years ago, as principal at Centennial Lane Elementary School (CLES), I implemented professional development sessions focused on instructional belonging and the integration of equity into classroom practice. These sessions encouraged teachers to validate student voices, decenter traditional teacher authority, and create opportunities for students to take greater ownership of their learning. In addition, teachers began revising aspects of the social studies curriculum to incorporate broader historical contexts and more authentic learning experiences that reflect diverse identities and perspectives. While these efforts represented initial steps toward addressing issues of representation and belonging within the curriculum, they also revealed the complexity of implementing sustained curricular change. Addressing systemic curriculum bias requires coordinated leadership across school administration, district offices, and equity-focused initiatives to ensure that efforts to expand representation are supported through policy alignment, professional learning, and instructional resources (HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity, 2020). These leadership experiences ultimately informed the development of the current capstone study.

This work at CLES informed broader district initiatives, prompting a review of the social studies curriculum across multiple schools. By aligning curriculum development with the principles outlined in the Maryland State Grade Five Social Studies Framework and HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020), these efforts aim to create a more inclusive educational environment that fosters critical thinking, civic engagement, and equitable learning opportunities for all students. These actions demonstrate the potential for local initiatives to influence systemic

change, addressing long-standing inequities, and preparing students to thrive in a diverse society. These experiences underscored the urgent need to address the persistent Eurocentric bias within the district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum, inspiring me to examine this issue through a scholarly lens. As a practitioner committed to advancing equity, I am conducting this capstone research to explore solutions that dismantle curriculum bias and empower all students to engage with diverse historical narratives.

These historical patterns did not emerge incidentally but were shaped through longstanding systems of curriculum design that prioritized Western European perspectives as the foundation of formal schooling, resulting in enduring structures that continue to influence what is taught and how history is framed in classrooms today

While the need for more inclusive and representative curriculum is well established, it is also important to acknowledge the structural and instructional constraints that shape elementary social studies instruction. Teachers operate within limited instructional time, competing curricular priorities, and mandated pacing guides that often require them to simplify complex historical narratives to ensure developmental appropriateness for young learners. Additionally, standards-driven expectations and assessment demands can constrain opportunities for extended inquiry or the integration of multiple perspectives. Some scholars and practitioners argue that curriculum must prioritize coherence, developmental appropriateness, and breadth of coverage, which may limit the extent to which multiple perspectives can be deeply integrated within elementary instruction, particularly given time constraints and standards-driven expectations. These realities do not diminish the importance of addressing inequity; rather, they highlight the complexity of doing so within existing systems. This study is therefore situated within these constraints, seeking not to dismiss them, but to identify feasible, low-lift, high-impact

approaches that support more equitable representation while remaining aligned with required curriculum structures and instructional expectations. These constraints further underscore the importance of examining the systemic factors that shape curriculum design and enactment.

Literature Review

A Eurocentric curriculum prioritizes European history and culture, often marginalizing the experiences and contributions of other groups. Scholars such as Woodson (1933) and Ladson-Billings (2018) have long argued that Eurocentric curricula reinforce colonial and racialized power structures by privileging dominant cultural narratives while marginalizing the histories and contributions of other groups. More recent scholarship continues to highlight how such curricular frameworks perpetuate stereotypes and sustain inequitable social hierarchies within educational systems (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023; Omodan, 2023). This exclusionary framework negatively impacts students from marginalized backgrounds by diminishing their sense of belonging and self-esteem (Pevac-Zimmer et al., 2024).

A Eurocentric curriculum not only marginalizes underrepresented cultures but also adversely impacts students from dominant cultural groups by limiting their exposure to diverse histories, experiences, and viewpoints. By confining students to a narrow and restrictive worldview, such curricula reduce opportunities for students to critically engage with complex societal issues, diminish appreciation of cultural difference, and hinder the development of empathy and cross-cultural understanding (Banks, 2008; Sleeter, 2011; Levy et al., 2023; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2025; Iweuno & Tochi, 2024; White & Schoenfeld, 2023; Bae & Baker, 2025). By prioritizing a singular cultural narrative, the curriculum not only perpetuates bias but also deprives all students of the opportunity to become more thoughtful, inclusive, and globally aware citizens.

Themes of citizenship and democracy are central to social studies education, making the representation of diverse historical perspectives particularly consequential for students' understanding of democratic participation (Marks, 2000; White & Schoenfeld, 2023). When curricular narratives center primarily on Eurocentric perspectives, students may encounter a limited portrayal of democratic development that overlooks the diverse individuals and communities who have shaped democratic ideals. The omission of the achievements and historical experiences of marginalized groups can distort historical realities, reinforce stereotypes, and exclude critical perspectives necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of democracy (De La Mare, 2014; Kincheloe, 2001; Levy et al., 2023; Hornbeck, 2025).

Social studies education plays a critical role in shaping students' understanding of democracy, citizenship, and their roles within a pluralistic society. When students encounter historical narratives that exclude or marginalize the experiences of diverse communities, their understanding of democratic participation may be incomplete or distorted (Banks, 2008; Levy et al., 2023). Scholars emphasize that equitable civic education requires exposing students to multiple historical perspectives so that students can critically examine how power, culture, and participation shape democratic societies (Bae & Baker, 2025; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2025). Without such representation, students—particularly those whose identities do not align with dominant cultural narratives—may struggle to see themselves as legitimate participants in democratic processes (White & Schoenfeld, 2023). Ensuring that curricula reflect the diverse experiences that have shaped democratic ideals is therefore essential for fostering inclusive civic identity development and meaningful democratic engagement. These civic implications are particularly salient within the current sociopolitical climate in the United States.

Current events in the United States further underscore the importance of how democratic ideals and historical narratives are represented within educational curricula. Debates surrounding immigration policy have intensified public discussion about belonging, citizenship, and whose histories and perspectives are represented within civic institutions, including schools. These debates highlight the importance of social studies education in shaping students' understanding of democratic participation and civic identity.

Research examining immigrant and multilingual students consistently emphasizes the importance of inclusive school environments and culturally responsive instructional practices in fostering students' sense of belonging and civic participation. Across studies, scholars find that when schools cultivate inclusive climates and connect instruction to students' cultural identities and lived experiences, immigrant students demonstrate stronger engagement, greater school belonging, and increased participation in civic learning opportunities (Choi et al., 2025; Ginicolo et al., 2026). At the same time, research suggests that immigrant youth possess significant civic potential that may remain underdeveloped when civic education fails to meaningfully incorporate students' cultural identities and experiences. Callahan and Obenchain (2016) argue that immigrant students often demonstrate strong interest in civic participation and community engagement; however, when educational curricula fail to reflect their histories and experiences, students may struggle to see themselves as legitimate participants within democratic systems. These findings suggest that social studies curricula play a critical role in helping immigrant and historically marginalized students develop a sense of civic identity and agency. When curricula reflect diverse historical experiences and perspectives, students are more likely to view themselves as active civic participants capable of engaging in democratic processes and contributing to social change (Banks, 2008; Levy et al., 2023; White & Schoenfeld, 2023).

Impacts on Student Engagement and Equity

Marks (2000) underscores the importance of instructional practices in shaping student engagement, particularly during the elementary years. A Eurocentric curriculum not only risks disengaging students whose identities align with historically marginalized groups by undervaluing their histories, but it also undermines broader efforts to advance equity and inclusivity within education. Iweuno et al. (2024) highlight that the absence of racial representation in curriculum content significantly affects student identity and performance, particularly for marginalized groups, who feel unseen and undervalued in the educational process. Their research shows that fostering engagement requires a curriculum that affirms diverse identities and experiences, enabling students to connect meaningfully with the material.

Similarly, Buzzetto-Hollywood (2023) emphasizes that decolonizing curriculum through culturally responsive practices allows educators to design lessons that center students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. This approach creates a sense of belonging and promotes engagement by validating students' identities within the learning environment (Ulbricht et al., 2024). Research on culturally responsive pedagogy indicates that when social studies curricula integrate multicultural narratives and meaningful participatory learning experiences, students demonstrate greater engagement, critical thinking, and classroom participation (Pevac-Zimmer et al., 2024; Ulbricht et al., 2024; Gillespie et al., 2025).

Building on this, extensive research underscores the transformative potential of culturally grounded pedagogies in fostering student engagement, academic achievement, and social consciousness. While the terms *culturally relevant* and *culturally responsive* are often used interchangeably in educational discourse, they are rooted in distinct theoretical frameworks. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2018) introduced *culturally relevant pedagogy*, which emphasizes

three key goals: academic success, cultural competence, and the development of critical consciousness. Geneva Gay (2010) advanced *culturally responsive teaching*, which explicitly leverages students' cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and communication styles to enhance instructional effectiveness.

In this context, the term *responsiveness* is employed intentionally to reflect a broader pedagogical orientation that synthesizes Ladson-Billings's critical framework with Gay's instructional emphasis. As Aronson and Laughter (2016) argue in their synthesis of cross-disciplinary research, while these frameworks have different emphases, they share a common commitment to equity, student empowerment, and the validation of diverse identities. Therefore, referencing Ladson-Billings within the discourse on responsiveness enables an expansive, intersectional interpretation that integrates curricular adaptation with a critical awareness of structural and systemic inequities.

Evidence indicates that when educators intentionally integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, they not only validate diverse identities but also promote deeper student engagement, enhanced academic performance, and a stronger sense of belonging (Marks, 2000; Iweuno et al., 2024). These inclusive curricular practices empower students to participate more actively in classroom discourse and connect meaningfully with their learning experiences. Importantly, culturally responsive and inclusive teaching practices also foster critical thinking, cultural competence, and social consciousness, enabling students to recognize and challenge injustice within and beyond educational spaces (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2018; Gay, 2010).

Addressing the persistence of Eurocentrism in curricula holds far-reaching implications for student outcomes. When educational content reflects a wider array of historical and cultural

narratives, students are more likely to see themselves as active participants in knowledge construction. For example, Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) conducted qualitative research examining youth participation in social justice–oriented educational programs designed to connect academic learning with issues affecting students’ communities. Through interviews and observational data, their study found that culturally relevant learning experiences increased students’ sense of agency, strengthened civic identity development, and improved engagement with academic content. More recently, Hinnant-Crawford, Lett, and Cromartie (2023), drawing on improvement science and case-based analyses of equity-centered school reform efforts, examine how schools can systematically address inequities through continuous cycles of inquiry and collaborative problem-solving. Their work demonstrates that when educators intentionally analyze inequitable practices and implement coordinated instructional and organizational changes, schools can improve student engagement, belonging, and academic outcomes while advancing equity-focused improvement efforts. Similarly, Gillespie et al. (2025) conducted a quantitative study using a natural experiment design to examine the effects of ethnic studies coursework on student outcomes. Analyzing student survey and outcome data, the researchers found that students exposed to inclusive historical narratives demonstrated greater identity exploration, stronger multicultural attitudes, and increased civic engagement compared to peers who did not participate in such coursework. By anchoring curricular reforms in measurable outcomes—such as increased academic achievement, student engagement, and civic readiness—a compelling and urgent case emerges for dismantling Eurocentrism in education.

Theoretical Foundations and Gaps in Equity Research

Culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies provide an important theoretical foundation for addressing Eurocentrism in educational curricula. Ladson-Billings’ framework for

culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes three core components: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. These principles align closely with Ginwright and Cammarota's (2002) Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) framework, which integrates social justice principles into educational practice and emphasizes youth agency, critical awareness, and civic engagement. Together, these frameworks advocate for empowering students through culturally responsive instruction and critical engagement with historical narratives, offering important conceptual guidance for addressing Eurocentric bias in curriculum and instruction.

Recent empirical research has begun to document measurable outcomes associated with culturally responsive and inclusive curricular approaches. For example, Iweuno et al. (2024) examined the impact of racial representation in curriculum content and found that greater representation was associated with improved student identity development and academic performance, particularly for students from historically marginalized groups. Similarly, quantitative findings from ethnic studies research indicate that students exposed to culturally inclusive curriculum demonstrate stronger identity exploration, increased multicultural attitudes, and higher levels of civic engagement (Gillespie et al., 2025). While these studies provide emerging evidence of measurable outcomes, much of the literature continues to emphasize the theoretical benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy rather than examining how schools systematically identify and address Eurocentric bias within existing curriculum materials.

Despite extensive documentation of the issues associated with Eurocentric curricula, gaps remain in understanding the long-term impacts of inclusive educational practices. While immediate benefits such as increased student engagement and self-esteem are well documented (DaCunha, 2016; Hinnant-Crawford, Lett, & Cromartie, 2023), longitudinal studies exploring the

sustained academic and social outcomes of inclusive curricula remain limited. Additionally, there is relatively little research examining how school systems transition from Eurocentric curricula to more inclusive instructional models, particularly at the district level, where curriculum adoption, professional learning, and policy alignment influence classroom practice.

Another gap in the literature concerns how Eurocentric narratives persist in instructional materials and classroom implementation. Few studies combine systematic analysis of curriculum content with the perspectives of educators responsible for implementing those materials in classrooms. Addressing this gap requires research that examines both the structure of curricular materials and the experiences of educators who use them.

Implications and Future Directions

The consequences of failing to address the Eurocentric curriculum extend beyond individual classrooms. Nationally, these biases perpetuate systemic inequities, contributing to disparities in academic achievement among Black, White, and Latino students (NAEP, 2024). Locally, marginalized students may feel excluded and undervalued, while their peers from dominant cultural groups may lack the critical awareness needed to engage with diverse perspectives. Addressing these issues requires a two-prong approach that combines curriculum transformation and professional development for educators.

Future research should focus on evaluating successful models of curriculum transformation and educator professional development and their impact on student outcomes. Studies could explore how culturally responsive teaching practices influence students' academic success, sense of belonging, and membership in a diverse society. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of inclusive curricula would provide valuable insights into their broader implications for educational equity.

Addressing the Eurocentric fifth-grade social studies curriculum is a critical step toward fostering equity and inclusivity in education. The integration of diverse perspectives, grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy, not only benefits marginalized students by affirming their identities but also enriches the educational experience for all learners by broadening worldviews and critical thinking skills. Addressing Eurocentric bias in the social studies curriculum requires more than adding diverse perspectives; it requires examining the systemic conditions that shape how curricular narratives are constructed and enacted in classrooms—an inquiry that guides the causal systems analysis presented in the following section.

Background: Social Studies at the National, State, and Local Level

Social Studies: A Core Content Area

Social studies is a core content area in Maryland public education, as outlined in the *Code of Maryland Regulations* (COMAR) 13A.04.08.01 (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2020), which mandates that instruction from prekindergarten through grade 12 prepare students for effective, informed citizenship. The Maryland State Department of Education’s *Social Studies Frameworks* (MSDE, 2020) emphasize historical thinking, civic engagement, and culturally responsive teaching—goals echoed in local equity policies such as HCPSS Policy 1080 (Howard County Public School System [HCPSS], 2020).

Research has shown that social studies supports the development of informed, empathetic, and engaged citizens by equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to understand and respond to the world around them (Levy et al., 2023; Cal & Demirkaya, 2020). Aligned with HCPSS Policy 1080 on Educational Equity (HCPSS, 2020), social studies should provide all students with equitable access to a curriculum that affirms diverse identities, fosters critical thinking, and builds civic competence. Through the study of history, geography, civics,

and cultures, students learn how societies function, how decisions are made, and how individuals can influence their communities. This foundation supports students' development of the ability to analyze multiple perspectives and apply their understanding across a variety of social and civic contexts. Levy et al. (2023) argue that social studies education is vital for addressing contemporary civic challenges such as misinformation, polarization, and systemic inequities. They advocate for justice-oriented civic learning that equips students with the skills and dispositions to participate in democratic life, including media literacy, equity analysis, and collective engagement. Similarly, Cal and Demirkaya (2020) emphasize that social studies nurtures perspective-taking, creativity, and leadership, qualities that are essential not only for gifted students but also for all learners. These skills are particularly important in pluralistic societies, which comprise diverse groups that maintain distinct cultural, religious, ethnic, or social identities while coexisting within a shared political or social framework.

Moreover, social studies instruction extends beyond content memorization by incorporating interdisciplinary and inquiry-based approaches to learning. The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards emphasizes the use of compelling questions, analysis of primary sources, and the application of disciplinary knowledge to real-world issues (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013). This approach engages students in examining historical interpretation, ethical questions, and diverse human experiences, supporting the development of critical thinking and civic reasoning skills (White & Schoenfeld, 2023). While math and literacy are essential for academic success, social studies contributes to students' understanding of civic systems and supports their ability to analyze societal issues and participate in community-based problem-solving (NCSS, 2013; White & Schoenfeld, 2023). Halverson, Tucker, and Smith (2024) identify strategies such as using

primary sources, role-play, and academic service learning as effective methods for connecting civic content to practical applications. These instructional approaches have been shown to enhance students' understanding of civic processes and support their preparation for participation in civic life.

Despite its foundational importance, social studies remain significantly marginalized in the elementary curriculum. Multiple studies have shown that instructional time devoted to social studies is consistently overshadowed by the emphasis on math and reading, largely due to accountability pressures from standardized testing (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Montgomery, 2023). Fitchett et al. (2014) demonstrate that time spent on social studies is systematically reduced in elementary classrooms, a trend exacerbated by policy mandates and the perception that civic learning is secondary to academic performance.

This marginalization is not merely a matter of reduced minutes; it also reflects deeper structural and instructional challenges. Montgomery (2023) highlights how many elementary teachers feel constrained by limited planning time and pacing guides that focus on ELA and math, leaving little room to thoughtfully implement social studies lessons. Additionally, many teachers lack robust preservice or professional development experiences in social studies pedagogy, making them less confident in teaching complex civic or historical content. Halverson et al. (2024) underscore that without targeted training, educators may struggle to adopt the inquiry-based, participatory strategies necessary for meaningful civic instruction, such as using primary sources or facilitating simulations. The result is a simplified and shortened version of social studies that often prioritizes rote learning and surface-level facts over deeper civic understanding and engagement.

In recent years, social fragmentation in the United States has been documented through increasing political polarization, declining trust in institutions, and persistent disparities across racial, socioeconomic, and ideological lines (Pew Research Center, 2022; Salajan & Jules, 2024). These conditions highlight the importance of civic education that extends beyond foundational knowledge to include opportunities for students to engage in dialogue, examine multiple perspectives, and develop the analytical skills needed to navigate complex societal issues. However, current instructional practices often limit the capacity of social studies to fulfill these objectives. Research indicates that political agendas opposing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts have influenced curriculum decisions and classroom practices. Ng et al. (2025) describe an anti-DEI agenda that gained momentum during Trump's second term, characterized by efforts to restrict equity-focused curriculum content, reduce culturally responsive pedagogy, and limit the inclusion of marginalized perspectives. These shifts may impact students' opportunities to develop civic reasoning and awareness.

The growing hostility toward equity and justice-oriented frameworks in education coincides with what Salajan and Jules (2024) identify as a broader project of American isolationism and authoritarian populism, which has cultivated fear of pluralism and suppressed democratic engagement. This climate makes the role of social studies even more essential, yet many teachers lack the preparation or support to respond effectively. Osei-Tutu (2025) underscores that educators frequently feel underprepared to implement practices that support equity, inclusion, and social justice, particularly in environments where institutional support is minimal. This gap in preparation contributes to a cycle in which teachers either avoid or are unequipped to facilitate critical discussions around race, power, or civic responsibility, further diluting the transformative power of social studies.

Compounding this issue is the tension between theory and practice in how democracy is taught. Hornbeck (2025) found that many social studies teachers conceptualize democracy as voting and rule-following rather than as an evolving and participatory process that demands critical inquiry and civic action. When educators focus on procedural aspects of democracy while avoiding its complexities and contradictions, students are denied the tools needed to interrogate injustice and engage in meaningful democratic renewal. This instructional gap reinforces the status quo and leaves students unprepared to navigate the civic and ethical dilemmas of the modern world.

Moreover, curricular representation continues to reflect dominant cultural narratives, excluding voices that could deepen students' understanding of identity, resistance, and belonging. Bae and Baker (2025) explore how Asian American identity is often overlooked or tokenized in social studies curricula, resulting in narratives that fail to reflect the richness and complexity of these communities' experiences. They argue that such omissions limit students' ability to build inclusive worldviews and challenge hegemonic structures.

Similarly, Osei-Tutu et al. (2022) assert that critical theory and social justice must be embedded in educational practice, particularly during times of social crisis. Without these frameworks, students are deprived of the opportunity to examine systems of oppression and envision more equitable futures.

In this context, strengthening elementary social studies instruction represents a strategic response to documented gaps in civic preparation. Research suggests that preparing students for participation in a diverse and democratic society requires a curriculum that incorporates critical thinking, historical inquiry, and diverse perspectives, including those of historically marginalized communities (Levy et al., 2023; Osei-Tutu et al., 2022). Without intentional attention to these

elements, students may lack the knowledge and skills necessary to engage with complex civic issues and contribute meaningfully to society.

Critical Analysis of Social Studies Curriculum

For more than two decades, scholars have raised sustained concerns about the persistent limitations in elementary social studies curricula, particularly their marginalization and the lack of diverse, inclusive narratives. This study builds on decades of curriculum analysis by social studies researchers who have identified entrenched patterns of marginalization, Eurocentrism, and surface-level civic learning in elementary education. Prior analyses have revealed recurring issues, including the dominance of Eurocentric historical content, the exclusion of marginalized perspectives, and an emphasis on rote memorization rather than critical inquiry (Boyle-Baise et al., 2011; VanSledright, 2002). Boyle-Baise et al. (2011) emphasize that elementary social studies instruction often centers on White, Western histories while overlooking or distorting the experiences of historically marginalized communities. Their research calls for the inclusion of multicultural content to better reflect students' cultural identities and lived experiences.

While early critiques established a foundation for understanding exclusion and imbalance in curricular design (VanSledright, 2002; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Loewen, 2007), more recent scholarship calls for transformative, justice-driven reform aligned with the lived realities of today's learners. Building on this shift, scholars have examined Black and Hispanic/Latine perspectives to advocate for instructional approaches that actively confront systems of power, rather than relying on surface-level inclusion of diverse content. Edmondson (2023) explores the gatekeeping function of pre-service teachers in world history instruction, showing how unexamined biases and institutional constraints often maintain curricular exclusion even when teachers intend to be inclusive. His findings emphasize the importance of preparing educators to

challenge structural inequities in historical narratives and to intentionally adopt inclusive pedagogical practices.

Araujo and Henderson (2024) highlight another dimension of equity reform through their collaborative work with elementary preservice teachers on a school-wide community event. Their study demonstrates how engaging teacher candidates in culturally responsive projects centered on hidden or underrepresented histories can build more inclusive curricular approaches. Through school-based initiatives, students and educators collectively surface marginalized stories, fostering both cultural validation and participatory learning. This work underscores how community-based experiences can reframe social studies as a lived and shared practice rather than a static body of content.

Further expanding the analysis of curriculum design, Conrad (2018) examines the epistemological foundations of social studies and world history programs. These foundations refer to the assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge, whose perspectives are included, and how knowledge is organized and conveyed. Conrad analyzes programs such as the Big History Project that aim to present a global, interdisciplinary narrative. However, she observes that these programs often emphasize Western scientific frameworks, chronological progress, and empirical approaches to knowledge. Through a content and frequency analysis of the Big History Project's online materials, Conrad found that the curriculum tends to overrepresent Western historical narratives—particularly European and U.S. perspectives—while marginalizing non-Western worldviews, Indigenous cosmologies, and alternative epistemologies. Using a framework based on five attributes of Eurocentric curricula, she demonstrates how these materials privilege certain knowledge systems and sources, potentially rendering the curriculum culturally irrelevant for non-European learners. As a result, such

curricular models may contribute to a limited portrayal of global history and reduce the visibility of diverse knowledge systems.

Conrad (2018) offers a critical framework to identify Eurocentrism in world history curricula by analyzing their epistemological foundations, the underlying assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge, and whose perspectives are prioritized. In her analysis of the Big History Project, she identifies five key attributes through which Eurocentric narratives are often reproduced: (1) the portrayal of human origins and civilization as beginning in the West, which minimizes the contributions of non-European societies; (2) a linear notion of progress, where Western modernization is positioned as the pinnacle of development; (3) the framing of rationality as a uniquely Western trait, marginalizing other knowledge systems such as Indigenous epistemologies and spiritual cosmologies; (4) the Eurocentric narration of global interactions, where major events are told predominantly from European perspectives; and (5) the assumption of the cultural superiority and universality of Western values, in which diversity is acknowledged superficially without engaging deeper critiques of power. Conrad argues that even globally framed curricula may reinforce narrow, dominant worldviews by embedding these attributes, thereby limiting students' exposure to diverse historical interpretations and ways of knowing (Conrad, 2018).

This epistemic critique is echoed in the work of Shreiner and Martell (2022), who apply a critical race lens to data visualizations in online curricular materials. They reveal how racial inequality is often obscured through colorblind graphs, infographics, and timelines that distort historical events and reinforce sanitized narratives of progress. Their analysis shows how digital materials that are commonly used in elementary classrooms can subtly perpetuate racial erasure,

even in seemingly neutral visual formats. This insight expands the critique of curriculum beyond textual content to include the representational politics of visual media.

Conrad's (2018) and Shreiner & Martell's (2022) critiques align with a broader body of work that examines how curriculum reproduces hegemonic narratives through textbook selection, event framing, and standardized assessments (Apple, 2004; Loewen, 2007). These scholars argue that decolonizing curriculum involves more than content revision; it requires a critical interrogation of the power structures embedded in curricular frameworks, whose knowledge is legitimized, whose voices are excluded, and what worldviews are normalized (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Andreotti, 2011).

These critiques are especially relevant in the context of civic education, where contemporary scholars warn against the tendency to present democracy as a neutral or apolitical construct. Levy et al. (2023) argue that traditional civic education often fails to address the structural inequities experienced by historically marginalized groups. They advocate for justice-oriented, anti-racist, and participatory civic learning. Naseem Rodríguez and Swalwell (2025) similarly contend that elementary social studies should be grounded in principles of equity and social responsibility, encouraging students to engage with power, injustice, and community-based action.

Naseem Rodríguez and Swalwell (2025) argue that elementary social studies education must move beyond superficial inclusion and instead be grounded in principles of equity, critical consciousness, and social responsibility. They emphasize that young learners are not only capable of understanding complex social issues but should be actively encouraged to question systems of power, recognize injustice, and envision more just alternatives in their communities. Rather than treating civic engagement as a neutral or procedural concept, they advocate for

justice-oriented pedagogy that centers the lived experiences of marginalized groups and frames students as agents of change. This includes integrating content that explores historical and contemporary struggles for rights and equity, facilitating classroom discussions on topics such as racism, colonization, and inequality, and creating opportunities for community-based inquiry and action. In doing so, social studies becomes a transformative space where students develop not only academic skills but also a sense of ethical responsibility and collective agency.

In addition to what is taught, scholars have also focused on how social studies is taught. VanSledright (2002), Barton and Levstik (2004), and Levy et al. (2023) have demonstrated that young learners can engage in complex historical thinking when supported by inquiry-based instruction. These scholars recommend practices such as analyzing primary sources, using essential questions, and cultivating historical empathy to develop interpretation, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement.

Although the field of social studies education has produced a wide range of critical analyses and transformative visions, many standards, curricula, and instructional practices continue to fall short of these goals. Research consistently shows that despite efforts to diversify content, dominant epistemologies, Eurocentric narratives, and sanitized portrayals of history persist in both textual and digital materials (Conrad, 2018; Shreiner & Martell, 2022). Studies also reveal how unexamined biases and institutional gatekeeping can limit the effectiveness of inclusive intentions (Edmondson, 2023) and how teacher preparation programs must support educators in navigating these complexities. At the same time, promising models such as culturally responsive, community-based projects (Araujo & Henderson, 2024) and justice-oriented pedagogies that center student agency and social responsibility (Naseem Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2025) point to new possibilities for the field. Together, these perspectives underscore

the urgency of reimagining elementary social studies not as a static body of facts but as a dynamic and critical discipline. Aligning curriculum with equity-driven, inquiry-based, and culturally sustaining pedagogies is not only necessary for reflecting diverse student identities but also essential for preparing young learners to think critically, act ethically, and participate meaningfully in a complex and unjust world.

Patterns of Eurocentrism in social studies curricula are pervasive across the United States, and these national trends are mirrored locally in central Maryland. The district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum prioritizes Eurocentric narratives, marginalizing the rich cultural diversity of the student population. These localized manifestations underscore the urgent need for systemic reform to foster inclusivity and equity in elementary social studies curricula, ensuring that students see their identities reflected and valued.

State Frameworks, Policy Intentions, and Local Gaps

In Maryland, state frameworks and district policies strive to provide students with a curriculum that fosters critical thinking, civic engagement, and cultural awareness, ensuring that all learners can see themselves represented and valued in their education. The Maryland State Grade Five Social Studies Framework (2020) provides a comprehensive structure designed to prepare students with foundational knowledge and skills in civics, history, geography, and economics, fostering their development as informed, active, and socially responsible citizens. Through inquiry-based learning, students are encouraged to evaluate diverse sources, construct evidence-based arguments, and take informed action, emphasizing critical thinking and civic identity. The framework integrates literacy skills, including reading, writing, and speaking, into social studies instruction, creating cross-disciplinary opportunities that support overall academic growth. It broadens traditional historical narratives by including the experiences and

contributions of marginalized groups, ensuring that students engage with diverse perspectives while highlighting Maryland's significant figures and events as a lens for exploring national history. This approach aligns with Maryland's six social studies standards, encouraging consistency across districts, inclusivity in content, and a seamless transition to a rigorous secondary-level social studies curriculum.

HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020) strives to eliminate disparities in educational outcomes by addressing systemic barriers, discriminatory practices, and institutional inequities. The policy establishes expectations for providing a culturally responsive curriculum, equitable resource allocation, and inclusive environments that affirm students' identities and support their academic, social, and emotional growth. It emphasizes the collective responsibility of educators, families, and stakeholders to ensure every student has access to opportunities that maximize their potential while fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the school system.

HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020) explicitly emphasizes the importance of a culturally responsive curriculum that reflects the histories, experiences, and contributions of historically marginalized communities. This commitment aligns seamlessly with the Maryland Social Studies Standards 1.0 through 6.0 (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2020), which intend to cultivate informed and engaged citizens who value multiple narratives and global perspectives. Both the policy and the standards emphasize integrating diverse perspectives, including those of Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latine, LGBTQ+, Indigenous, and other underrepresented communities, to ensure inclusivity in educational experiences. Maryland's Inquiry Arc—developing questions, applying disciplinary tools, evaluating sources, and communicating conclusions—provides a robust framework for

fostering critical thinking and social responsibility, equipping students to analyze complex social, political, and historical phenomena. Together, these guiding principles and structures create a shared vision for a curriculum that is not only equitable but also relevant to the challenges and opportunities of a diverse society.

By exploring the historical development of these concepts and processes, students can gain insight into how democratic systems function and the roles they play within them. The framework encourages inquiry-based learning, which involves asking questions, evaluating sources, and critically analyzing information. Through this approach, students learn to think independently, research effectively, and form reasoned opinions, as suggested by a body of foundational research in education (Ginwright & James, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2018). These skills are essential for active citizenship but align with subjugated knowledge (Kincheloe, 2001), as they enable individuals to seek out information, assess its credibility, and make informed decisions about civic issues. The concept of subjugated knowledge challenges the dominant narratives and ideologies that uphold systems of oppression and privilege. It offers alternative viewpoints and understandings of social, cultural, and historical phenomena, shedding light on aspects of society that have been ignored or misrepresented. Providing students with the necessary skills and knowledge enables them to actively participate in the political process and make informed contributions to their communities as responsible citizens.

Local Gaps: Discrepancies in Implementation

Despite these robust frameworks and policy intentions, local implementation often falls short of achieving the inclusive curriculum envisioned in these standards. Autonomy granted to districts can lead to significant variability in how effectively these principles are operationalized.

To understand the intent of HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020) as it directly impacts students, it is essential to examine its implementation at the classroom level. The misalignment is particularly evident when comparing HCPSS's curriculum with the policy's aspirations. While the policy explicitly emphasizes diverse representation and dynamic instructional materials, the current curriculum inadequately integrates the lived experiences of students from underrepresented communities. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive professional development on culturally responsive teaching further exacerbates these gaps, limiting educators' ability to effectively implement the policy's objectives. While the Maryland State Grade Five Social Studies Framework and HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020) advocate for a culturally responsive curriculum that reflects diverse perspectives, the autonomy granted to Howard County and other Maryland districts has led to discrepancies in implementing these principles.

Survey Insights on Identity Representation. In 2023, Centennial Lane Elementary School (CLES) administered the Indicators of Educational Equity Survey (IEES), which revealed significant gaps in identity representation in its lesson materials. Among the 675 participants, 33.1% of respondents across all racial/ethnic groups reported negatively on how well the school ensures students see their identities reflected. Marginalized groups such as Hispanic/Latine (51%) and Black/African American (30%) reported notably high levels of dissatisfaction. Asian respondents also expressed moderate dissatisfaction (29%), with a significant portion responding neutrally (34%).

These findings suggest systemic failures in providing culturally responsive curriculum content. For Hispanic/Latine students, the 51% negative response highlights a critical gap in representation, fostering feelings of exclusion and disengagement. Research underscores that

culturally responsive teaching enhances student outcomes, particularly for marginalized populations (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This survey indicates an urgent need to address curriculum gaps to ensure all students experience a sense of belonging and engagement.

Table 1

HCPSS Indicators of Educational Equity Survey (2022-2023): Belonging (B3b) How well are we doing as a school in making sure everyone sees their identities reflected in lesson materials?

Race/Ethnicity	Total Respondents	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Positive (%)	Summary
American Indian/Alaska Native	9	67%	33%	33%	Majority Negative (67%),
Asian	122	29%	34%	20%	Majority Negative or Neutral (63%)
Black/African American	23	30%	13%	30%	Negative (30%) and Positive (30%),
Hispanic/Latine	8	51%	25%	13%	Majority Negative (51%),
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	-	100%	-	All Neutral (100%)
Two or More Races	25	36%	20%	24%	Majority Negative (36%),
White	97	31%	50%	19%	Majority Neutral (50%)
Prefer Not to Say	46	40%	20%	20%	Majority Negative (40%)

Curriculum Analysis: Eurocentric Bias. Three years ago, as an elementary school principal, I led a team in reviewing the district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum. The review identified a pattern of Eurocentric content that prioritized European perspectives while marginalizing or excluding the contributions and experiences of non-European cultures. Narratives about African Americans were limited, centering almost exclusively on slavery while ignoring stories of resilience, leadership, and significant contributions to American society. These findings were high-level and anecdotal, but they highlighted surface-level patterns of

exclusion and misrepresentation. This capstone builds on those findings by conducting a deeper, evidence-based analysis to inform actionable strategies for curriculum improvement.

Teacher and Student Perspectives on Curriculum Gaps. Reviewing the district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum was complemented by discussions with teachers and students, yielding high-level qualitative insights into its impact. Teachers expressed frustration with the lack of resources to teach diverse perspectives, noting that available materials often failed to engage students from underrepresented groups. One teacher remarked, “It feels like we’re always filling gaps—creating lessons from scratch to ensure all students see themselves in the content.” Students shared similar sentiments, with one fifth grader stating, “I am Jewish, and there is not one mention of people who were Jewish during colonial times. It is like they did not exist.” Another fifth grader expressed frustration that the only representation of Asian Americans in the social studies curriculum was when mentioned as building the Trans-Atlantic Railroad as workers. These insights emphasize the curriculum’s failure to meet the needs of both educators and learners, reinforcing the need for comprehensive reform.

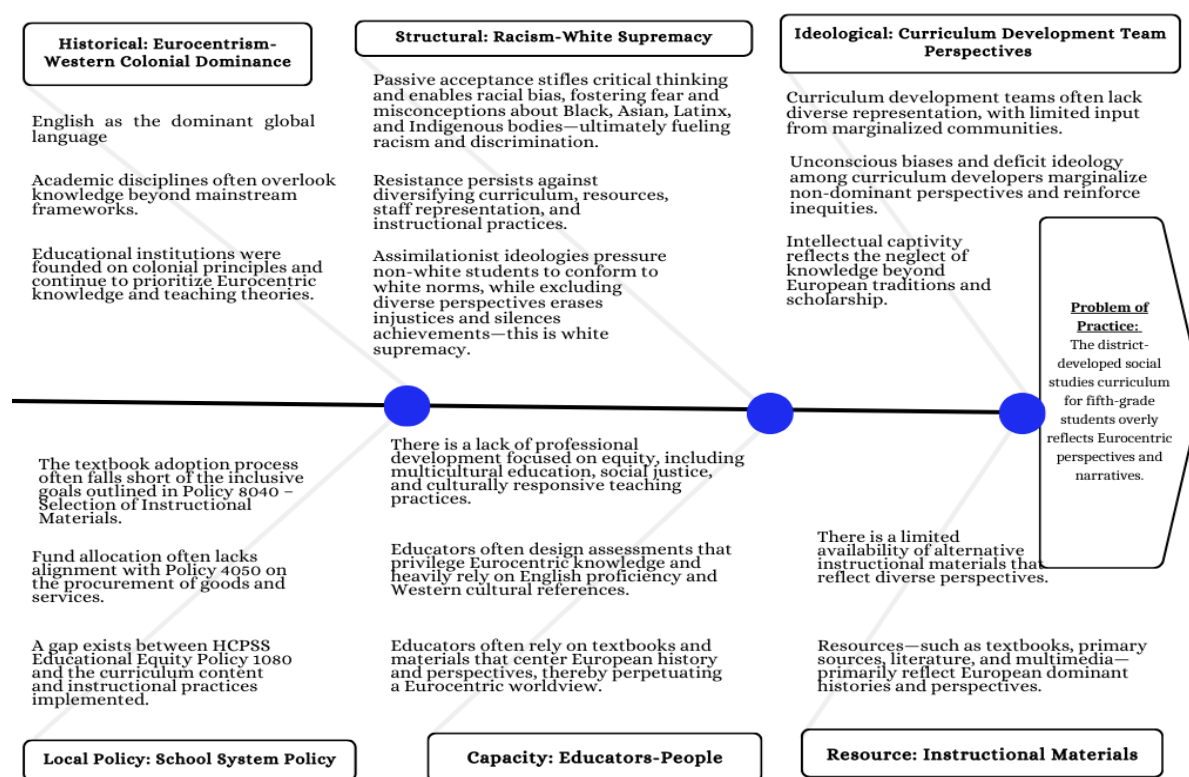
Causal System Analysis and Causal Factor Review

Causal System Analysis (CSA) explores the underlying factors contributing to the district-developed social studies curriculum for fifth-grade students that disproportionately reflect Eurocentric perspectives and narratives. By examining historical and structural causes, this analysis intends to identify actionable strategies to shift the curriculum toward inclusivity by representing diverse perspectives. This approach aligns with improvement science frameworks that emphasize understanding the systems and conditions that produce inequitable outcomes before implementing change (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). By identifying root causes and patterns within existing curriculum structures, the CSA supports the design of targeted interventions to address systemic inequities in instructional materials and practices.

(Hinnant-Crawford, Lett, & Cromartie, 2023). Aligned with the study’s research questions and the goal of empowering educators to advance equity in instruction, the Causal Systems Analysis informs the development of a causal systems diagram that illustrates the interconnected factors contributing to Eurocentric narratives in the curriculum. These insights subsequently guide the Theory of Improvement by identifying key drivers and change ideas aimed at supporting educators in implementing more inclusive instructional practices and helping students become critical consumers of historical narratives.

Figure 1

Causal System Analysis of Eurocentric Curriculum



Ideological: Curriculum Development Team Perspectives

Curriculum development teams operate within epistemological traditions that shape what is recognized as legitimate knowledge and whose perspectives are deemed authoritative.

Curriculum design may be shaped by long-standing reliance on European knowledge traditions, limited inclusion of voices from marginalized communities, and unexamined biases within development structures. Together, these conditions can result in a curriculum that normalizes dominant cultural frameworks while marginalizing non-dominant perspectives. Apple (2004) argues that curriculum is never ideologically neutral; rather, it reflects broader social power structures that determine which knowledge is sanctioned and institutionalized. When Western academic traditions are treated as universal, alternative epistemologies are positioned as peripheral rather than foundational (Banks, 2015). Such ideological positioning influences how civic identity, national development, and historical causality are constructed, reinforcing narrative hierarchies that privilege institutional power over community knowledge. These patterns reflect systemic orientations embedded within curriculum design processes rather than isolated instructional decisions.

From my perspective as an elementary school principal working closely with teachers and curriculum materials, these systemic patterns often emerge through smaller, everyday decisions that shape how curriculum is developed and enacted. For example, I have observed that members of curriculum writing and review teams do not always reflect the diversity of the student populations they serve, which can result in disproportionately reflecting Eurocentric perspectives relative to marginalized groups, unintentionally limiting the perspectives considered when selecting historical narratives or instructional examples. In conversations with teachers implementing the district-developed curriculum, I have also seen how unconscious bias and reliance on familiar instructional resources can reinforce dominant narratives, even when educators are committed to equity. Additionally, district-developed curriculum structures sometimes prioritize established pacing guides and existing instructional materials, leaving

limited space for teachers to incorporate additional perspectives without significant adaptation. These observations suggest that Eurocentric narratives are often sustained not through intentional exclusion but through routine curriculum development processes, team composition, and instructional habits that shape how historical narratives are presented in elementary classrooms.

Local Policy: School System Policy

Educational policy articulates aspirational commitments to equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive practice; however, a gap often persists between policy language and instructional implementation. Ladson-Billings (2018) notes that structural inequities in schooling frequently endure despite reform efforts when policies are not operationalized within institutional systems. When textbook adoption processes fall short of inclusive goals, funding allocations do not fully align with equity priorities, and accountability mechanisms for policy enactment remain diffuse, structural embedding of equity within required curriculum materials may be limited. This policy–practice disconnect reflects a broader systemic tension between rhetoric and design. As Hinnant-Crawford et al. (2023) emphasize, equity-centered improvement requires deliberate alignment between policy commitments and structural implementation; without such alignment, curricular frameworks may continue to center dominant narratives even in systems that formally espouse equity.

Capacity: Educators

Educator capacity functions as a mediating force within the broader curricular system. Limited professional development focused on equity, reliance on assessments privileging Eurocentric knowledge, and unconscious biases held by educators and curriculum developers shape how instructional materials are interpreted and enacted. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasize that effective professional learning must be sustained, contextually embedded, and

aligned to systemic goals; without this infrastructure, educators may lack the preparation necessary to critically examine dominant narratives. Similarly, Gay (2010) argues that culturally responsive teaching requires intentional development of cultural knowledge, critical consciousness, and pedagogical skill. In contexts where assimilationist ideologies subtly pressure students from historically marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds to conform to dominant cultural norms, educators may unintentionally reproduce systemic inequities embedded within curriculum structures. Capacity, therefore, is not merely an individual attribute but a structural condition shaped by institutional expectations, professional learning systems, and prevailing ideological norms.

While curriculum development has historically been shaped by predominantly white perspectives, it is also important to recognize that the teaching workforce—particularly at the elementary level—has been and remains largely white, which may further influence how curriculum is interpreted, emphasized, and enacted in classroom practice. Additionally, elementary educators often have more limited formal preparation in social studies than in literacy and mathematics, which can shape how historical narratives are interpreted and contribute to a reliance on curriculum materials as the primary source of historical knowledge (VanFossen, 2005). These conditions reinforce the role of educator capacity as a structural factor that mediates the enactment of curriculum, particularly when equity-centered analysis is not explicitly embedded in instructional materials.

Resources: Instructional Materials

Instructional materials operate as powerful structural drivers within educational systems. As depicted in the fishbone (Figure 1), the limited availability of alternative materials reflecting diverse perspectives, the central office gatekeeping of curriculum resources, and primary sources

that predominantly represent European-dominant histories constrain interpretive possibilities. Loewen (2007) demonstrates how U.S. history textbooks frequently privilege sanitized, Eurocentric narratives that minimize conflict, resistance, and the experiences of marginalized groups. Likewise, Shreiner and Martell (2022) argue that elementary social studies standards often render race and racism invisible through omissions and framing choices that appear neutral but reinforce dominant perspectives. When essential texts, assessments, and multimedia resources center on Eurocentric narratives, marginalized histories may be presented as supplemental rather than integral to understanding national development. The dominance of Eurocentric instructional resources thus shapes both content exposure and students' conceptualizations of citizenship, belonging, and historical agency.

Historical Causes: Eurocentrism-Western Colonial Dominance

The Eurocentrism embedded in the United States (U.S.) educational system stems from its colonial foundations, where early institutions prioritized Western knowledge systems (Eurocentric) and marginalized alternative perspectives. This legacy persists, perpetuating a curriculum dominated by European narratives while excluding the histories and contributions of African, Asian, Indigenous, and Latin American peoples (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This exclusion has institutionalized biases that reinforce the superiority of Western civilization in curricular content. These historical trends are particularly evident in the persistent marginalization of subjugated knowledge (Kincheloe, 2001), which challenges dominant narratives by highlighting erased or minimized histories.

As Iweuno et al. (2024) point out, such exclusionary practices in curriculum design significantly impact student identity formation, fostering feelings of alienation and inferiority among students from underrepresented groups. Additionally, the researchers emphasize that the

absence of diverse perspectives limits all students' opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, as they are exposed to a singular, Eurocentric worldview. This enduring belief in the superiority of Western civilization reinforces a narrow view of history and citizenship, exacerbating systemic inequalities. Moreover, many academic disciplines and educational frameworks remain unaware of, or dismissive of, knowledge sources beyond mainstream Western development, perpetuating curricular biases that hinder the creation of an equitable educational environment (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Iweuno et al. (2024) further highlight that integrating diverse narratives into the curriculum not only improves academic engagement but also fosters inclusivity and challenges systemic inequities rooted in Eurocentrism.

Historical causes, such as the colonial roots of U.S. education, represent deeply embedded societal norms that are challenging to address directly within the scope of this capstone. These norms have institutionalized Eurocentric narratives in curricula, fostering exclusion and systemic biases.

Structural Causes: Racism-White Supremacy

Structural racism and white supremacy are foundational causal factors in this study. These patterns are not neutral; they are rooted in systems of structural racism and white supremacy that have historically shaped whose knowledge is centered, legitimized, and institutionalized within curriculum design and instructional materials. This section provides a more detailed analysis of how these systemic forces sustain the dominance of Eurocentric curricula. Structural factors perpetuate the dominance of Eurocentric curricula through systemic inequities in educational economic funding, assimilationist ideologies, and the social funding of race, creating resistance to change. Funding disparities disproportionately affect schools serving marginalized communities, severely limiting their ability to develop and implement diverse

curricular materials. Darling-Hammond (1999) underscores how inequitable funding leads to gaps in access to quality educational resources—textbooks, laboratory facilities, and culturally inclusive materials—ultimately reinforcing systemic inequities and narrowing educational opportunities for marginalized students.

Economic funding inequities exacerbate disparities in teacher quality and experience, compounding the challenges underfunded schools face in delivering diverse curricula, as Knight (2017) highlights. These resource deficiencies deepen systemic inequalities while simultaneously sustaining Eurocentric educational frameworks. Although the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) endeavors to address these funding disparities, its mechanisms for ensuring equitable resource allocation remain insufficient. Without targeted efforts to close these gaps, marginalized schools are left ill-equipped to challenge the hegemony (leadership or dominance, especially by one social group over others) of Eurocentric curricula and cultivate a more inclusive educational experience.

The structural inequity of assimilationist ideologies supports systemic inequities by devaluing the cultural contributions of marginalized communities and reinforcing the dominant cultural norms (and power dynamic) that sustain the Eurocentric curriculum. Assimilationist ideologies pressure students of color to conform to dominant cultural norms while devaluing their cultural contributions (Gollnick & Chinn, 2024). Iweuno et al. (2024) highlight that this pressure often manifests in curriculum content that prioritizes Eurocentric perspectives and neglects the histories, languages, and cultural practices of marginalized communities. Such an approach not only marginalizes students of color but also invalidates their lived experiences, leading to disengagement and diminished academic self-esteem. These same researchers further argue that assimilationist ideologies contribute to a "hidden curriculum," where implicit

messages about cultural superiority are conveyed through instructional materials and teaching practices. This phenomenon reinforces the notion that success in education requires adopting dominant cultural norms, effectively erasing the value of diverse cultural identities. Additionally, Iweuno et al. (2024) emphasize that this ideology perpetuates structural inequities by restricting the development of inclusive curricula that reflect a plurality of voices. Moreover, passive acceptance of the current curricula discourages independent thinking and perpetuates both conscious and unconscious racial biases, contributing to ongoing racism and discrimination (Howard, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The concept of "funding race," as described by Ladson-Billings (2018), provides a critical lens to examine how societal structures allocate resources and perpetuate inequities. Curricula shaped by these dynamics prioritize dominant cultural norms, marginalizing diverse perspectives and limiting students' ability to critically engage with democratic ideals. Similarly, Dewey's (1916) critique of education as a mechanism for sustaining social hierarchies underscores how the Eurocentric curriculum undermines democratic principles by excluding marginalized voices. Yet these systems often embed dominant cultural narratives and historical perspectives that marginalize or erase the contributions of many racial or ethnic groups. For instance, the Eurocentric curriculum prevalent in many schools frequently overlooks the experiences and contributions of children of color, making them feel invisible within the educational setting (DaCunha, 2016). This omission misrepresents their histories and reinforces the notion that their voices are unimportant, thereby perpetuating systemic inequities (hooks, 1994; Pevec-Zimmer et al., 2024). Consequently, such curricula contribute to the marginalization of students by failing to acknowledge and validate their identities, as noted by Ginwright and James (2002) in their discussion of social justice approaches in education. This erasure reinforces

a racial hierarchy within the educational system and underscores the need for a more inclusive and representative curriculum (Hinnant-Crawford, Lett, & Cromartie, 2023).

The social funding of race is intricately linked to assimilation, as it perpetuates structural inequalities that favor certain groups, typically White immigrants, by facilitating their integration into society while systematically disadvantaging others. This uneven process reinforces dominant cultural norms, limiting the representation of diverse perspectives in education and further entrenching the disparities schools face in less affluent areas. These disparities hinder curricula from reflecting a comprehensive range of historical narratives and cultural viewpoints, thereby reinforcing existing racial biases and maintaining the status quo of unequal assimilation (Gollnick & Chinn, 2024; Ladson-Billings, 2018; Dewey, 1916).

Although bell hooks does not explicitly use the term "funding race," her critique in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) aligns with this idea. hooks examines how educational practices and curricula perpetuate systemic inequalities, including racial biases, and emphasizes the need for education to challenge and transform traditional power structures and racial hierarchies. Her advocacy for a more inclusive and critical pedagogy supports the broader objective of addressing and dismantling the systemic biases encapsulated in the concept of "funding race".

This highlights why funding race poses a significant problem within education. In her work, bell hooks emphasizes how societal structures and norms actively support and sustain the notion of race as a meaningful social category, particularly within educational settings. Her examination of the Eurocentric bias in educational materials aligns with the concept of funding race by showing how curricula often prioritize one group's perspective while marginalizing others (hooks, 1994). Essentially, hooks' perspectives on the interconnectedness of oppression,

the value of diverse viewpoints, and the necessity of inclusive educational approaches resonate with the concept of funding race. This connection underscores how societal structures and educational institutions shape and sustain racial biases, highlighting the need to critically examine and revise curricula to promote equity, inclusivity, and social justice.

Resistance to Curriculum Transformation.

In my causal systems analysis, one of the contributors to the causal factor of racism and white supremacy is the historical resistance to curriculum transformation. Historical examples demonstrate longstanding resistance to diversifying the curriculum and challenging Eurocentric narratives. The *Knight v. Alabama* case (1991) illustrates this resistance. Plaintiffs argued that university curricula marginalized African American perspectives and perpetuated systemic inequities; however, the courts upheld the existing system, citing academic freedom and rejecting mandated curricular reform. This decision demonstrates how legal precedents have often reinforced dominant narratives and limited systemic change.

Contemporary resistance to inclusive curriculum continues through legislative efforts targeting Critical Race Theory (CRT) and related diversity initiatives. CRT examines how racism is embedded in legal systems, policies, and institutional structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Efforts to regulate discussions of race in schools reflect continuing ideological conflicts over curriculum content and the role of education in addressing systemic inequities (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1983).

For example, restrictions on CRT-related instruction in states such as Florida limit classroom discussions of systemic racism and privilege, effectively protecting a Eurocentric narrative that centers European historical achievements while minimizing the experiences of marginalized communities (DaCunha, 2016; Gollnick & Chinn, 2024; Muniz, 2024; Tabron et

al., 2024). Similar policies across multiple states constrain how race and inequality are addressed in public schools, reinforcing dominant historical narratives (Muniz, 2024; Tabron et al., 2024).

These policies have significant implications for student learning. Research demonstrates that culturally responsive curricula promote deeper student engagement, stronger critical thinking skills, and more comprehensive understandings of historical and social issues (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2014). Conversely, limiting discussions of systemic inequities restricts exposure to diverse perspectives and reduces opportunities for inquiry-based learning and civic reasoning (Parker, 2014; Stripling, 2003). Debates surrounding CRT and multicultural education ultimately reflect broader struggles over historical interpretation, national identity, and the role of schooling in democratic societies (Crenshaw, 1991; Sleeter, 2011).

Many scholars argue that efforts to suppress CRT represent attempts to maintain dominant historical narratives while avoiding engagement with systemic inequities (Apple, 2004; Banks, 2015; Gollnick & Chinn, 2024; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Muniz, 2024; Sleeter, 2011). As Tabron et al. (2024) note, legislative efforts to regulate curriculum reflect broader attempts to control historical narratives within public education. Such restrictions limit students' opportunities to critically examine social inequities and historical complexities, ultimately weakening their preparation for democratic participation in a diverse society.

CSA Summary: Implications for Curricular Transformation.

Addressing the structural inequities associated with assimilationist ideologies requires intentional curricular reform that prioritizes inclusivity and cultural responsiveness. Integrating the histories and perspectives of underrepresented groups challenges the dominance of Eurocentric narratives while promoting more accurate and representative historical instruction. Iweuno et al. (2024) argue that an inclusive curriculum fosters equitable learning environments

by validating diverse identities and encouraging critical engagement with history. Exposure to multiple perspectives also strengthens students' critical thinking skills and civic understanding.

Although historical causes of Eurocentrism are deeply embedded within educational systems, structural factors such as assimilationist ideologies present more immediate opportunities for change. Professional learning focused on culturally responsive teaching and critical curriculum analysis can equip educators to identify both explicit and implicit biases within instructional materials. By strengthening educators' capacity to critically examine the curriculum, schools can begin to challenge Eurocentric assumptions and promote more inclusive instructional practices.

This capstone prioritizes these structural factors because they offer feasible entry points for reform within school systems. By supporting educators in analyzing curricular materials for representation gaps and implicit narratives, the study seeks to strengthen educators' ability to adapt instruction, integrate diverse perspectives, and advance more inclusive social studies teaching. In this way, the CSA identifies both the structural causes sustaining Eurocentric curricula and the leverage points necessary for meaningful curriculum transformation.

Collectively, these ideological, policy, capacity, resource, historical, and structural factors interact to produce and sustain a curriculum in which Eurocentric narratives are disproportionately centered, shaping both the design of instructional materials and their enactment in classroom practice. These systemic conditions illustrate that Eurocentric dominance is not incidental, but the result of interconnected structures that influence what is represented in the curriculum and how those narratives are enacted in classroom practice.

Theory of Improvement

Theory About Change

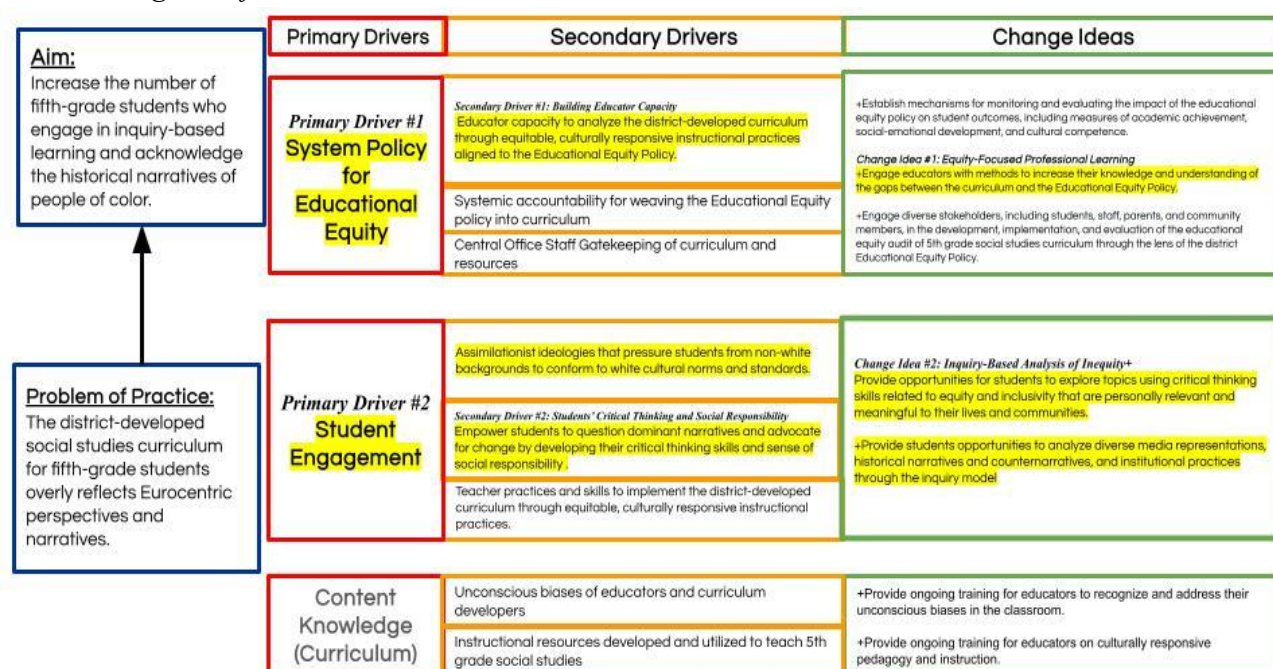
The problem of practice centers on the district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum, which disproportionately reflects Eurocentric perspectives and narratives relative to marginalized groups. My theory of improvement is that if fifth-grade students are provided opportunities to engage in inquiry-based learning that allows them to critically analyze media representations, historical narratives, and institutional practices that perpetuate inequalities and injustice, then they will develop the critical thinking skills and sense of social responsibility necessary to question dominant narratives and pursue the historical narratives of people of color. This will empower them to engage with diverse perspectives, fostering a more inclusive understanding of history and disrupting the Eurocentric bias in the social studies curriculum.

This belief is grounded in constructivist theories of learning, such as Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in learning. Vygotsky asserted that learning is most effective within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students can achieve higher levels of understanding with guidance and collaboration. Through inquiry-based learning, educators act as facilitators, scaffolding students' exploration of complex topics, enabling them to develop critical thinking skills and broaden their understanding of diverse historical perspectives. Inquiry-based learning, as outlined by Stripling (2003), promotes the development of critical thinking skills by encouraging students to question, analyze, and draw conclusions from evidence. Stripling highlights that inquiry-based learning shifts the focus from passive absorption of information to active, student-centered exploration, empowering learners to take ownership of their educational journey. By guiding students to formulate compelling questions and seek evidence-based answers, inquiry-

based learning fosters deeper engagement and a sense of curiosity. This method aligns with the goals of promoting equity in education, as it allows students to explore diverse historical narratives and challenge dominant perspectives. Furthermore, Stripling emphasizes that inquiry creates opportunities for students to connect their personal experiences and cultural backgrounds to their learning, making education more relevant and inclusive.

Figure 2

Driver Diagram of Eurocentric Curriculum



The driver diagram identifies three primary drivers for achieving the aim of disrupting Eurocentric bias in the fifth-grade social studies curriculum: System Policy for Educational Equity, Student Engagement, and Content Knowledge (Curriculum). Together, these drivers address both the structural conditions that shape curriculum development and the instructional practices that influence how students engage with historical narratives. Secondary drivers—including building educator capacity to analyze curriculum through an equity lens, strengthening

students' critical thinking and social responsibility, and examining instructional resources and educator biases embedded within curriculum materials—support these broader goals.

While all three primary drivers contribute to advancing equitable curriculum reform, the Theory of Improvement developed in this capstone focuses primarily on two drivers highlighted in the diagram: System Policy for Educational Equity and Student Engagement. These drivers were prioritized because they represent the most actionable leverage points within the local school and district context. By strengthening educators' ability to align curriculum with equity policy and by increasing opportunities for students to critically engage with diverse historical perspectives, these drivers create conditions that support both inclusive curriculum implementation and meaningful student learning. Together, these interconnected drivers provide a framework for disrupting Eurocentric narratives while empowering both educators and students to engage more critically with historical content.

Aim Statement

Increase the number of fifth-grade students who engage in inquiry-based learning and acknowledge the historical narratives of people of color. To achieve this aim, we must focus on two key primary drivers. The first is the System Policy for Educational Equity, which involves building educators' capacity to critically analyze the district-developed curriculum and implement equitable, culturally responsive instructional practices aligned with the Educational Equity Policy (secondary driver #1). The second is Student Engagement, which requires addressing teacher practices and pedagogical skills that support the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in daily instruction (secondary driver #2).

To move this work forward, two targeted change ideas have emerged. First, we must engage educators in meaningful professional learning that increases their awareness of, and

ability to address, misalignments between the curriculum and the district's equity policy. Second, we must provide students with structured opportunities to examine diverse media representations, historical narratives, and institutional practices through the inquiry model. Together, these strategies will empower both educators and students to disrupt biased narratives and foster a more inclusive and accurate understanding of history.

Primary Driver #1: System Policy for Educational Equity

To realize the aim of increasing the number of fifth-grade students who pursue and acknowledge the historical narratives of people of color, school systems must address the systemic structures that shape curriculum and instruction. A key component of this work involves aligning classroom practice with HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020), which mandates inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive learning environments. This policy underscores the need to close opportunity gaps and ensure all students experience affirming instruction. As research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes, equitable learning outcomes are shaped by teacher practices and curricular choices.

Equity policies must extend beyond aspiration and become embedded in classroom routines. When curriculum centers only on dominant cultural perspectives, it alienates students whose identities are absent, contributing to disengagement and inequity (Gay, 2010). Aligning content with equity-focused policies is a foundational step toward building an inclusive educational system that reflects and respects all students' lived experiences.

Secondary Driver #1: Building Educator Capacity

Educator capacity is central to the successful alignment of curriculum with equity policy. Teachers are the most influential in-school factor for student success, and their ability to identify

and address bias is essential for equitable instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Yet, many have not been prepared to critically evaluate curriculum materials or adjust pedagogy through an equity lens.

Teachers must be equipped to examine whose perspectives are included—and omitted—in historical narratives. In fifth-grade social studies, this includes identifying gaps in representation and understanding how these gaps reinforce dominant ideologies. Without this critical lens, educators may unintentionally perpetuate Eurocentric perspectives that marginalize students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Change Idea #1: Equity-Focused Professional Learning

Ongoing professional learning builds teachers' capacity to assess content critically, amplify marginalized voices, and design affirming instruction. These experiences should be sustained, collaborative, and grounded in research-based frameworks such as Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2010) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Teachers need concrete strategies for practice—tools for examining historical texts, facilitating difficult conversations, and designing lessons that elevate underrepresented narratives. This change idea affirms that shifting practice requires more than awareness; it demands deliberate skill-building and reflective collaboration. When implemented with fidelity, equity-focused professional learning enhances instructional quality and ensures students engage in inclusive, meaningful learning experiences.

Primary Driver #2: Student Engagement

Student engagement is a powerful entry point for addressing Eurocentric bias in the fifth-grade social studies curriculum. Rooted in Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow, engagement emerges when students are immersed in meaningful, challenging tasks that connect

to their identities. Exclusion of diverse perspectives can lead to disengagement, especially when students do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

Conversely, culturally relevant learning fosters motivation and deepens understanding. Prioritizing student engagement enables school leaders and teachers to collaboratively implement inclusive instructional strategies that affirm students' experiences. A focus on engagement also strengthens the school climate by ensuring that students feel seen, valued, and empowered to learn.

Secondary Driver #2: Students' Critical Thinking and Social Responsibility

To challenge the passive acceptance of dominant narratives, students must build the capacity to think critically and act with social awareness. These skills are essential to engaging in meaningful inquiry and becoming informed, responsible citizens. Students will learn to ask compelling questions, evaluate sources, use evidence to support their claims, and communicate their ideas clearly.

This driver prioritizes agency: empowering students to analyze complex issues, question inequities, and recognize their capacity to create change. As students deepen their understanding of diverse perspectives and societal structures, they become better equipped to advocate for justice and equity in their communities and beyond.

Change Idea #2: Inquiry-Based Analysis of Inequity

Students will engage in inquiry-based analysis of media representations, historical narratives, and institutional practices that perpetuate injustice. Through guided investigations, they will examine primary sources, media clips, and historical documents to identify missing or misrepresented perspectives. Classroom discussions and collaborative activities will foster dialogue and promote critical evaluation of dominant narratives.

This approach matters because it shifts students from passive recipients of knowledge to active agents of inquiry. By encouraging exploration, questioning, and critical reflection, students develop not only academic skills but also a sense of responsibility to challenge bias and advocate for change. These experiences cultivate civic awareness and affirm that their voices are essential in shaping a more equitable society.

Research by Ladson-Billings (2018) and hooks (1994) underscores the transformative potential of culturally responsive teaching. When students are encouraged to question, reflect, and act, they gain both the skills and the confidence to pursue social justice throughout their academic and personal lives.

Conclusion: Advancing Equity Through Curriculum and Inquiry

Grounded in the belief that culturally responsive pedagogy and inquiry-based learning are powerful tools for transformation, this Theory of Improvement centers both educator practice and student experience to disrupt Eurocentric bias and promote equity. Central to this work is the intentional use of HCPSS Educational Equity Policy (2020) as a catalyst for curricular reflection and revision. Yet many educators require sustained support to identify the disconnect between district-developed materials and the policy's equity commitments.

Through ongoing professional learning, teachers can build the skills to critically assess curriculum, elevate marginalized voices, and design inclusive instruction. Simultaneously, students will participate in inquiry-based learning that promotes critical thinking and social responsibility. This dual approach ensures that instruction becomes both inclusive and transformative—shaping classrooms where students feel seen, where their histories matter, and where their capacity to contribute to a more just society is affirmed.

This capstone addresses Eurocentric bias in the fifth-grade social studies curriculum through educator empowerment, curriculum analysis, and inquiry-based instruction, which is essential to fostering inclusive civic identity, student engagement, and educational equity.

Section 2: Study Design and Methods

Purpose and Design Overview

This capstone sought to advance equity-centered curriculum reform by critically analyzing district-developed curriculum in relation to Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) Policy 1080: Educational Equity. Policy 1080 functioned as both a conceptual lens and an analytic constraint, defining the boundaries of how the curriculum was interpreted and analyzed. Applying this lens, the study examined structural imbalances in curriculum design and instructional practice, with a focus on representation gaps and Eurocentric narrative framing—specifically, whose voices are centered, whose agency is acknowledged, and how power and progress are constructed within the district’s fifth-grade social studies curriculum, Unit 2: *Our Changing Nation*.

The anticipated impact of addressing these gaps is to enhance student engagement, particularly for students of color, by fostering learning environments in which students’ cultural identities and experiences are affirmed and positioned as assets within the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*, was selected as a focal unit because it represents a high-leverage narrative segment of the curriculum in which foundational national stories—particularly those related to government formation, slavery, and the Civil War—are constructed and reinforced. As such, it serves as a critical site for examining how dominant historical narratives are represented and enacted in alignment with the causal factors identified in the Causal Systems Analysis.

Qualitative research design was employed, incorporating curriculum document analysis and semi-structured interviews with educators. Curriculum materials were analyzed as

institutional artifacts reflecting systemic priorities, assumptions, and power structures embedded in narrative framing, including the centering of historical voices and interpretations (Apple, 2004; Bowen, 2009; Giroux, 1983). Educator interviews elicited how educators interpreted, navigated, and adapted the curriculum in practice. Findings from both phases informed the development of an educator-facing impact product: a low-lift, high-impact curriculum equity framework designed to support inclusive, inquiry-driven instruction aligned with district equity commitments. This framework provides educators with concrete strategies to disrupt Eurocentric narratives through inquiry-based approaches and fosters students' critical thinking, historical agency, and social responsibility by ensuring engagement with multiple historical perspectives, particularly those of people of color.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What gaps in content and representation exist about historically underrepresented and marginalized groups in Grade 5 Social Studies Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*, and how does the curriculum's narrative framing align with the equity standards outlined in HCPSS Policy 1080?
2. How do fifth-grade educators interpret, adapt, and enact *Our Changing Nation* in classroom practice in response to representation gaps and equity expectations?
3. How can findings from Unit 2: *Our Changing Nation* document analysis and educator interviews inform a low-lift, high-impact framework that helps elementary educators identify and address representation gaps through inclusive, equity-aligned instruction?

Researcher Positionality

My identity as a White, middle-class female with nearly thirty years of experience in Howard County's elementary schools shaped my understanding of education, curriculum, and equity. Rooted in a predominantly British and Northwestern European heritage, my professional experiences unfolded within a system that centered Eurocentric narratives—an alignment that afforded me a sense of belonging and legitimacy without requiring me to question whose identities and histories were represented. This positional awareness informed my reflexive stance throughout the study.

Pursuing an EdD in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Maryland, College Park, enhanced my critical perspective and deepened my understanding of how systemic inequities shape educational experiences. Reflexivity was central to this research, requiring continuous examination of how my background, beliefs, and professional role influenced interpretation and analysis (Holmes, 2020). As an administrator, I remained attentive to power dynamics that could affect participant responses. To address this, I implemented strategies such as reflective journaling, member checking, triangulation across data sources, maintaining an analytic audit trail, and clearly separating research activities from evaluative roles to strengthen trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Throughout this study, I approached the analysis with humility and vigilance, aiming to challenge dominant narratives and to contribute to more inclusive curricular and instructional environments in which all students engage with complex and diverse historical perspectives.

Methodological Framework

Qualitative Design Rationale

A qualitative research design was adopted to examine the extent to which equity and representation were present and/or operationalized in both curriculum design and classroom practice. Qualitative methods facilitated in-depth exploration of meaning-making and instructional decision-making rather than producing generalizable findings.

Equity Lens and Policy Anchor

HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020) served as the deductive anchor for the study, offering explicit equity criteria for examining curriculum alignment and identifying representation gaps. This policy-based lens guided document analysis, interview protocol development, and analytic interpretation, ensuring that findings were grounded in district-defined equity commitments rather than external standards.

Trustworthiness and Analytic Rigor

Grounded in qualitative research standards for rigor, this study employed trustworthiness criteria articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure that findings were credible, dependable, and confirmable. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation across curriculum documents and educator interviews, as well as member checking to clarify the accuracy of interpretive claims. Dependability and confirmability were supported by a systematic analytic process that included the consistent application of coding procedures, the maintenance of an analytic audit trail to document analytic decisions, and the evolution of interpretations.

Bowen's (2009) framework for qualitative document analysis guided the first phase of the study by providing a procedural structure for systematically analyzing curriculum materials as institutional artifacts. Document analysis was conducted prior to educator interviews to

examine gaps in representation and narrative framing patterns within the formal curriculum. Bowen's emphasis on careful document selection, iterative review, and analytic reduction supported the trustworthiness of the curriculum findings by ensuring that the findings were transparently derived and grounded in both explicit content and latent meanings related to power, inclusion, and representation.

Saldaña's (2021) qualitative coding methodology was applied to both document and interview data to ensure analytic consistency and rigor. Deductive codes aligned with HCPSS Policy 1080 were applied during document analysis to assess equity alignment, while inductive coding supported the emergence of unanticipated themes related to silencing, agency, and dominant narratives. Analytic memoing accompanied each coding cycle and served as a reflexive tool to document interpretive decisions, category refinement, and evolving analytic insights, thereby contributing to dependability and confirmability. Analytic memos were used to document patterns across coding cycles, support the synthesis of related codes into analytic categories, and guide the development of cross-cutting themes by tracing how meaning was constructed and refined across data sources.

Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) model of qualitative interviewing guided the second phase of the study by informing the design of the interview protocol, ethical safeguards, and the analytic interpretation of interview data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted following document analysis, so that interview prompts could be intentionally aligned with findings from Phase 1, enabling educators to respond directly to identified representation gaps and curricular constraints. Kvale and Brinkmann's emphasis on meaning-making, clarification, and interpretive validity strengthened the credibility of interview findings by foregrounding participants' lived experiences and instructional reasoning rather than treating interviews as confirmatory tools.

Finally, findings from document analysis and educator interviews were integrated through triangulation, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework. Triangulation enabled the examination of convergence and divergence across data sources, thereby strengthening analytic claims about systemic patterns in curriculum and educator responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By integrating Bowen's document analysis, Saldaña's coding procedures, and Kvale and Brinkmann's interview methodology within a trustworthiness-oriented framework, the study ensured that findings were methodologically rigorous, transparently derived, and responsive to issues of power, representation, and equity embedded within curriculum and instructional practice. Methodological decisions were made to balance analytic rigor with applicability for district-based curriculum decision-making.

Methods: Three-Phase Qualitative Design

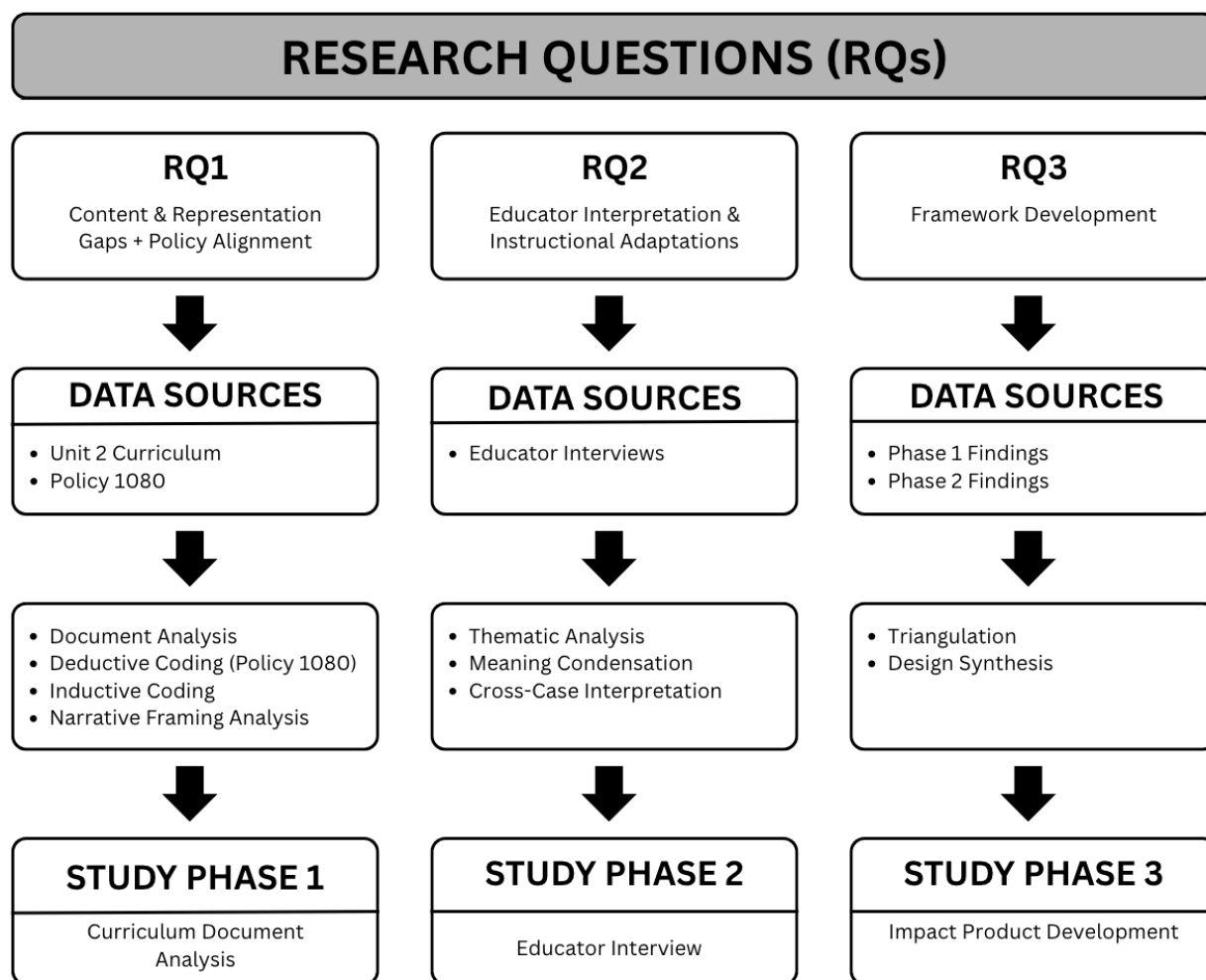
This capstone employed a three-phase qualitative design:

- Document analysis of Unit 2: Our Changing Nation and HCPSS Policy 1080
- Semi-structured interviews with fifth-grade educators
- Development of an EdD impact product informed by triangulated findings

This phased design facilitated a comprehensive examination of both formal curriculum content and its classroom enactment.

Figure 3

Alignment of Research Questions, Data Sources, Analytic Methods, and Study Phases



The study began with an analysis of curriculum documents to identify gaps in representation and in narrative framing patterns. Findings from Phase 1 then informed the design and focus of educator interviews. After completing the interviews, results from both phases were synthesized through triangulation to guide the development of the Phase 3 impact product.

Curriculum documents were requested under the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) following proposal approval in Summer 2025. Document analysis occurred between August and November 2025, including multiple iterative coding cycles and the writing of analytic memos. Semi-structured educator interviews were conducted in the first week of January 2026, following completion of Phase 1 document analysis and initial coding to align

document findings with interview prompts. Triangulation and cross-phase synthesis were conducted following the analysis of interviews and directly informed the development of the Curriculum Equity Framework in February 2026.

Phase 1: Curriculum Document Analysis

Data Sources and Scope. Phase 1 involved qualitative document analysis of the HCPSS fifth-grade social studies curriculum, Unit 2: Our Changing Nation, in conjunction with HCPSS Policy 1080. The document corpus consisted of eight district-developed lessons from Unit 2, including lesson plans, instructional resources, and student tasks, analyzed alongside HCPSS Policy 1080. A complete list of curriculum documents (document corpus) included in Phase 1 is provided in Appendix D. Curriculum materials were obtained through a Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) request following proposal approval, and document analysis was conducted between August and November 2025. Conducting document analysis prior to educator interviews allowed emergent findings to directly inform interview design and analytic focus.

Phase 1 examined eight district-developed lessons within Unit 2: Our Changing Nation. Each lesson served as the primary unit of analysis, including associated lesson plans, instructional resources, guiding questions, and student tasks obtained through an MPIA request.

Conceptual Focus: Content and Narrative Framing. This analysis examined curriculum representation across two interrelated dimensions:

Content (the what) refers to the inclusion or omission of historical events, individuals, groups, and contributions. Content analysis assessed the visibility of historically underrepresented groups and the breadth and depth of the included perspectives.

Narrative framing (the how) refers to how historical content is constructed and communicated, including whose voices are centered, whose agency is acknowledged, and how

power, resistance, and progress are portrayed. Narrative framing shapes students' understanding of belonging, identity, and historical causality and may reinforce or disrupt dominant Eurocentric narratives. Representation gaps were defined as omissions, marginalization, superficial inclusion, or framing that diminished the agency or complexity of historically underrepresented groups.

Procedures. A consistent document analysis protocol (Appendix F) was applied systematically across all curriculum materials. First, documents were reviewed in full to establish familiarity with the content scope and sequencing. Deductive codes aligned with HCPSS Policy 1080 and inductive codes capturing emergent themes were then applied using a policy-aligned coding framework (Appendix G). Deductive coding aligned to Policy 1080 was applied during the first analytic cycle to examine equity alignment. Inductive coding was introduced in subsequent cycles to surface emergent themes related to dominant narratives, silencing, agency, and tokenism. To enhance analytic clarity, tokenism was translated into analytic interpretations using specific indicators, including the superficial inclusion of historically underrepresented groups without substantive context or agency. For example, a coding cue for tokenism included instances in which marginalized groups were referenced briefly but played no meaningful role in the historical narrative.

Analytic Approach. Document analysis followed Bowen's (2009) framework for qualitative document analysis and Saldaña's (2021) iterative coding procedures. Phase 1 analysis was conducted using NVivo qualitative data analysis software to support the systematic application of deductive and inductive coding to district-developed curriculum materials. Curriculum documents for Unit 2: Our Changing Nation and HCPSS Policy 1080 were imported into NVivo and treated as individual sources, with each lesson serving as the primary unit of analysis. Analysis progressed through multiple cycles of deductive and inductive coding to

examine content inclusion, narrative framing, and patterns of omission or marginalization. Deductive codes were derived from HCPSS Policy 1080 equity criteria (Appendix E) and applied to examine equity alignment across curriculum content and narrative framing, including representation, voice, agency, and the presence of equity alignment or gaps. Deductive and inductive codes were translated into analytic interpretations using a structured codebook grounded in Policy 1080, applied iteratively across analytic cycles (Appendix G). A representative excerpt of the Phase 1 codebook is provided alongside the full coding framework to illustrate code-guided analytic interpretation while maintaining analytic transparency (Appendix G, Table G2). These policy-anchored codes ensured analytic consistency across documents. Subsequent inductive coding cycles captured emergent themes related to dominant Eurocentric narrative framing, silencing, marginalization, and superficial inclusion. A detailed, step-by-step document analysis protocol is provided in Appendix F to support analytic transparency and replicability. Analytic memos were written after each coding cycle to document interpretive decisions, emergent questions, and category refinement. NVivo supported analytical rigor by enabling consistent application of codes, hierarchical code organization, and systematic comparison across lessons, while memoing and codebook revisions were documented to maintain a transparent analytic audit trail (Appendices F–H). While NVivo functioned as an analytic management and organizational tool that supported—but did not replace—the researcher’s analytic judgment, all interpretive determinations regarding representation, narrative framing, and equity alignment were guided by Policy 1080, Bowen’s (2009) document analysis framework, and Saldaña’s (2021) qualitative coding methodology. In this way, the curriculum was analyzed as a contextualized, meaning-laden institutional artifact rather than a neutral

instructional text. Trustworthiness in Phase 1 was supported by the consistent application of the policy-aligned coding framework (Appendix G) and the maintenance of an analytic audit trail.

Phase 2: Educator Interviews

Phase 2 included semi-structured interviews with five fifth-grade educators who taught Our Changing Nation.

Interview Procedures and Selection Process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a non-evaluative climate, consistent with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) guidance on ethical interview practice. All five interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted via Zoom outside of school settings and contractual working hours. Participants were reminded that participation was voluntary, confidential, and unrelated to evaluation or employment status. Interviews were audio-recorded using Otter.ai with informed consent and transcribed for analysis (Appendices I–K). All interviews followed a consistent semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix J), applied across participants to ensure procedural consistency while allowing for participant-driven elaboration and clarification.

A combination of purposeful and random sampling was used to select five fifth-grade social studies educators in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), each responsible for teaching the required "Our Changing Nation" (Unit 2) curriculum. This approach ensured that participants were well-positioned to address questions about content, framing, and instructional implementation. In coordination with HCPSS research staff, ten of the district's forty-two elementary schools were invited to participate. Fulton Elementary was excluded to avoid conflicts of interest, as the researcher served as principal at that site. Centennial Lane Elementary, the researcher's former school, was intentionally included due to its prior participation in equity-focused professional learning initiatives. The remaining nine schools were

selected at random using an electronic wheel picker, yielding a sample that represented geographic diversity, varied in school size (approximately 450 to 950 students), and included two Title I schools. Invitations were extended to 46 fifth-grade educators across 10 schools; 9 responded. This response rate may limit the extent to which participant perspectives represent the broader population of fifth-grade educators and may reflect self-selection among educators with interests or experiences related to curriculum equity. Consistent with the recruitment protocol, the first five respondents were selected for participation, including one educator from Centennial Lane Elementary and four educators from four different schools across the district. One of the selected participants from Centennial Lane Elementary had previously collaborated with the researcher on curriculum equity work between 2019 and 2025. The potential analytic value of this participant's experience was weighed against the need to maintain methodological objectivity. Although multiple Centennial Lane educators received invitations, no educators from that site were prioritized for selection beyond response order, and participation was limited to the first five respondents. The five interviewees represented a broad range of professional experience, from two to twenty-nine years in HCPSS, and included both veteran educators and those new to the profession. Two had served as team leaders, and one had taught fifth grade for all fourteen years of their career. This diversity of backgrounds and expertise contributed to both experienced and emerging perspectives on curriculum implementation.

The sample consisted of five fifth-grade educators with varied levels of teaching experience and instructional perspectives, all of whom were responsible for implementing Unit 2 within the same district context. It is important to note that these participants were educators willing to be interviewed by a school-based administrator within their system, which may reflect a degree of professional openness or alignment with district expectations and may have

influenced both their willingness to participate and the nature of their responses. Additionally, the participant sample did not include strong dissenting perspectives, which may limit the extent to which this study captures a broader range of viewpoints, particularly those that challenge or resist equity-centered curriculum shifts.

This pattern may also reflect the broader sociopolitical and historical context of the study setting. The district includes communities such as Columbia, Maryland, a planned community developed by the Rouse Company with an explicit vision of racial, socioeconomic, and religious integration (Columbia Association, n.d.). This emphasis on inclusion and community cohesion has contributed to a local context often characterized as more politically progressive than many other regions of the United States, which may further shape educators' perspectives on equity-focused curricular initiatives and reduce the presence of strongly dissenting viewpoints.

All participants contributed experience relevant to teaching fifth-grade students and implementing the *Our Changing Nation* curriculum. Their perspectives were essential for addressing the study's central research questions on the enactment of equity principles in district-developed curricula. As Saldaña (2021) contends, educators familiar with equity frameworks are well-positioned to illuminate the connections between systemic goals and daily classroom practice.

Table 2

Educator Participant Overview

Participant	Total Years in Education (HCPSS)	Years Teaching Grade 5	School Context (as described by the interviewee)
Interviewee 1	25 years	3 years	High-enrollment elementary school (more than 600 students) with a high population of multilingual learners
Interviewee 2	29 years	5 years	Title I elementary school with approximately 600 students serving a racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse community

Participant	Total Years in Education (HCPSS)	Years Teaching Grade 5	School Context (as described by the interviewee)
Interviewee 3	14 years	14 years	High-enrollment elementary school (more than 600 students)
Interviewee 4	2 years	2 years	Title I elementary school with fewer than 400 students, with a large population of Spanish-speaking students
Interviewee 5	4 years	3 years	High-enrollment elementary school (more than 600 students)

All participants identified as female; four identified as White and one as Jewish. As the study focused on how educators interpret and respond to curriculum, sampling prioritized in-depth perspectives and analytic saturation over statistical generalization. Participants had 2-29 years of total teaching experience, including 2-14 years of fifth-grade teaching. Educators taught in diverse school contexts, including high-enrollment elementary schools, Title I schools of varying sizes, and schools with significant populations of multilingual learners.

Participants reported varying levels of prior professional learning related to equity and culturally responsive teaching. One educator participated in equity-focused professional learning facilitated by the researcher and reported moderate confidence in culturally responsive instructional practices. The other four educators had minimal exposure to equity-focused professional learning, primarily through district-provided sessions. Of these, three reported limited confidence in their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching, while one reported no confidence. These self-reported differences in professional learning exposure and confidence provided important context for interpreting how educators navigated gaps in curriculum representation and made instructional decisions, without serving as evaluative measures of individual practice.

Educator interviews were audio-recorded and initially transcribed using Otter.ai to support efficient and consistent preparation of interview data for analysis. Transcripts were

reviewed in full by the researcher, corrected for accuracy, and cleaned prior to being imported into ATLAS.ti for analysis, consistent with qualitative research standards that recognize transcription as an interpretive act requiring researcher oversight. Otter.ai functioned solely as a technical recording and transcription support tool; all analytic decisions—including meaning unit identification, coding, interpretation, and verification—were guided by Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2015) interview methodology and remained the researcher’s responsibility.

Analytic Approach. Interview analysis followed a step-by-step thematic coding process aligned with Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2015) framework, emphasizing meaning condensation and cross-case interpretation. The purpose of the interviews was to surface how educators interpreted representation gaps, navigated curricular constraints, and enacted instructional adaptations in practice. Analysis progressed from transcript familiarization to identification of meaning units, meaning condensation, categorization, and synthesis across participants (Appendices L–M).

Analysis also attended to both the frequency and intensity of patterns across interviews. Intensity was examined using systematic affective coding procedures detailed in Appendix M (Table M1), including attention to emotional qualifiers, evaluative phrasing, repetition within interviews, and references to professional risk (Saldaña, 2021). Intensity levels were assigned using criteria specified in Appendix M (Table M2), distinguishing Low, Moderate, Moderate–High, and High expressions based on linguistic indicators such as anxiety markers (“afraid,” “nervous”), cautionary phrasing (“dicey,” “stay away from”), evaluative critique, and repeated references to institutional vulnerability.

The step-by-step interview analysis outlined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) was conducted using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software to support systematic organization, transparency, and analytic rigor. ATLAS.ti was used to manage and organize the five cleaned

educator interview transcripts, with each interview serving as the primary unit of analysis; to facilitate the identification and coding of meaning units across deductive and inductive analytic cycles; and to support the processes of meaning condensation, categorization, and cross-case comparison described by Kvale and Brinkmann. Analytic memos were recorded within ATLAS.ti at multiple stages of analysis to document interpretive decisions, evolving understandings, and category refinement. While ATLAS.ti supported the technical management and retrieval of coded data, all analytic decisions—including interpretation, meaning construction, and verification—were guided by Kvale and Brinkmann’s conceptual framework and remained the researcher’s responsibility. In this way, ATLAS.ti functioned as an analytic support tool that operationalized, rather than replaced, the interpretive interview analysis process.

Key Analytic Categories. Educator perceptions of inclusivity and content representation Instructional adaptations and supplemental resources Culturally responsive and inquiry-based teaching practices Systemic and institutional constraints shaping implementation Interviews with five fifth-grade educators revealed recurring patterns and themes related to curriculum representation, instructional adaptations, and systemic constraints. Thematic saturation was achieved when no new analytic categories emerged, indicating that the data were sufficient to address the study’s research questions. This approach aligns with Saldaña’s (2021) conceptualization of saturation as the stabilization of codes and categories during iterative qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis and Triangulation. NVivo and ATLAS.ti were intentionally used in different phases of this EdD study to align analytic tools with the applied purposes and data types of each phase. NVivo supported systematic, policy-anchored analysis of district curriculum materials, while ATLAS.ti supported interpretive analysis of educator interviews grounded in

Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) framework; across both phases, analytic rigor was maintained through consistent coding procedures, reflexive memoing, and researcher-led interpretation in service of a practical, equity-aligned impact product.

Findings from document analysis and educator interviews were triangulated to enhance credibility and analytic depth. This process examined alignment and divergence among curriculum content, educator perspectives, instructional practices, and the expectations outlined in HCPSS Policy 1080. Analytic decisions prioritized themes that appeared consistently across both curriculum documents and educator interviews, as these convergent findings indicated systemic patterns in content representation and instructional practice. Analytically salient findings from a single data source were also retained when they provided meaningful insight into curriculum limitations or demonstrated educators' agency in adapting instruction. This approach ensured that findings reflected both structural conditions and lived classroom experiences. Triangulation was further supported through reflexive journaling, member checking, and careful documentation of analytic decisions. Cross-phase triangulation is illustrated in Appendix J, Table J1.

Phase 3: Impact Product Development

Phase 3 synthesized findings from curriculum document analysis and semi-structured interviews with educators to inform the development of an educator-facing impact product aligned with district equity commitments. Findings from Phases 1 and 2 were examined through triangulation, with representation gaps consistently evident across both data sources prioritized in the framework. Strong single-source findings were also included when they illuminated structural constraints or instructional decision-making. These synthesized insights guided the design of a low-lift, high-impact Curriculum Equity Framework to support elementary educators

in identifying and addressing representation gaps through inclusive, inquiry-driven instructional practices consistent with HCPSS Policy 1080. Consistent with the aims of an EdD, Research Question 3 is intentionally design-oriented rather than evaluative, focusing on how triangulated findings can be translated into a practical, educator-facing framework, rather than on assessing the effectiveness or outcomes of implementation. The full Curriculum Equity Framework is presented in Appendix O.

Methodological Rigor and Trustworthiness

Multiple strategies were employed throughout the study to ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness, including triangulation across data sources, member checking, consistent application of analytic procedures, and maintenance of an audit trail. Analytic memoing supported confirmability by documenting interpretive decisions and monitoring researcher bias. Collectively, these strategies ensured that findings were transparently derived, grounded in the data, and aligned with HCPSS Policy 1080.

Section 3: Findings and Interpretations

Scope and Boundaries of Findings

The findings reported in this chapter describe patterns in curriculum design, representation, and narrative framing, as well as educators' instructional reasoning in Grade 5 Social Studies Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*. Findings focus on how equity-related features are structured within required curriculum materials and how educators interpret and navigate those structures in practice. Across representation, narrative framing, and instructional enactment, findings consistently indicate that Eurocentric perspectives function as the structural default, while marginalized perspectives are incorporated in limited, episodic, and often supplemental ways.

Phase 1 Findings: Curriculum Document Analysis

Research Question 1

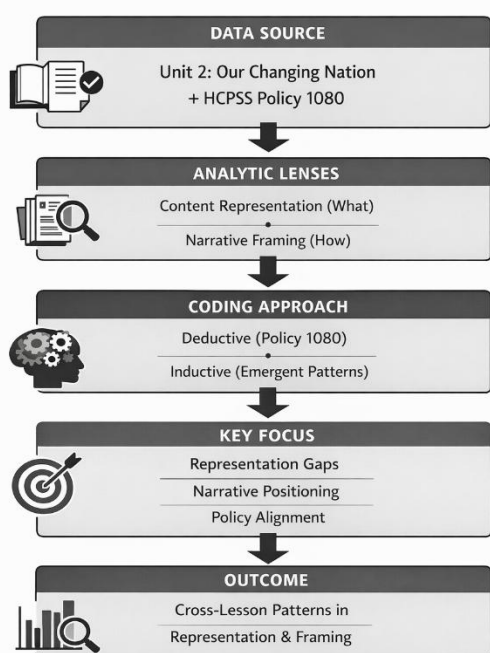
What gaps in content and representation exist about historically underrepresented and marginalized groups in Grade 5 Social Studies Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*, and how does the curriculum's narrative framing align with the equity standards outlined in HCPSS Policy 1080?

For analytic precision, this study uses *historically marginalized* to refer to communities structurally positioned through systems of racialized, gendered, and political exclusion, and *historically underrepresented* to refer specifically to patterns of curricular presence or absence. While related, the former reflects structural positioning, and the latter reflects representational distribution within instructional materials.

Phase 1 Analytic Overview

Figure 4

Phase 1 Framework for Examining Representation and Narrative Framing



Examines both what is taught and how it is framed.

Note. This figure illustrates the analytic framework guiding Phase 1, including the data sources, analytic lenses (content representation and narrative framing), coding approach (deductive and inductive), and key focal areas used to identify cross-lesson patterns in representation, framing, and policy alignment.

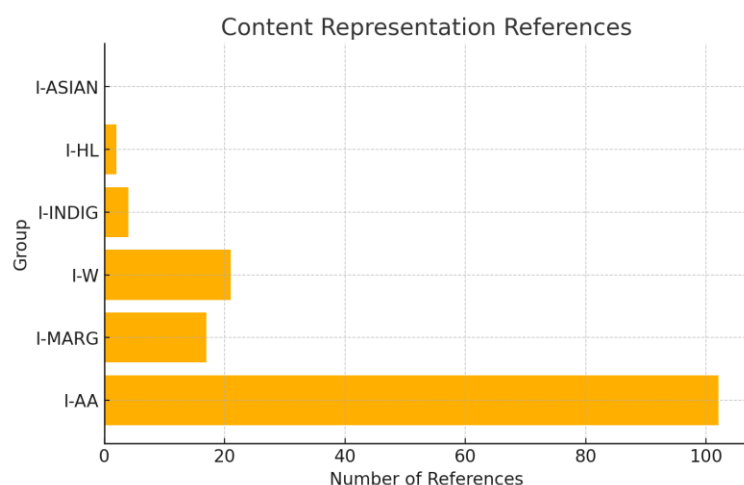
As shown in Figure 4, Phase 1 analysis examined both what is represented and how historical narratives are constructed, using deductive and inductive coding to identify cross-lesson patterns in content representation, narrative framing, and alignment with HCPSS Policy 1080. These findings document how equity is structured within the curriculum—not only through the presence or absence of particular perspectives, but through the ways in which historical meaning, agency, and power are organized across lessons and instructional tasks.

Content Representation

Figure 5 displays the aggregate frequency of deductive content representation codes across the unit. African American perspectives account for most coded references, while other historically underrepresented groups appear far less frequently.

Figure 5

Frequency of Content Representation References by Identity Group in Grade 5 Unit 2



Note. Frequencies represent the number of coded references to groups identified through deductive content representation codes during Phase 1 document analysis.

Note. Deductive Coding: Representing the Inclusion of I-AA (African American), I-W (Women), I-INDIG (Indigenous Peoples), I-H/L(Hispanic/Latine), I-ASIAN, I-MARG (Other Marginalized peoples not already named).

Table 3

Frequency of Identity Representation in Grade 5 Unit 2: Our Changing Nation

Coding rules were applied as follows:

0 = not present

1 = present (mentioned or implicit)

2 = present and instructional focus (required reading and/or required task requiring engagement beyond mention)

Lesson	African American (I-AA)	Indigenous (I-INDIG)	Asian American (I-ASIAN)	Hispanic/ Latine (I-H/L)	Women (I-W)	Other Marginalized / Intersectional (I-MARG)
L1 – Beginning Anchor	1	0	0	0	0	0
L2 – Abolitionists	2	0	0	0	1	1
L3 – Road to Civil War	1	1*	0	0	0	0

Lesson	African American (I-AA)	Indigenous (I-INDIG)	Asian American (I-ASIAN)	Hispanic/ Latine (I-H/L)	Women (I-W)	Other Marginalized / Intersectional (I-MARG)
L4 – Maryland’s Location	1	0	0	0	0	0
L5 – Effects of the Civil War	2	0	0	0	1	1
L6 – Maryland in the 19th Century	1	0	1	1	0	1
L7 – Reconstruction Amendments	2	0	0	0	1	1
L8 – Ending Anchor	1	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Full coding definitions and procedures are provided in Appendices F and G.

Across the eight lessons, African American perspectives are the only historically marginalized identity group present in all lessons (8/8), while Indigenous perspectives appear in only one lesson (1/8), and Asian American and Hispanic/Latine perspectives appear in only one lesson each (1/8), without sustained instructional focus. Women’s perspectives and other marginalized identities appear in three lessons (3/8) but are not consistently positioned as central to required instructional tasks. This distribution demonstrates a clear disparity in both frequency and instructional emphasis across identity groups. Mentions of Indigenous peoples (I-INDIG) occur in a single lesson (Lesson 3) and are limited to indirect constitutional language (“Indians not taxed”), without contextual explanation or Indigenous-authored materials. Asian American (I-ASIAN) and Hispanic/Latine (I-H/L) perspectives appear only in Lesson 6 and are presented through a generalized immigration framing rather than through historically situated narratives. By *historically situated narratives*, I refer to accounts that embed communities within specific political, economic, and social contexts—identifying the policies, power structures, resistance movements, and lived experiences that shaped their historical trajectories. Women’s contributions (I-W) and other marginalized or intersectional identities (I-MARG) appear in three lessons but are consistently coded as present rather than as instructional focal points.

Across lessons, institutional actors—most often represented by white male figures in roles such as government officials, policymakers, plantation owners, or enslavers—drive the narrative in 100% of lessons. This pattern reflects a consistent centering of white men as the primary agents of historical change within the curriculum’s narrative structure, while the perspectives and agency of historically marginalized groups appear less consistently and are more often positioned as secondary or episodic.

As shown in Table 4 below, government, settler, and institutional actors—predominantly represented through white male figures in roles such as government leaders, policymakers, plantation owners, and enslavers—dominate the narrative across all lessons, reinforcing a pattern in which historical change is consistently attributed to institutional systems rather than to the sustained agency of historically marginalized groups.

Table 4

Narrative Dominance Across Lessons in Grade 5 Unit 2

Lesson	Dominant Narrative Agent	Evidence of Narrative Framing	Level of Dominance
L1 – Beginning Anchor	Government / Founding Structures	Framing of nation-building through foundational systems and structures	High
L2 – Abolitionists	Government / Legal Systems	Emphasis on laws and institutional change alongside individual actors	High
L3 – Road to Civil War	Government / Political Conflict	Focus on legislative conflict and national division	High
L4 – Maryland’s Location	Geographic / Economic Systems	Framing of state significance through economic and strategic positioning	High
L5 – Effects of the Civil War	Government / Reconstruction Policies	Emphasis on policy decisions and institutional rebuilding	High
L6 – Maryland in the 19th Century	Economic / Institutional Systems	Focus on development through systems and structures	High

Note. Narrative dominance was identified through analysis of lesson framing, essential questions, and required tasks, rather than frequency coding. Government, settler, and institutional figures are represented through white male perspectives within the curriculum materials.

This pattern of narrative dominance aligns with the causal systems analysis, which identifies structural racism and white supremacy as underlying forces that shape whose knowledge is centered and legitimized within curriculum design and instructional materials.

Table 3 disaggregates representation by lesson to examine how identity groups are distributed across the unit. The analysis demonstrates that representation is not evenly distributed, but systematically disproportionate. References to historically marginalized groups are concentrated within specific lessons rather than consistently integrated across the unit.

Although African American perspectives appear in each lesson, sustained instructional focus (coded as 2) occurs primarily within lessons addressing abolition, the effects of the Civil War, and Reconstruction. This concentration reflects context-bound inclusion rather than distributed representation across the broader historical narrative. In contrast, other historically marginalized groups—including Indigenous, Asian American, Hispanic/Latine, and women's perspectives—appear infrequently and without continuity across lessons and are rarely positioned as central to the instructional focus.

Across the unit, Eurocentric perspectives appear more frequently and with greater instructional emphasis, functioning as the dominant narrative throughline. Marginalized perspectives, when included, are most often presented at a surface level or within isolated contexts rather than as sustained contributors to historical understanding. Taken together, these patterns indicate a clear disproportionality in representation, in which Eurocentric narratives are consistently prioritized while the perspectives of historically marginalized groups remain limited, episodic, and insufficiently integrated across the unit.

Table 3 and Table 4 demonstrate that disproportionality operates not only through frequency of representation but through the consistent positioning of institutional actors as the

primary drivers of historical change. Figure 5 and Table 3 demonstrate uneven patterns of content representation across Unit 2, with African American history receiving the most frequent attention and other identity groups appearing sporadically or indirectly.

To examine how these representation patterns extend to historical authority, Table 5 analyzes the use of primary sources by identity groups. This table summarizes the presence of primary source materials by identity groups using a deductive coding framework aligned to HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity.

Table 5

Frequency of Primary Source Use by Identity Group in Unit 2: Our Changing Nation

Identity Group	Primary Sources Present	Description
African American	Low–Moderate	Appears in isolated lessons; often supplemental
Indigenous	None	Referenced indirectly
Asian American	None	None
Hispanic / Latine	None	None
Women (all groups)	Low	Named figures appear

Analysis of primary source materials reveals additional disparities. Institutional and government-authored texts—such as constitutional excerpts, amendments, laws, and economic data—dominate the unit and function as the primary sources of historical authority. Primary sources authored by African Americans appear infrequently and are concentrated within a small number of lessons, most notably those focused on abolition and Reconstruction. No Indigenous-authored primary sources are included, and Asian American and Hispanic/Latine perspectives are absent from historical primary texts. Women’s voices appear only minimally through named figures, with limited direct sourcing.

Taken together, Phase 1 deductive content representation findings indicate that Unit 2 incorporates historically underrepresented groups unevenly across lessons, with inclusion

concentrated in a limited set of topics and instructional moments rather than being distributed consistently throughout the unit. African American perspectives appear most frequently—particularly in lessons addressing enslavement, abolition, and Reconstruction—while Indigenous, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latine perspectives appear infrequently, indirectly, or without sustained instructional emphasis. Primary source analysis further indicates that institutional and government-authored texts function as dominant sources of historical authority, constraining consistent access to first-person or contemporaneous perspectives from marginalized communities. Collectively, these patterns reflect concentrated inclusion rather than unit-wide representational integration within the required curriculum materials.

Narrative Framing

Narrative framing analysis describes how historical narratives are constructed across Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*, including whose perspectives are centered, how historical change is explained, and how agency, power, and responsibility are positioned within required curriculum materials. Narrative framing analysis documents the alignment and gaps between the required curriculum narratives and the Policy 1080 criteria across lessons and tasks.

Across Unit 2, deductive coding indicates consistent narrative framing patterns across lessons rather than isolated variation at the lesson level. Historical change is most frequently framed through institutions, legal structures, and economic systems as primary explanatory agents. Government documents, constitutional provisions, geographic positioning, and economic outcomes function as dominant narrative mechanisms, while the lived experiences, resistance, and decision-making of historically marginalized communities receive uneven narrative emphasis. As a result, historical change is more often represented as institutional progression than as the outcome of sustained collective action, struggle, or resistance. For example, in Lesson

3, constitutional language—specifically the phrase “Indians not taxed”—is presented as part of a structural explanation of representation. Yet, the lesson does not contextualize the clause's sovereignty implications or include Indigenous-authored perspectives, positioning Indigenous peoples as constitutional figures rather than political decision-makers. In Lesson 6, immigration is framed primarily in terms of economic opportunity and geographic settlement patterns, emphasizing labor markets and demographic shifts while offering limited analysis of exclusionary policies or organized resistance. In Lesson 8, the unit’s culminating lesson, essential questions such as “How did our government meet the challenges of a changing nation?” and “What were the promises and realities of the Civil War Amendments?” center governmental response and constitutional reform as primary drivers of historical change. Although abolitionists and formerly enslaved individuals are referenced, the synthesis positions legislative action and federal amendments as the dominant explanatory mechanisms, rather than sustained Black resistance, grassroots organizing, or community-led reconstruction efforts.

Institution-centered narrative framing is particularly evident in lessons emphasizing constitutional and institutional analysis. In Lesson 3 (Civil War Causes), constitutional clauses such as the Three-Fifths Compromise and the Fugitive Slave Clause serve as central narrative anchors (P-ALIGN). Indigenous peoples appear only indirectly through constitutional language such as “Indians not taxed,” without narrative development related to sovereignty, displacement, or lived experience (P-GAP). Within this framing, institutions are positioned as primary drivers of historical change, while Indigenous communities are narratively absent as agents.

Narrative sequencing further reinforces this pattern. In Lesson 5 (Impact of the Civil War), the lesson opens with an image of a burned plantation. It prompts students to consider the economic loss experienced by plantation owners, placing White economic impact first in the

narrative sequence before addressing the experiences of newly freed people. While the lesson later includes Reconstruction-era inequities—such as Black Codes, segregation, racial violence, and Black political participation (P-ALIGN)—initial narrative emphasis prioritizes institutional and economic recovery. Language describing “devastation” focuses on White economic outcomes without explicitly naming the dismantling of an enslaved labor system as the source of those losses (P-GAP).

Similar framing patterns appear in Lesson 4 (Maryland as a Border State), where geography and economic strategy organize the historical account. While this approach supports systems-level analysis (P-ALIGN), narrative attention to the experiences of enslaved people, free Black communities, or dissenters within Maryland is limited within the lesson’s required materials (P-GAP). Historical change is framed primarily through spatial and economic considerations rather than through human action or resistance.

Immigration narratives in Lesson 6 (Immigration and Industrialization) further illustrate this pattern. Immigration is introduced through institutional entry points such as Ellis Island, Angel Island, and Locust Point (P-ALIGN). Narrative emphasis centers on arrival experiences, while exclusionary policies, racial hierarchies, and differential access to opportunity are not consistently positioned as central explanatory forces (P-GAP). As a result, immigration is framed primarily as a demographic process—characterized by population movement, numerical growth, and settlement patterns—rather than as a contested historical phenomenon shaped by power, policy, and exclusion. Without sustained attention to the regulation of policies and power structures, immigration appears neutral or inevitable.

Equity-aligned narrative framing is most visible in abolition-focused lessons and select supplemental texts, representing localized instances of P-ALIGN rather than a consistent

narrative pattern across the unit. Lesson 2 Abolition and the Abolitionist Strategies frames abolition as collective action, positioning Black abolitionists and allies as advocates, strategists, and civic figures engaged in protest, writing, and public service (P-ALIGN). In these contexts, resistance and agency are explicitly named and sustained within the narrative. However, this framing remains confined to abolition-specific content and is not consistently extended to lessons on economics, governance, or state development (P-GAP).

Supplemental materials, particularly the Facing History text *“He Was Always Right and You Were Always Wrong,”* present a contrasting narrative approach by centering the voice of a formerly enslaved person and documenting sharecropping as systemic economic exploitation (P-ALIGN). While this text foregrounds lived experience and structural harm, required curriculum materials do not consistently specify analytic tasks that extend individual experience to broader systems or policy-level analysis, resulting in a constrained narrative scope (P-GAP).

Language choices further shape narrative construction. Euphemistic or neutralized terms such as “conflicts over slavery,” “job competition,” and Reconstruction-era labels such as “carpetbaggers” can obscure power relations and responsibility when used without explicit contextualization. When such terms appear without qualifying language that names racialized harm and the institutions and decision-making forces responsible for it, the narrative can reduce the clarity with which injustice, accountability, and structural inequity are represented. In these instances, historical processes may appear as interpersonal disagreements or economic inevitabilities rather than as outcomes of deliberate policy decisions, organized resistance, and sustained systems of racialized power.

In sum, deductive narrative framing findings indicate that Unit 2 most often explains historical change through institutional progression—government actions, legal structures, and

economic systems—while the lived experiences, resistance, and decision-making of historically marginalized communities receive uneven narrative emphasis across lessons. This framing pattern establishes the analytic foundation for the inductive themes that follow, which interpret how recurring structural features (e.g., source selection, sequencing, and task expectations) stabilize institutional authority as the dominant narrative logic and constrain sustained agency-centered historical interpretation. See Appendix E for the Policy 1080 equity criteria crosswalk and Appendix H for coded policy-alignment evidence by lesson.

Policy Alignment with HCPSS Policy 1080

HCPSS Policy 1080 was intentionally established as the deductive analytic anchor for Phase 1 document analysis; alignment judgments were therefore embedded throughout the examination of content representation and narrative framing. Instances of alignment (P-ALIGN) and misalignment (P-GAP) were identified concurrently as curriculum materials were analyzed for inclusion, agency, and the positioning of power and historical change. The preceding section presented lesson-level illustrations of these coded findings. This section synthesizes those patterns across Unit 2 to evaluate the degree of structural alignment with the explicit equity commitments articulated in HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity (2020). Findings indicate systemic partial alignment with Policy 1080 across Unit 2, with both alignment (P-ALIGN) and gaps (P-GAP) evident across lessons and supporting materials.

Across the unit, several lesson structures align with Policy 1080’s expectations for student voice, civic reasoning, and inquiry. Lesson 1 (Beginning Anchor) and Lesson 8 (Ending Anchor) include deliberative discussion routines that require students to justify claims, weigh evidence, and engage in public reasoning (P-ALIGN). Lesson 3 (Civil War Causes) similarly positions students as analysts of constitutional language and institutional conflict through

synthesis tasks that require them to evaluate competing claims (P-ALIGN). These participation structures recur across the unit as a consistent design feature.

Targeted lesson content also demonstrates alignment by explicitly connecting historically marginalized perspectives to systems and policies. Lessons focused on abolition and Reconstruction include attention to enslavement, abolitionist organizing, and post-Civil War conditions. The Abolitionist Strategies lesson positions Black abolitionists and women abolitionists as intellectual and civic figures (P-ALIGN). Lesson 5 (Impact of the Civil War) explicitly names Reconstruction-era inequities, including Black Codes, segregation, racial violence, and Black political participation (P-ALIGN). Lesson 7 supporting materials address Reconstruction Amendments and systemic barriers (P-ALIGN). Collectively, these lessons demonstrate that equity-relevant content appears within the unit and is, in several cases, linked to formal policy and legal structures.

At the same time, alignment is constrained by variation in how Policy 1080 expectations are operationalized across lessons. Several lessons include inquiry structures but do not consistently incorporate historically underrepresented perspectives beyond abolition- and Reconstruction-centered content. For example, Lesson 3 (Civil War Causes) promotes constitutional analysis, yet Indigenous peoples appear only indirectly through constitutional language without inclusion of Indigenous perspectives as historically situated communities (P-GAP). Lesson 4 (Maryland as a Border State) supports geographic and economic inquiry (P-ALIGN) but provides limited curricular attention to the experiences of enslaved people, free Black communities, or dissenters within Maryland (P-GAP). Lesson 6 (Immigration and Industrialization) introduces multiple immigration entry points (P-ALIGN) while organizing content primarily around arrival narratives rather than exclusionary policy or differential

treatment (P-GAP). Lesson 8 includes synthesis tasks (P-ALIGN) but emphasizes content review rather than recurring equity-centered analysis as a required lens (P-GAP).

Supplemental texts further illustrate partial alignment. The Facing History text *“He Was Always Right and You Were Always Wrong”* centers a formerly enslaved person’s voice and documents systemic economic exploitation through sharecropping (P-ALIGN). However, required curriculum materials do not consistently specify analytic tasks that extend individual experience to broader systems or policy-level analysis, reinforcing reliance on supplemental resources for deeper equity-centered inquiry. These patterns reflect not only representational gaps but also epistemological prioritization, in which institutional and government-centered knowledge systems remain dominant across required curriculum materials.

These illustrative examples demonstrate that equity-aligned content and inquiry structures are present within the curriculum; however, their design and sequencing do not consistently require sustained engagement with marginalized perspectives, resulting in patterns of concentrated inclusion, institutional framing, and optional equity analysis.

To further illustrate these patterns, selected examples from Unit 2 lessons provide concrete evidence of how representation, narrative framing, and instructional enactment operate within required instructional tasks. These examples demonstrate that while equity-aligned content is present, it is often structured in ways that limit consistent, sustained engagement with marginalized perspectives across the unit.

From a representation (what is included) perspective, curriculum materials reflect patterns of concentrated inclusion rather than distributed representation. For example, in Lesson 2, abolitionist figures are introduced through statements such as “Some famous abolitionists include: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth.” While this inclusion

highlights important African American figures, representation remains centered on a limited set of well-known individuals and is primarily situated within abolition-focused lessons rather than sustained across the unit. Similarly, instructional descriptions such as “Abolitionists held meetings, wrote articles, gave speeches, and helped enslaved people escape to freedom” emphasize collective action but do not expand representation to include a broader range of historically marginalized voices or localized experiences. In contrast, other identity groups are referenced more indirectly, as seen in broader framing questions such as “How did Maryland’s population change during the 19th century?”, where demographic change is presented without explicitly naming or situating specific racialized or ethnic groups within a historical context. Together, these examples reflect uneven representation patterns consistent with Phase 1 findings.

From a narrative-framing (how history is constructed) perspective, the curriculum language consistently positions institutions and government as the primary drivers of historical change. This is evident in unit-level and lesson-level framing questions such as, “How did our government meet the challenges of a changing nation?” and “How did the Constitution address slavery?” These prompts center governmental action and legal structures as the dominant explanatory mechanisms, reinforcing institution-centered narratives. Additional framing language, such as “The government is faced with choices that create challenges all the time”, further generalizes historical change as a function of decision-making within formal systems, rather than as the result of sustained resistance, activism, or community agency. Even when marginalized groups are included, their roles are often situated within these institutional narratives rather than as independent drivers of change. This pattern aligns with findings that historical change is more frequently represented as institutional progression than as the outcome of collective struggle or grassroots action.

From an instructional enactment (how students are asked to engage) perspective, inquiry structures and learning activities provide opportunities for engagement but do not consistently require equity-centered analysis. For example, inquiry routines such as “Write down what you Think, Wonder or Notice” promote student observation and discussion; however, they do not explicitly prompt analysis of power, inequity, or marginalized perspectives. Similarly, civic engagement activities such as “I am your elected delegate... so I can represent your opinions” position students within representative government structures, reinforcing institutional participation without explicitly engaging alternative forms of civic action, such as protest, resistance, or community organizing. Choice-based activities (e.g., “Pick a side”) further emphasize engagement but abstract decision-making from historical power dynamics. As a result, opportunities for equity-centered inquiry remain present but are not structurally required within the instructional design, making their enactment dependent on teacher interpretation and facilitation.

Taken together, these examples illustrate that patterns identified in Phase 1 are not only evident in aggregate coding but are embedded within the language, structure, and sequencing of the curriculum itself. Representation is uneven and concentrated, narrative framing centers institutions as primary agents of change, and opportunities for equity-centered analysis are present but not consistently required. These patterns reinforce the broader finding that equity within the curriculum functions as a pedagogical possibility rather than a structural expectation, contributing to the design-to-enactment gap identified across phases of the study.

Overall, Phase 1 policy alignment findings indicate that *Our Changing Nation* demonstrates systematic partial alignment with Policy 1080 through recurring inquiry-based participation structures and the targeted inclusion of equity-relevant content, particularly in

abolition and Reconstruction lessons. At the same time, alignment is limited by uneven inclusion of policy-named groups, variability in whether equity-centered analysis is required in instructional tasks, and reliance on supplemental texts to sustain engagement with marginalized perspectives. As a result, alignment is enacted in discrete lesson components rather than embedded as a consistent structural feature across the unit. These patterns reflect not only representational gaps but also epistemological prioritization, in which institutional and government-centered knowledge systems remain dominant across required curriculum materials

While deductive coding documented where Policy 1080 alignment and gaps were structurally evident across Unit 2, inductive coding was subsequently used to identify cross-lesson design patterns that help explain how these documented conditions recur across lessons and tasks.

Table 6

Summary of Policy 1080 Alignment Patterns Across Unit 2

Policy 1080 Commitment Area	Cross-Lesson Pattern Observed in Required Curriculum	Dominant Code Pattern and Strength Classification	Alignment Interpretation
Ensure access to a culturally responsive and relevant curriculum	Early lessons are structured through institutional and settler-centered framing, with marginalized perspectives introduced later in the sequence rather than embedded as parallel interpretive lenses.	C-GOV (Strong); C-SETTLER (Moderate); T-MARG sequencing pattern (Moderate to Limited for structural embedding of equity)	Structural misalignment (P-GAP). Culturally responsive framing is not consistently embedded across the unit design.
Promote student voice and agency	Inquiry structures (discussion, argument writing, civic reasoning) are present in multiple lessons but frequently operate within institution-centered narratives without required power or inequity analysis.	C-GOV (Strong); O-MARG (Moderate); T-MARG (Moderate to Limited); R-MARG (Moderate, concentrated in select lessons)	Procedural alignment with inquiry structures; substantive gap in required equity-centered analysis.
Ensure inclusive representation, validating diverse identities	African American perspectives appear in most lessons but are concentrated as instructional focus in select clusters; other identity groups appear minimally and episodically.	I-AA (Strong presence; Moderate as sustained focal lens); I-INDIG (Limited); I-ASIAN (Limited); I-H/L (Limited); I-W (Moderate to Limited); T-MARG (Moderate)	Partial alignment for African American inclusion; recurring P-GAP for other identity groups. Representation is uneven and episodic rather than structurally integrated.

Policy 1080 Commitment Area	Cross-Lesson Pattern Observed in Required Curriculum	Dominant Code Pattern and Strength Classification	Alignment Interpretation
Elimination of systemic barriers (structural embedding of equity)	Resistance and agency appear primarily in abolition and Reconstruction lessons; analysis of inequity and harm is not consistently required across the unit sequence and often depends on lesson clustering.	R-MARG (Moderate, clustered); D- MARG (Moderate risk in select lessons); T-MARG (Moderate to Limited at unit level)	Concentrated alignment within specific lessons; cross-lesson structural gap in embedding equity as foundational rather than educator-dependent.
Ensure historically accurate instruction reflecting multiple perspectives	Government-authored and institutional texts dominate required materials; first-person and community-authored sources from marginalized groups are limited and often supplemental.	C-GOV (Strong); C-SETTLER (Moderate); D-MARG (Moderate risk); R-MARG (Moderate, concentrated)	Narrative authority remains institution-centered; limited sustained centering of marginalized epistemologies across required components.

Note. This summary table provides a reader-oriented synthesis of documented alignment and misalignment patterns; full coding evidence is provided in Appendix E.

Note. Patterns were classified as follows: Strong = present across most lessons (six or more of eight), embedded in required instructional components, and functioning as a dominant explanatory or narrative structure. Moderate = present across multiple lessons but concentrated within specific lesson clusters or partially embedded within required components. Moderate to Limited = present inconsistently across lessons and often dependent on optional tasks, supplemental materials, or teacher mediation rather than structurally required components.

Cross-Lesson Design Patterns

Deductive findings documented patterns of uneven representation and institution-centered narrative framing across lessons. Inductive analysis identified recurring curriculum design features—such as sequencing, task optionality, and narrative organization—that explain how these patterns recur across Unit 2 materials.

These inductive patterns describe recurring features of curriculum structure and required task design observed across Unit 2 materials rather than claims about authorial intent, instructional impact, or educator decision-making. Table 7 integrates deductive codes with second-cycle inductive pattern clusters, illustrating how recurring structural features align with the conditions of Policy 1080.

Table 7

Deductive–Inductive Synthesis of Equity Alignment in Grade 5 Unit 2

Deductive Codes (What Was Identified)	Emergent Inductive Theme (What It Means)	Policy 1080 Connections (Analytic Link)
C-GOV, C-SETTLER	Dominant cultural framing as the default historical lens	Equity is constrained when state power and institutions are positioned as the primary agents of change; Policy 1080 requires curricula that validate multiple ways of knowing and acting
O-MARG, T-MARG	Silencing through structural omission rather than explicit exclusion	Partial and uneven inclusion masks inequitable access to voice; culturally responsive curriculum cannot depend on teacher discretion alone
T-MARG, D-MARG	Oversimplification through linear progress narratives	Progress-oriented framing undermines historical accuracy by minimizing resistance, backlash, and ongoing inequity, misaligning with Policy 1080's equity mandate
R-MARG	Marginalized agency framed as exceptional rather than normative	Treating resistance as “extraordinary” limits students’ understanding of marginalized communities as continuous agents of historical change
I-AA, I-ASIAN, I-H/L, I-W	Equity as pedagogical optionality	Inconsistent inclusion across identity groups reproduces inequitable learning experiences, contrary to Policy 1080's systemic equity expectations

Table 7 synthesizes deductive findings with emergent inductive themes, illustrating how documented patterns of representation, framing, and alignment correspond to recurring design features across the unit. Building from these documented patterns, inductive coding identified cross-lesson design features—such as sequencing, task optionality, and narrative organization—associated with how representational patterns recur across lessons and materials.

Inductive analysis identified five recurring design patterns that extend and contextualize the deductive findings reported earlier. These patterns describe how equity-related content and narratives are organized, sequenced, and operationalized across Unit 2 materials. Relative strength classifications reflect criteria detailed in Appendix F, Step 6, including cross-lesson recurrence and structural embedding within required lesson components.

Table 8

Cross-Lesson Structural Design Patterns

Pattern	Recurring Design Pattern	Relative Strength	Cross-Lesson Distribution	Sample Evidence Supporting Strength
1	Dominant Cultural Framing	Strong	Present in 7 of 8 lessons	Constitutional clauses as explanatory anchors (Lesson 3); geographic/economic strategy framing (Lesson 4); government response and reform-centered essential questions (Lesson 8).
2	Structural Silencing	Strong	Evident in unit sequencing and 6 lessons	Institutional framing preceding marginalized perspectives (Lessons 1–4); indirect Indigenous reference through constitutional language (Lesson 3); optional equity sourcing in culminating task (Lesson 8).
3	Linear Progress Narratives	Moderate	Concentrated in Lessons 4, 5, 8	Economic “devastation” foregrounded before Reconstruction (Lesson 5); amendments framed as reform milestones without sustained analysis of backlash (Lesson 8).
4	Episodic Representation of Marginalized Agency	Moderate	Primarily in Lessons 2, 5, 7	Abolitionist resistance centered in isolated lessons (Lesson 2); reversion to institutional framing in subsequent lessons; limited cross-unit continuity of Black political participation (Lesson 7).
5	Equity as Structural Optionality	Moderate to Limited	Evident in culminating and optional tasks	Equity inquiry dependent on supplemental text (Facing History); synthesis task allowing but not requiring power/inequity analysis (Lesson 8).

Note. Patterns reflect recurring structural features identified through second-cycle coding that explain variability in equity alignment across the unit. Relative strength indicates cross-lesson recurrence and structural embedding within required lesson components: *Strong* patterns operated as dominant organizing logic across most lessons; *Moderate* patterns were concentrated within specific lesson clusters; *Moderate to Limited* patterns were inconsistently embedded and often dependent on optional or supplemental structures.

The cross-lesson structural patterns presented in Table 8 reflect recurring features identified through inductive second-cycle coding and comparative analysis of lessons. These patterns document how representation, sequencing, and task design operate structurally within the curriculum. The emergent themes that follow interpret what these recurring structural conditions signify for equity, agency, and historical interpretation in relation to the study’s research questions and Policy 1080 commitments.

Emergent Themes

While Table 8 identifies structural recurrence, the emergent themes below interpret the implications of those recurring conditions for narrative authority, equity alignment, and historical meaning-making.

Dominant Cultural Framing as the Default Historical Lens. Dominant cultural framing refers to the consistent positioning of government action, legal reform, and economic systems as the primary drivers of historical change across Unit 2. Institutional authority operates as the default explanatory framework through which causality and significance are constructed.

This framing is embedded in essential questions, source selection, and narrative structure. Lesson 3 centers on constitutional clauses such as the Three-Fifths Compromise and Fugitive Slave Clause as primary explanatory anchors. Lesson 4 organizes historical meaning through geographic strategy and economic positioning. Lesson 8 foregrounds governmental response and constitutional reform as drivers of national development. Within this structure, marginalized communities are most often discussed in relation to institutional decisions rather than from their own epistemological standpoints.

This theme extends deductive findings associated with C-GOV and C-SETTLER codes, which documented the dominance of institutional sources and explanatory logics. The thematic interpretation clarifies how those coded patterns collectively shape narrative authority. This theme was identified as strong, appearing in seven of eight lessons and functioning as a cross-unit organizing logic. While abolition-focused lessons temporarily foreground resistance, these moments do not displace institutional causality as the dominant explanatory frame.

Structural Silencing Through Sequencing and Optionality. Structural silencing operates through curriculum sequencing and task design, positioning marginalized perspectives as secondary without overt exclusion. Marginalized voices are present, yet they are introduced later, revisited only minimally, or embedded as optional rather than required components of analysis.

Early lessons establish institutional framing prior to sustained engagement with marginalized resistance. Subsequent lessons rarely require students to reinterpret earlier content through those perspectives. Indigenous peoples, for example, appear only indirectly through constitutional language in Lesson 3 without sustained contextualization, and the culminating task in Lesson 8 permits—but does not mandate—equity-centered sourcing. Under these conditions, marginalized perspectives function as additive content rather than organizing lenses for historical meaning-making.

Deductive findings associated with O-MARG and T-MARG codes documented uneven representational embedding across required materials; thematic analysis clarifies how sequencing and task optionality structurally reinforce that unevenness. Cross-lesson recurrence and integration within required lesson sequencing support a strong classification. The pattern reflects systematic design conditions rather than isolated omissions, and it operates consistently across most lessons.

Linear Progress Narratives. Linear progress narratives structure complex historical processes through sequential reform arcs that position institutional change as resolution. Historical development is organized around a progression from injustice to reform, suggesting closure through legislative milestones.

Lessons addressing enslavement, abolition, and Reconstruction frequently follow a sequence such as enslavement → abolition → amendments → expanded rights. Although this structure provides chronological coherence, it minimizes backlash, systemic durability, and the persistence of racialized inequity. In Lesson 5, economic “devastation” to plantation owners is foregrounded before a sustained examination of racial violence and Black Codes. Similarly, Lesson 8 presents

Reconstruction amendments as reform milestones without consistent interrogation of post-amendment regression or the reconstitution of racialized power structures.

Deductive textual analysis, using D-MARG coding and neutralized language, documented these reform-centered framings; thematic synthesis clarifies how progress-oriented sequencing stabilizes institutional legitimacy and diffuses sustained attention to structural harm. Relative strength analysis classifies this pattern as moderate, reflecting its concentration within specific historical arcs rather than uniform embedding across the full sequence of lessons.

Marginalized Agency as Exceptional Rather Than Normative. Marginalized agency appears in discrete lessons but does not operate as a sustained interpretive lens across the unit. Resistance is acknowledged in bounded segments rather than embedded as a cross-lesson explanatory framework. Lesson 2 centers Black abolitionists as organizers and advocates engaged in collective resistance, and Reconstruction-era content in Lessons 5 and 7 references Black political participation. However, subsequent lessons return to constitutional provisions, legislative reform, and governmental response as primary drivers of change. Collective organizing, everyday resistance, and community survival strategies are not consistently sustained across lessons addressing geography, economics, or governance.

Deductive R-MARG coding documented agency-centered framing within a narrow subset of lessons; the thematic synthesis clarifies that such framing remains episodic rather than structurally embedded. Relative strength analysis classifies this pattern as moderate, reflecting its concentration within specific lesson clusters and its lack of cross-unit continuity.

Equity as Pedagogical Possibility Rather Than Structural Expectation. Equity as pedagogical possibility refers to the availability of equity-centered analysis within Unit 2 without

a consistent structural requirement. Opportunities to examine power, exclusion, and marginalized agency are present, yet they are not consistently embedded within required lesson components.

The unit incorporates inquiry routines, participatory structures, and supplemental resources that support equity-oriented interpretation. However, required tasks do not consistently mandate sustained engagement with structural inequity. The Facing History text, for example, provides a deeper analysis of systemic exploitation, yet its implications are not consistently integrated into the required analytic expectations. Similarly, Lesson 8's synthesis task permits equity-centered interpretation but does not require students to examine power, exclusion, or marginalized agency as organizing lenses.

Deductive coding patterns reflecting uneven P-ALIGN and P-GAP classifications documented this variability; thematic synthesis clarifies that equity operates as an available option rather than a design expectation. Relative strength analysis classifies this pattern as moderate to limited, indicating that equity-centered analysis is structurally accessible but inconsistently embedded and frequently dependent on educator mediation rather than systematic curricular design.

Synthesis of Phase 1 Findings

Collectively, the emergent themes indicate that variability in equity representation across Unit 2 is associated with recurring curriculum design features related to narrative framing, sequencing, and task expectations. Among the five themes, Dominant Cultural Framing and Structural Silencing emerged as strong cross-lesson patterns, appearing consistently across most required materials. Linear Progress Narratives and Marginalized Agency as Episodic were moderately present, concentrated in specific lesson clusters, yet reinforcing the broader institutional framing. Equity as Pedagogical Possibility was identified as moderate to limited in

structural embedding, reflecting variability in whether equity-centered analysis was required or discretionary. Taken together, the relative strength of these themes indicates that institutional framing and structural sequencing operate as the most stable organizing logics across the unit, while agency-centered and equity-centered interpretations appear episodic or conditional.

Phase 1 findings document how equity is represented, framed, and operationalized within Grade 5 Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*. The unit reflects uneven content representation across identity groups, dominant reliance on institutional and government-authored sources, and narrative framing that privileges legal and economic systems over sustained marginalized agency. Structural silencing through sequencing and optionality further positions marginalized perspectives as additive rather than foundational, while linear progress narratives stabilize institutional reform as resolution. Even where resistance and participatory inquiry structures are present, they do not consistently function as cross-unit analytic lenses.

Collectively, these findings suggest that equity-related opportunities within Unit 2 are shaped not only by what content is included but also by how historical meaning is organized, sequenced, and structurally required. Institutional authority serves as the default explanatory framework, while equity-centered interpretation relies on localized lesson design and educator mediation rather than on consistent structural embedding. Phase 2, therefore, examines how educators interpret, navigate, and respond to these documented curricular conditions in classroom practice, exploring whether and how instructional reasoning mediates the structural patterns identified in Phase 1.

Phase 2 Results: Educator Interviews

This phase addresses the research question: How do fifth-grade educators interpret, adapt, and enact Our Changing Nation in classroom practice in response to representation gaps and equity expectations?

Five fifth-grade educators participated in Phase 2 interviews. Participants ranged in experience from 2 to 29 years in HCPSS and included both current and former team leaders. For analytic clarity, participants are referenced as Interviewee 1–5 throughout the findings. Table 2 in Section 2 (reproduced here) presents a brief professional profile for each participant.

Table 2

Educator Participant Overview

Participant	Total Years in Education (HCPSS)	Years Teaching Grade 5	School Context (as described by the interviewee)
Interviewee 1	25 years	3 years	High-enrollment elementary school (more than 600 students) with a high population of multilingual learners
Interviewee 2	29 years	5 years	Title I elementary school with approximately 600 students serving a racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse community
Interviewee 3	14 years	14 years	High-enrollment elementary school (more than 600 students)
Interviewee 4	2 years	2 years	Title I elementary school with fewer than 400 students, with a large population of Spanish-speaking students
Interviewee 5	4 years	3 years	High-enrollment elementary school (more than 600 students)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five fifth-grade educators teaching Unit 2 in racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse elementary school contexts. Phase 2 findings synthesize recurring patterns in educator noticing, instructional reasoning, reported decision-making, and system-level conditions shaping curriculum enactment.

Alignment of Phase 2 Interview Design to Phase 1 Findings

Phase 1 document analysis directly informed refinements to the Phase 2 interview protocol. While the original semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix J) was grounded in

the study's research questions and HCPSS Policy 1080 commitments, Phase 1 findings prompted targeted revisions to specific questions and probes. In particular, documented patterns related to uneven representation, institution-centered narrative framing, delayed inclusion of marginalized perspectives, and educator-dependent equity enactment led to adjustments in wording, sequencing, and analytic emphasis.

Appendix J, Table J1 provides a detailed crosswalk documenting how original interview questions were revised in response to Phase 1 analytic insights. For example, broad questions about inclusivity were refined to explicitly probe sequencing, agency, structural embedding of equity, and educator decision-making when materials center on institutional figures. These revisions strengthened coherence across study phases and ensured that educator interviews directly examined how documented curriculum patterns were interpreted, navigated, and mediated in practice.

Together, these refinements position Phase 2 as a deliberate extension of Phase 1 rather than a separate inquiry. Interview design, recruitment, and analytic procedures were aligned to the structural patterns identified in curriculum analysis, ensuring that educator accounts directly examined how those documented conditions were interpreted and enacted in practice. The document analysis informed several enhancements to the Phase 2 interview design, including refining interview questions, aligning prompts with specific representation gaps identified in the curriculum, and developing analytic categories that reflected patterns observed in the instructional materials. These adjustments ensured that educator interviews directly examined how the structural patterns identified in the curriculum—such as representation gaps, narrative framing, and instructional constraints—were interpreted and enacted in classroom practice.

Interview findings were examined in relation to patterns identified in Phase 1 to ensure coherence across phases. This alignment strengthened coherence across the study's phases and ensured that educators' perspectives were systematically examined in relation to the curricular conditions identified in the initial analysis.

Table 9

Phase 2 Alignment to Phase 1 Policy 1080 Commitment Areas and Key Analytic Categories

Policy 1080 Commitment Area (as outlined in Table 6)	Key Analytic Category (as defined in Section 2)	Phase 2 Interview Construct	How Phase 2 Interviews Extend Phase 1
Inclusive representation across historically underrepresented groups	Content Representation	Educator perceptions of representation gaps and whose histories are foregrounded	Examine educators' noticing and interpretation of uneven or episodic inclusion documented Phase 1
Use of sources that broaden perspectives and elevate marginalized voices	Content Representation / Narrative Framing	Educator decisions related to sourcing, supplementation, and student-facing texts	Examine how educators expand, mediate, or reproduce documented source authority patterns in practice
Student voice, civic reasoning, and inquiry-based participation	Policy Alignment / Instructional Enactment	Educator interpretations of narrative framing, sequencing, and task optionality	Examine how educators navigate participation structures when inequity analysis is not structurally required
Required analysis of inequity, harm, resistance, and agency	Narrative Framing / Policy Alignment	Conditions shaping equity enactment (supports, constraints, professional learning, etc.)	Identify system- and school-level factors associated with variability in equity-centered instructional enactment

Note. Policy 1080 commitment language is drawn directly from Table 6. Key Analytic Full interview protocol and crosswalk documentation are provided in Appendices I and J.

Analytic Approach

Interview findings reflect recurring patterns in how educators interpret and enact Unit 2 within documented curricular and institutional conditions.

Findings: Educator Instructional Reasoning

In addition to identifying recurring cross-interview patterns, analysis attended to both frequency (how consistently a pattern appeared across interviews) and intensity (the affective tone and strength with which educators described the issue). Frequency was determined through

cross-case comparison procedures outlined in Appendix L (Step 9), while attention to intensity captured the strength, tone, and emotional weight of educators’ expressed experiences.

These analytic dimensions supported differentiation between patterns described as normalized features of curriculum enactment and those expressed with heightened professional risk, caution, or emotional significance. Together, frequency and intensity provided a more nuanced understanding of how educators interpreted and responded to curriculum structures in practice.

Overview of Cross-Interview Patterns. Analysis of educator interviews revealed four consistent cross-interview patterns related to how educators interpret, adapt, and enact Unit 2 under documented curricular conditions. These patterns are summarized in Table 10 and are used to organize the Phase 2 findings that follow.

Table 10

Cross-Interview Pattern Summary

Pattern	Description of Recurring Cross-Interview Regularities	Representative Evidence Types (Reported)
Reported delayed or peripheral integration of marginalized perspectives	Educators described marginalized perspectives as introduced late, positioned peripherally, or omitted within required materials.	Noticing language, references to “missing” or “not included” voices; examples of lessons requiring supplementation
Reported teacher-initiated supplementation to address curriculum gaps	Educators described adding resources or modifying lessons to address omissions not structurally embedded in the curriculum	Added resources; redesigned prompts; supplemental texts; extensions to foreground alternative perspectives
Reported fidelity expectations and adaptation constraints	Educators cited pacing, mandates, and ambiguity about permissible modifications as shaping enactment decisions.	Pacing guidance; district mandates; risk-management language; limited time; limited system-level direction
Reported reliance on individual teacher facilitation for culturally responsive and inquiry-based practices	Educators described culturally responsive dialogue and inquiry as dependent on individual pedagogical decisions rather than required structures.	Discussion protocols; questioning strategies; relational routines; connections to student identity and lived experience

Note. Patterns reflect reported instructional conditions and decision-making contexts rather than evaluative judgments of practice. Supporting analytic materials are documented in Appendices L-M.

While Table 10 summarizes the recurring cross-interview regularities observed across participants, the analytic categories that follow (A1–A4) move beyond description of recurrence

to interpretive synthesis. Each analytic category consolidates multiple meaning units, affective patterns, and contextual conditions into a theoretically coherent construct that explains how educators reason about and enact Unit 2 under documented curricular conditions. Thus, Table 10 presents empirical pattern recurrence, whereas A1–A4 represent analytically elevated categories developed through cross-case comparison, affective coding (Appendices M and N), and synthesis procedures detailed in Appendix L. Categories were constructed when recurring patterns demonstrated conceptual coherence across interviews and were supported by consistent tone and intensity markers in Appendix M.

Analytic Elevation and Organization of Findings. Based on the identified patterns, the findings are organized into four analytic categories (A1–A4), where “A” denotes the analytic category and the numbering distinguishes the four major analytic constructs derived from cross-interview pattern analysis. These categories synthesize and theoretically elevate the recurring cross-interview patterns summarized in Table 10 into explanatory constructs that illuminate how educators interpret and mediate curriculum structures during instructional enactment. Rather than restating descriptive patterns, the categories integrate recurrence, affective tone, and contextual conditions into explanatory constructs. Where relevant, participants are referenced as Interviewees 1–5 to preserve analytic traceability while maintaining cross-case synthesis. Analytic procedures supporting category construction—including meaning condensation, cross-case comparison, and verification—are detailed in Appendix L. Appendices M and N provide representative coded transcript excerpts and condensed meaning tables demonstrating how analytic categories were developed and weighted across cases. Consistent with research on curriculum enactment and instructional implementation, these analytic categories capture how

educators interpret, adapt, and mediate curriculum structures while navigating institutional expectations and instructional constraints (Bryk et al., 2015).

Cross-interview comparison revealed variation not only in recurrence but also in affective intensity across analytic categories. A1 (Afterthought Integration of Marginalized Perspectives) and A2 (Equity Work as Curricular Supplementation) were highly recurrent and often expressed in observational, reflective, or compliance-oriented tones, suggesting patterns that educators experience as normalized features of curriculum enactment. In contrast, A4 (Systemic and Institutional Constraints) was both highly recurrent and consistently expressed with the greatest intensity, frequently marked by cautionary or anxiety-related language signaling professional vulnerability. A3 (Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent) demonstrated moderate recurrence with variable intensity, reflecting differences in educators' perceived agency and confidence when facilitating culturally responsive inquiry within scripted curricular conditions. These analytic distinctions are traceable through the stepwise cross-case procedures in Appendix L, Steps 6–9, and the coded evidence tables in Appendices M and N.

The following sections present each analytic category with representative cross-case evidence illustrating how educators experienced and interpreted these patterns during instructional enactment.

A1. Afterthought Integration of Marginalized Perspectives. Across interviews, educators consistently described marginalized perspectives as positioned late, peripheral, or episodic within Unit 2 rather than as structurally embedded throughout the unit's narrative arc. Educators did not describe these absences as an abstract design flaw; they described them as felt discontinuities while trying to teach a coherent story of national change to ten- and eleven-year-olds. Interviewee 4 captured this “add-on” structure most explicitly, describing moments when

alternative perspectives enter the curriculum as a visible shift in lesson logic rather than an integrated framing thread. Interviewee 3 described a sequencing pattern across the unit, emphasizing that perspectives central to equity and lived experience appear late and then must be “lifted up quickly” to meet culminating expectations:

Aside from that lesson [Lesson 7], perspectives of formerly enslaved people, free Black communities, Black lawmakers, and women are minimized or treated as secondary... Often, teachers end up trying to lift up perspectives quickly at the end... But those perspectives should be included from lesson one, not rushed at the end.

Interviewee 2 reported that students themselves register the imbalance before the curriculum addresses it, raising questions that implicitly challenge those whose experiences count as historically significant:

We focus heavily on wealthy White landowners and power, and then we briefly say, “Oh, and here’s who was left out.” Students notice missing voices before the curriculum addresses them. They ask: “Where are the women? Where are the enslaved people? Where are Native Americans?” It’s really frustrating.

Collectively, these accounts align with Phase 1 evidence of delayed inclusion and tokenistic or episodic treatment (T-MARG patterns) and reinforce the interpretation that marginalized perspectives function as additive inserts rather than organizing lenses across required materials.

A2. Equity Work as Curricular Supplementation. Across interviews, educators described equity-centered instruction as teacher-initiated work undertaken in response to perceived curriculum gaps rather than as a feature embedded within curriculum design.

Participants reported varying degrees of supplementation; however, even educators who described teaching with high fidelity indicated that equity enactment often depends on what an individual teacher is willing and able to add without disrupting pacing, coherence, or perceived professional expectations.

Interviewee 3 described intentionally adding instructional prompts and contextual information not included in the materials provided to surface perspectives absent from the curriculum:

I follow it exactly as it is written. However, there are some things I add... I read it with my class and then ask them what they think is missing... Usually, one or two students notice that there is almost no mention of how newly freed people could not locate their families, how families were separated, or how newly freed people were still mistreated. Those perspectives are not really addressed in the sources provided, so I add instruction to ensure more perspectives are heard.

At the same time, she framed this supplementation as emotionally and professionally weighty, describing vetting and external consultation as protective practices:

Sometimes I feel nervous selecting materials. I double- and triple-check before using anything... I have always relied heavily on the curriculum... I consider myself a rule follower. But social studies feels different. It is the only subject in which I regularly seek outside sources, so that all voices are heard.

Interviewee 5 explained why supplementation often becomes structurally separated from the unit rather than integrated within it:

I want to stick to the curriculum, but I also feel the curriculum lacks what really happened... If I include my own diversity-related content, it becomes a separate

lesson from what Howard County has put together... It does not really follow the lessons the county has given us.

Interviewee 1 described adding an entire lesson to repair narrative discontinuity—an adaptation motivated by student curiosity and coherence rather than “enrichment”:

Lessons build up to it and then jump to after the Civil War... moving from before to after without addressing it at all feels disjointed. Students are curious and want to know what happened... I add a lesson that provides the basics... Without that, the curriculum just does not flow.

These examples illustrate how educators frequently supplement required materials by adding missing historical context, perspectives, or explanatory lessons to maintain narrative coherence and represent broader historical experiences. Taken together, these accounts indicate that equity-centered instruction is frequently enacted as discretionary rather than as a predictable outcome of required curriculum design—an interpretation consistent with Policy 1080’s emphasis that equity should be structurally embedded rather than dependent on individual educator intervention.

A3. Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent. Culturally responsive and inquiry-based practices emerged most often through teachers’ facilitation moves—questioning, moderating discussions, and responding to students’ noticing—rather than through systematically embedded curriculum structures. Educators described equity-centered inquiry as reactive: it tended to arise in response to student questions and contradictions rather than as a consistent feature of required tasks.

Interviewee 2 described a structural limitation in the materials that constrains close reading and interpretive work: “Even the provided resources are not deep or thought-provoking.

We cannot do close reading or analysis because the texts do not provide rich enough material—there are no quotes or perspectives that students can analyze.” She explained that deeper learning emerged primarily from the interpretive work she facilitated with students, rather than from inquiry structures embedded in the curriculum: “That deeper learning came from my own work, not the curriculum.”

Interviewee 5 described student-generated critique as emerging most clearly during collaborative discussion, particularly when constitutional ideals collide with lived realities:

I encourage them to work in small groups and discuss... those kinds of questions come up... We were talking about how, once one of the amendments was passed, Black people were still going to jail and were not getting paid to work in jail... that got them asking, “What was the point of even having that amendment if there are so many loopholes, specifically geared toward Black people?”

Interviewee 1 framed culturally responsive engagement as intensifying when she deviates from scripted delivery and teaches relationally, “That is when they come alive. They engage much more when I go off script... Students mirror my energy. When I am genuinely teaching rather than presenting slides, they are far more invested.”

However, educators also described navigating these discussions cautiously. Interviewee 4 emphasized neutrality as a stance shaped by age, power, and perceived boundaries, “Students are interested in controversial topics... but in fifth grade, you are balancing what you can and cannot say... I try to stay neutral.”

These descriptions suggest that culturally responsive inquiry is most often enacted through teachers’ facilitation of discussion, questioning, and interpretation rather than through curriculum tasks explicitly designed to prompt critical examination. Furthermore, they support

the analytic interpretation that culturally responsive and inquiry-based enactment remains contingent on individual teacher facilitation capacity rather than guaranteed by required curriculum structures.

A4. Systemic and Institutional Constraints. Educators consistently referenced institutional conditions shaping decisions about whether and how to adapt curriculum materials, especially when teaching politically sensitive historical content. High-fidelity expectations and scripted lesson components were described as both guidance and constraint. Participants repeatedly framed adherence to the curriculum and reliance on approved materials as risk-management strategies.

Interviewee 2 described close adherence as protective in a context where conversations can be taken out of context, “I follow it closely because it can be a very sensitive conversation... especially when talking about enslaved people. I worry about what a parent might take out of context if they were not present for the full discussion.” She further linked these constraints to limits on honesty about historical brutality:

It is difficult because we are trying to teach a very dark period of time, but we are limited in how honest we can be with students about what life actually looked like—how families were destroyed, how brutal the system was...

Interviewee 3 affirmed that concerns about harm, parent reactions, and leadership scrutiny can prevent the use of relevant resources.

Interviewee 5 described pacing as a structural constraint that compresses possibilities for adaptation, “Time is also really restricted... Because the Simulated Congressional Hearing (SCH) unit is Unit 2, I have to get through all eight lessons and be mindful of time.” Interviewee

1 described scripted delivery as a narrowing of professional agency: “The curriculum feels very scripted. Teaching has become presenting, and I want to be an educator, not a presenter.”

Collectively, these accounts indicate that institutional constraints function not only as a structural condition but also as an affectively charged dimension of curriculum enactment, shaping educators' discretion, neutrality practices, and reliance on district-approved instructional materials.

Summary of Observed Patterns

Across interviews, educators described equity-centered instruction within *Our Changing Nation* as valued but inconsistently supported through required curriculum materials. Marginalized perspectives were frequently described as positioned late, peripheral, or episodic within the unit (A1), while equity enactment was often framed as teacher-initiated supplementation rather than a curriculum-embedded expectation (A2). Culturally responsive and inquiry-based practices were described as contingent on individual teacher facilitation and student prompting rather than systematically embedded within required instructional tasks (A3). Institutional conditions—including fidelity expectations, pacing constraints, and perceived professional risk—were described as shaping when and how educators adapted or supplemented curriculum materials (A4).

In addition to thematic recurrence, Phase 2 analysis also attended to affective tone and intensity as indicators of analytic weight. Affective descriptors and intensity levels were applied using the standardized coding framework. Representative excerpt-to-meaning condensation tables demonstrating the application of these codes across analytic categories (A1–A4) are provided in Appendix N.

Across these findings, a clear design-to-enactment gap emerges: equity commitments are present at the policy level but are not consistently realized within the curriculum's structure, requiring educators to interpret, supplement, or navigate gaps in representation and narrative framing. While some educators engage in responsive practices to address these gaps, these efforts remain inconsistent and depend on individual teachers' decision-making rather than being embedded within the curriculum itself. This positions equity-centered instruction as a discretionary practice rather than a structural expectation.

Cross-Phase Findings

Research Question 1: Curriculum Design and Representation

Across phases, patterns of uneven representation and institution-centered narrative framing documented in Unit 2 curriculum materials were also identified by educators as salient features of instructional enactment. The delayed, peripheral, or episodic positioning of marginalized perspectives documented in Phase 1—conceptualized in Phase 2 as Afterthought Integration (A1)—was consistently recognized by educators as shaping how the unit unfolded in practice.

Phase 1 identified T-MARG patterns at the unit level, delayed the inclusion of marginalized communities due to dominant institutional framing (C-GOV; C-SETTLER), and uneven integration of agency-centered narratives (Appendix E). In Phase 2, educators described these same structural features as moments requiring clarification, supplementation, or contextualization during instruction. Marginalized perspectives—particularly Indigenous, Asian American, and women's histories—were frequently described as introduced late, referenced briefly, or positioned as additive rather than organizing lenses.

This convergence indicates that narrative framing gaps identified in curriculum design were not merely analytic observations but were experienced by educators as consequential features of instructional sequencing and coherence. The design-level positioning of perspectives shaped what required mediation during instructional enactment.

Research Question 2: Educator Interpretation and Instructional Response

Across phases, educators reported that instructional responses were closely aligned with curriculum design limitations identified in Phase 1. When required materials did not structurally embed analysis of power, inequity, resistance, or agency, educators described engaging in Equity Work as Curricular Supplementation (A2) and Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent (A3).

Supplementation, contextual framing, and facilitation of extended discussion were consistently described as educator-initiated responses rather than predictable outcomes of required curriculum tasks. When inquiry into exclusion, contradiction, or inequity occurred, it frequently emerged through teacher questioning strategies or student-initiated critique rather than through analytic structures embedded in lesson design.

At the same time, instructional mediation was shaped by the systemic and institutional conditions captured in A4 (Systemic and Institutional Constraints). Fidelity expectations, pacing guidance, ambiguity about permissible modification, and perceived professional risk influenced whether and how equity-centered adaptations were enacted.

Equity-centered instruction, therefore, functioned not as a structurally ensured design feature but as a discretionary response negotiated within institutional boundaries. The recurrence of these patterns across interviews, combined with affective-intensity markers associated with

institutional constraints, indicates that variability in equity enactment is linked to structural features of the curriculum rather than to individual educators' dispositions.

Cross-Phase Analytic Summary

Cross-phase analysis was conducted to examine how curriculum design patterns identified in Phase 1 were interpreted and mediated by educators during instructional enactment in Phase 2. Across phases, findings demonstrate a consistent relationship between curriculum design features and instructional enactment conditions. Representation gaps, sourcing disparities, and institution-centered narrative framing patterns documented in Phase 1 were recognized by educators and negotiated through instructional mediation in Phase 2. Together, these categories illuminate a persistent design-to-enactment gap within *Our Changing Nation*. Equity-related perspectives, primary sources, and analyses of power, inequity, resistance, and agency were unevenly embedded within required materials and frequently positioned as optional rather than structurally integral. Educators recognized these conditions and responded through individualized instructional mediation shaped by time, discretion, and institutional context.

Across phases, equity-centered learning opportunities emerged as valued yet inconsistently ensured by curriculum design. What the curriculum requires, what it renders optional, and the institutional conditions under which educators operate collectively shape the consistency of equity enactment.

Research Question 3 shifts analytic attention from documenting these cross-phase conditions to examining how they might be addressed through design. Phase 3 translates findings into a low-lift, high-impact Curriculum Equity Framework (Appendix O) intended to support more consistent, policy-aligned equity review and instructional decision-making within existing curricular constraints.

Overall, the data indicate not simply uneven representation, but a systematic disproportionality in which Eurocentric perspectives are consistently centered, while marginalized perspectives are included in ways that are limited, episodic, and insufficiently integrated across the unit. This disproportionality extends beyond representation alone, shaping how historical narratives are constructed and how opportunities for engagement are structured within instruction. As a result, equity-related perspectives remain inconsistently embedded across curriculum design and instructional enactment, contributing to the design-to-enactment gap identified across phases of this study. This finding is particularly significant given Policy 1080's expectation for an inclusive and representative curriculum, suggesting that equity is not yet embedded as a consistent structural feature of the unit.

Phase 3 Results: Development of the Curriculum Equity Framework

Research Question 3

How can findings from Unit 2: Our Changing Nation document analysis and educator interviews inform a low-lift, high-impact framework that helps elementary educators identify and address representation gaps through inclusive, equity-aligned instruction?

Phase 3 Overview

Phase 3 translates triangulated findings from Phases 1 and 2 into a practice-facing equity framework. Rather than introducing new empirical data or proposing an intervention, this phase synthesizes documented curriculum design patterns and educator-reported instructional enactment to identify structural leverage points for more consistent equity alignment.

Framework development occurred following completion of Phases 1 and 2 and reflects analytic translation rather than a priori design. Aligned with the scholarly-practitioner orientation of this capstone, Phase 3 operationalizes research findings into a replicable, educator-facing tool

that supports systematic equity review and instructional adaptation within existing curriculum structures.

Framework development was grounded in convergence among documented curriculum design features, educator-reported instructional responses, and equity expectations articulated in HCPSS Policy 1080. Specifically, Phase 1 documented uneven representation, institution-centered narrative framing, and the positioning of equity-centered analysis as optional rather than structurally required. Phase 2 identified A1 (Afterthought Integration of Marginalized Perspective), A2 (Equity Work as Curricular Supplementation), A3 (Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent), and A4 (Systemic and Institutional Constraints), clarifying how design features shaped instructional mediation and adaptation in practice.

This synthesis shifted analytic attention from identifying inequities to examining how equity-related instructional decisions were rendered optional within curriculum design and instructional contexts. Phase 3 responds by translating these findings into a structured framework that supports more consistent, policy-aligned equity review and instructional response.

Framework Components

The Curriculum Equity Framework consists of three interrelated components that emerged through cross-phase synthesis. Each component addresses a recurring analytic pattern identified across Phases 1 and 2 and corresponds to a documented point of vulnerability where equity expectations were present but not structurally ensured.

Component 1: Guiding Questions for Equity-Centered Curriculum Review. Guiding questions support educators' noticing of representation, agency, and narrative framing within required curriculum materials. Derived from analytic patterns documented in Phase 1 and

educator-reported needs in Phase 2, these questions make equity expectations explicit criteria for curriculum review rather than implicit considerations.

This component operationalizes Afterthought Integration (A1) by prompting educators to examine whose perspectives are centered, delayed, or peripheral and whether analysis of power, inequity, resistance, and agency is structurally required or optional.

Component 2: Equity Indicators and Red Flags. Equity indicators and red flags translate analytic patterns into observable signals that help educators assess whether a lesson aligns with equity expectations or reproduces documented gaps. Rather than introducing new evaluative criteria, this component formalizes patterns already documented across data sources, supporting consistency in equity interpretation.

Indicators correspond to features associated with sustained representation and embedded inquiry, while red flags signal additive inclusion, institution-centered framing, or optionalized equity analysis consistent with A1–A4 findings. These indicators and red flags are presented in educator-facing form in Appendix O.

Component 3: Enrichment, Supplementation, and Adaptation Strategies. This component synthesizes educator-reported practices for addressing representation gaps and narrative limitations. Strategies are aligned to specific indicators and red flags, supporting responsive instructional adaptation without introducing new instructional demands or increasing perceived risk.

Strategies explicitly respond to patterns identified in A2 (Equity Work as Curricular Supplementation) and A3 (Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent), while remaining attentive to A4 (Systemic and Institutional Constraints). The goal is structured instructional mediation within existing curriculum structures rather than curriculum replacement.

In this context, structured instructional mediation refers to intentional instructional moves—such as contextual framing of historical events, guided questioning about whose perspectives are represented or omitted, facilitated discussion of power and agency, and the use of supplementary primary sources—that help students critically interpret curriculum content within the existing instructional framework. Together, the three components function as an integrated equity support system that embeds equity expectations into curriculum review and instructional planning processes. As the culminating phase of the study, Phase 3 translates empirical findings into a practical, policy-aligned impact product grounded in documented curriculum structures and educator-reported instructional realities.

Phase 3 Conclusion

Phase 3 extends the analytic arc of the study by translating cross-phase findings into an evidence-based impact product intended to support equity-centered curriculum use within existing institutional constraints. Consistent with a design-translation orientation, the framework does not claim instructional effectiveness or student outcomes; rather, it provides a replicable structure that supports more consistent equity-related noticing, interpretation, and instructional response aligned with Policy 1080.

Summary of Findings

This study examined how equity is represented, framed, and operationalized within Grade 5 Social Studies Unit 2, *Our Changing Nation*, through a multi-phase qualitative design. Findings are organized around the three research questions and synthesize evidence across curriculum document analysis (Phase 1), educator interviews (Phase 2), and cross-phase triangulation.

Together, the findings illuminate how equity-related learning opportunities are structured within required curriculum materials, how educators interpret and navigate those structures in practice, and how the identified design-to-enactment gap informed the development of a Curriculum Equity Framework.

To support coherence across findings, results are presented across three interconnected dimensions: representation (who is included in the curriculum), narrative framing (how historical events and actors are positioned), and instructional enactment (how educators interpret and implement the curriculum in practice). Across these dimensions, findings indicate that equity is inconsistently embedded as a structural feature of the curriculum, often functioning as a pedagogical possibility rather than a design requirement.

Research Question 1: Curriculum Design, Representation, and Narrative Framing

Phase 1 findings document an uneven, episodic representation of historically underrepresented groups across the Unit 2 curriculum materials. Content representation analysis demonstrates that African American perspectives appear most frequently but are concentrated in a limited subset of lessons focused on abolition, the effects of the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Other identity groups—including Indigenous, Asian American, Hispanic/Latine, and women—appear infrequently, indirectly, or without sustained instructional focus. Analysis of primary source use further indicates that institutional and government-authored texts function as the dominant sources of historical authority, limiting consistent access to first-person or contemporaneous perspectives from marginalized communities.

Narrative framing analysis reveals a consistent pattern of institution-centered historical explanation across lessons. Government action, legal reform, and economic systems are positioned as primary agents of historical change, while marginalized communities are more

often represented as populations affected by policy decisions rather than as sustained agents of resistance or leadership. Although equity-aligned framing is evident in abolition-focused lessons and select supplemental texts, these instances remain localized rather than integrated into a continuous narrative thread. Policy alignment analysis indicates partial alignment with HCPSS Policy 1080 through inquiry-based participation structures and targeted equity-relevant content, but alignment is constrained by variability in whether equity-centered analysis is structurally required across lessons (Appendix E; Appendix H).

Research Question 2: Educator Interpretation and Instructional Response

Phase 2 findings indicate strong convergence between curriculum design features documented in Phase 1 and educators' reported instructional experiences. Across interviews, educators consistently described marginalized perspectives as positioned late, peripherally, or episodically within required curriculum materials. Equity-oriented instruction was framed as teacher-initiated instructional labor undertaken to address perceived gaps rather than as a curriculum-embedded expectation.

Educators reported engaging in supplementation, reframing, and expanded discussion to address omissions or problematic framing; however, these adaptations were shaped by institutional constraints, including fidelity expectations, perceived professional risk, limited time, and uneven access to social studies-specific professional learning. Culturally responsive and inquiry-based practices emerged primarily through individual pedagogical choices and student-initiated questions rather than as predictable features of lesson design. Collectively, Phase 2 findings illustrate how educators recognize and negotiate curriculum conditions under varying system-level constraints rather than how equity is consistently ensured through curriculum structure.

Research Question 3: Design Implications and Framework Development

Cross-phase synthesis revealed a persistent design-to-enactment gap in which equity-related perspectives, sources, and analyses of power, harm, resistance, and agency were often available but not structurally required. Representation gaps, sourcing disparities, and narrative framing patterns documented in Phase 1 were recognized by educators and addressed through discretionary instructional adaptations in Phase 2. Equity-centered instruction, therefore, functioned as a pedagogical possibility rather than a structural expectation embedded across lessons.

Phase 3 responded to these findings by developing a low-lift, high-impact Curriculum Equity Framework. The framework translates triangulated findings into a structured, educator-facing tool that supports consistent equity-centered curriculum review and instructional response aligned with HCPSS Policy 1080. Rather than proposing an intervention or evaluating effectiveness, the framework operationalizes documented leverage points—representation, narrative framing, and task expectations—into guiding questions, equity indicators, and red flags, and aligned adaptation strategies.

Limitations

The findings of this study are bounded by several methodological and contextual limitations. First, the analysis focused on a single Grade 5 social studies unit (*Our Changing Nation*) within one district-developed curriculum. While the unit provides a rich case for examining equity representation and narrative framing, findings should not be generalized to other grade levels, subject areas, or districts without further study.

Second, Phase 2 findings are based on a small, volunteer sample of five educators and reflect reported instructional interpretation and enactment rather than direct classroom

observation. As a result, findings describe how educators *perceive* and *navigate* curricular conditions rather than documenting enacted instructional practice or student experience.

Finally, this study examined curriculum design features and educator responses within existing institutional and policy contexts. It does not assess instructional effectiveness, student learning outcomes, or causal relationships between curriculum features and instructional practice. These limitations are consistent with the study's qualitative, design-oriented scope and inform appropriate interpretation of the findings.

Bounded Implications for Practice

Within these limitations, the findings offer bounded implications that clarify what the study makes visible and what it makes possible for the use of equity-centered curriculum. First, findings illuminate how equity-related learning opportunities are shaped not only by content inclusion but by curriculum design features such as sequencing, narrative framing, source authority, and task optionality. This suggests that equity improvement efforts must attend to how historical meaning is organized and operationalized in curriculum materials, rather than solely to the presence of inclusive content.

Second, findings indicate that when equity-centered analysis is not structurally required within curriculum design, responsibility for addressing representation gaps shifts to individual educators. This pattern renders equity enactment contingent on teacher discretion, capacity, and perceived institutional risk. Within this context, system-level tools that make equity expectations explicit and routinized may reduce variability in instructional access and support more consistent alignment with district equity commitments.

Third, the Curriculum Equity Framework developed in Phase 3 represents a bounded, practice-facing response to documented design-to-enactment gaps. The framework does not

claim instructional effectiveness or guarantee equitable outcomes; rather, it provides a structured mechanism to support educators' noticing, interpretation, and instructional response within existing curriculum constraints. Its value lies in translating empirical findings into a replicable process for operationalizing Policy 1080 expectations without requiring curriculum replacement or an increased instructional burden.

Together, these bounded implications position the study as a contribution to equity-centered curriculum improvement by clarifying how structural design choices shape instructional possibilities and by offering a practical, policy-aligned tool to support more consistent equity enactment in elementary social studies contexts.

Implications

Although this study is situated within HCPSS—a district with an explicit equity policy framework (Policy 1080)—the findings demonstrate that disproportional representation can persist even in contexts with strong equity commitments. In districts without similarly articulated policies or supports, these patterns may be further amplified, indicating that the need for structural alignment between policy, curriculum, and instructional practice extends across diverse educational contexts.

The Curriculum Equity Framework developed in Phase 3 operationalizes Policy 1080 by providing educators with a structured process to evaluate representation, narrative framing, and instructional enactment within existing curriculum materials.

Addressing the disproportionality identified in this research requires a shift from additive approaches to the systemic redesign of curriculum and instruction. Efforts to “include more diverse perspectives” are insufficient when those perspectives remain peripheral to the core narrative. Instead, marginalized histories and perspectives must be intentionally positioned as

central, sustained components of instruction, shaping how historical events are interpreted, framed, and understood. This shift moves beyond representation as presence toward representation as structural integration.

To address the design-to-enactment gaps identified in this study, districts must move beyond reliance on teacher supplementation and instead embed equity as a non-negotiable feature of curriculum design and implementation. This includes re-evaluating curriculum development processes to ensure that multiple perspectives are not only included but integrated across the full narrative arc of a unit. Instructional materials and assessments should be designed to require engagement with diverse perspectives, rather than to position such engagement as optional or enrichment. Additionally, professional learning must support educators in recognizing how disproportionality operates within curriculum structures and in implementing instructional practices that interrupt dominant narratives. Building on prior professional learning efforts, districts should prioritize sustained, job-embedded learning cycles that move beyond one-time training to include collaborative planning, analysis of curriculum materials, and ongoing coaching aligned to equity-focused look-fors. These structures should explicitly model how to implement inquiry-based, culturally responsive practices within the constraints of district pacing and approved materials, thereby reducing implementation variability across classrooms. By anchoring professional learning in authentic curriculum tasks and classroom practice, districts can more effectively close the design-to-enactment gap and ensure that equity is consistently realized in instruction rather than dependent on individual teacher discretion.

These implications are particularly significant in light of Policy 1080, which articulates a clear commitment to culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum. The persistence of disproportional representation suggests that stronger alignment is needed between policy

expectations and the structural features of required curriculum materials. Without this alignment, equity remains an aspirational goal rather than an operationalized component of instruction. These implications directly respond to the study's purpose of identifying and addressing structural conditions that produce inequitable curriculum experiences.

Ultimately, addressing these patterns requires a fundamental shift in how curriculum is conceptualized and enacted. Rather than asking how to add diversity to existing structures, educators and systems must examine how those structures themselves produce inequitable outcomes. By reframing equity as a design requirement rather than a discretionary practice, districts can move toward a curriculum that more accurately reflects the complexity of historical narratives and supports all students in developing critical, inclusive understandings of the past.

Final Reflections

Engaging in this research has deepened my understanding of the problem of practice that originally guided this study: the persistence of Eurocentric narratives within the district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum and the resulting gaps in representation for historically marginalized communities. While I began this work suspecting these gaps existed, the research process has strengthened my certainty that these patterns are not isolated observations but recurring features of curriculum design and instructional enactment. At the same time, this study has reinforced an equally important realization: these conditions are not immutable. Through intentional instructional mediation and critical examination of curricular narratives, educators can take meaningful steps to broaden historical representation and create more inclusive learning experiences for students.

Within the current political landscape—both nationally and locally—efforts to expand or reframe historical narratives in the curriculum may encounter resistance related to content scope,

instructional time, and differing perspectives on the role of equity in education. At the same time, students are increasingly engaging with diverse perspectives through media and lived experiences, creating both opportunities and tensions when curriculum materials do not fully reflect that complexity.

Perhaps the most meaningful outcome of this research has been witnessing how reflection and dialogue can inspire action among educators. After participating in one of the interviews for this study, a fifth-grade teacher with whom I had no prior professional relationship contacted me to share that our conversation had prompted her to reflect more critically on the curricular materials she was using. Shortly afterward, while teaching an English Language Arts text about Phillis Wheatley, she recognized that the narrative presented a softened portrayal of Wheatley's life and felt compelled to respond.

In the email she sent to both the anthology publisher and the HCPSS curriculum office, she expressed concern that the text did not fully address the realities of Wheatley's enslavement. She noted that Phillis Wheatley had been kidnapped from her family as a child, endured the trauma of the Middle Passage, and was given both the name of the slave ship on which she arrived and the surname of the family who enslaved her. She also suggested that teachers be encouraged to supplement the reading with additional resources that provide greater historical context and offered to develop and share supplemental lesson materials with colleagues.

When she later shared this correspondence with me, she reflected that the interview had encouraged her to pause and reconsider how the curriculum was presenting this history to her students. She wrote that she was grateful for the opportunity to engage in the conversation because it gave her a renewed sense of hope that even small instructional decisions could contribute to more accurate and inclusive teaching of history.

Moments like this illustrate the potential impact of the work presented in this capstone. While systemic curriculum reform is complex and often slow, educators possess meaningful agency within their classrooms to expand historical narratives and support students in engaging more critically with the past. For students from immigrant families—particularly immigrants of color whose belonging and citizenship are sometimes questioned within national political discourse—these instructional choices can be especially significant. When curricula reflect diverse historical experiences and perspectives, students are more likely to see themselves as participants in the ongoing story of democracy rather than as outsiders to it.

For many students, this recognition extends beyond the classroom. What students learn about citizenship, representation, and participation today can shape how they understand their role in democratic life and influence the trajectory of civic engagement within their families and communities for generations to come. When young people from immigrant families encounter historical narratives that acknowledge the struggles, contributions, and civic participation of diverse communities, they are more likely to view democratic participation not as something reserved for others but as a responsibility and opportunity that belongs to them as well. In this way, classrooms that intentionally broaden historical narratives can help cultivate a sense of civic identity and agency that extends beyond individual students to the broader communities and future generations they represent.

One lesson that has remained with me since the first class in this EdD program came from my professors, Dr. Snell and Dr. Eubanks. They explained that each capstone represents only a small grain of sand within the vast landscape of improvement science. At the time, I struggled to fully understand that analogy. Now, having engaged deeply in this research, I find its meaning much clearer. This capstone is not the culmination of the work—it is the beginning.

Through the lens of improvement science, it represents one small but intentional step toward shifting the trajectory of how curriculum reflects the voices, histories, and contributions of those who have long been marginalized and underrepresented.

If this capstone is only a grain of sand, then my hope is that it contributes to the gradual reshaping of the educational landscape—one where the telling of history no longer centers a single dominant narrative but instead reflects the full chorus of voices that have always shaped, challenged, and strengthened our democracy.

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



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DATE: September 30, 2025

TO: Tracey Albright

FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [2322687-1] Disrupting Eurocentrism in the Fifth-Grade Social Studies Curriculum

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: September 30, 2025

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7.

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to final approval of this project scientific review was completed by the IRB Member reviewer.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate Amendment forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Appendix B

Howard County Public School System Approval Form



TO: Tracey Albright
 FROM: Mary Klyap, Ph.D.
 DATE: November 12, 2025
 RE: Action Research Approval

Thank you for submitting your application to conduct action research in the Howard County Public School System. Your research is titled "Disrupting Eurocentrism in the Fifth-Grade Social Studies Curriculum."

The research committee has reviewed your application and your **action research request is approved**, given the following requirements that are indicated in the first tab of the [Implementation Checklist](#).

Researcher's next steps:

- 1) Thoroughly review the [Implementation Checklist](#) and initial in Column E (researcher) to acknowledge understanding of the requirements set forth in this approval.
- 2) Address any criteria in the [Implementation Checklist](#) that is set as "not met."
- 3) Utilize this finalized version of the [application](#).
- 4) Once criteria above are met, sign this letter and return the signed copy to research@hcpss.org.
- 5) Attach the letter on page 2 when communicating with school staff so they are aware that this project has been approved as per Policy 3030.

By signing this application, Researcher/Applicant agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the Board of Education of Howard County, the Howard County Public School System, its agents, officers, and employees ("Indemnified Parties") from and against any liability or loss resulting from claims, demands, suits, judgments, or settlements arising out of the activities, actions, and services to be carried out pursuant to this application, including but not limited to the use of the Researcher/Applicant of the results of the study; provided however, that the Researcher/Applicant shall not be obligated to indemnify and hold harmless claims that arise out of the gross negligence or willful misconduct of the Indemnified Parties.

[Please sign and return this letter indicating that you and your dissertation chair understand and plan to adhere to these conditions.]

Tracey Albright Tracey Albright 11/13/25
 [Primary Researcher's name, signature, and date]

Segun Eubanks Segun Eubanks 11/13/25
 [Dissertation chair name, signature, and date]

On behalf of the review committee, we wish you much success in the completion of your study.

Sincerely,

Mary Klyap

Mary Klyap, Ph.D.
 Superintendent's designee for Policy 3030

cc: D. Lamer

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form for Educator Interviews



Institutional Review Board

1204 Marie Mount Hall • 7814 Regents Drive • College Park, MD 20742 • 301-405-4212 • irb@umd.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	<i>Disrupting Eurocentrism in the Fifth-Grade Social Studies Curriculum</i>
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Tracey Albright at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a fifth-grade teacher providing social studies instruction for Unit 2: Our Changing Nation. The purpose of this capstone is to address the Eurocentric bias embedded within the district-developed fifth-grade social studies curriculum in Howard County Public Schools (HCPSS) by empowering teachers to analyze and address gaps. This shift enables a deeper exploration of systemic inequities within the curriculum and supports the development of actionable strategies to foster inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive learning environments. By evaluating curriculum content for representation gaps and skewed narratives, this investigation aims to empower educators to foster inclusive learning environments that affirm the diverse identities and experiences of all students.
Procedures	While the overall study includes multiple phases of data collection and analysis, only the interview procedures apply to you as a participant. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in one individual interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. The interview will take place virtually via a secure Zoom link or in a mutually agreed-upon private location. During the interview, you will be asked questions related to your experiences teaching fifth-grade social studies, specifically Unit 2: <i>Our Changing Nation</i>. Topics will include your perspectives on curriculum content, student engagement, and the extent to which the curriculum supports or limits diverse historical narratives. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Recording is not required for participation. If you choose not to be recorded, the researcher will take detailed written notes to document your responses. You may choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time without penalty.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	The study poses minimal risk. The main risk is the potential for discomfort when discussing sensitive topics related to equity, race, or curriculum gaps. To mitigate this,

	interviews will be conducted in private settings, and participants may skip any question or stop the interview at any time.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits to you, however the interview provides an opportunity for you to share your insight. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study. By identifying gaps in curricular content, representation, and instructional practices related to cultural inclusivity, this study seeks to equip educators with tools that align with the district's Educational Equity Policy. In doing so, it enhances student engagement, fosters historical inquiry, and affirms diverse identities.
Confidentiality	Participant identities will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms in all transcripts and published findings. A key linking personally identifiable information to participant study IDs will be stored in a separate, password-protected folder on the researcher's UMD institutional Box or Google Drive account. This key will be destroyed once transcription is complete and verified. Audio recordings will be used solely for transcription purposes. Transcription will be completed by the researcher, and all transcripts will use pseudonyms rather than personally identifiable information. Audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after transcripts are finalized. Transcripts will be stored in a password-protected digital folder, accessible only to the researcher. All identifiable data will be destroyed following transcription, and no identifiable information will be retained. All transcripts will remain de-identified, with pseudonyms replacing any personally identifiable information, and only these de-identified transcripts will be retained for analysis. Data reported in publications or presentations will be de-identified and presented in aggregate form or through pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality. Signed electronic consent forms will be stored separately in a secure, password-protected folder on the researcher's UMD institutional Box or Google Drive account. These forms will be retained for a minimum of three years following study completion, in compliance with federal regulations and UMD policy, and then permanently destroyed. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: Tracey Albright University of Maryland, College Park

	Email: talbrig1@umd.edu	
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.	
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix D
Document Corpus for Phase 1 Curriculum Analysis

Lesson	Lesson Title / Focus	Document Types Included
L1	Beginning Anchor	Lesson plan; unit overview; anchor task; guiding questions; student materials
L2	Abolitionists	Lesson plan; instructional slides; primary and secondary source readings; student tasks; vocabulary resources
L3	Road to Civil War	Lesson plan; abolitionist strategy resources; instructional materials; student analysis tasks
L4	Maryland's Location	Lesson plan; geographic maps; instructional resources; guiding questions; student activities
L5	Effects of the Civil War	Lesson plan; station-based readings; political, social, and economic impact charts; educator key
L6	Maryland in the 19th Century	Lesson plan; historical texts; timelines; student tasks
L7	Reconstruction Amendments	Lesson plan; instructional presentation; Reconstruction-era readings; student response materials
L8	Ending Anchor	Culminating lesson plan; synthesis task; reflection prompts; student performance task

Appendix E

Policy 1080 Equity Criteria Crosswalk

Table E1

Policy 1080 Equity Criteria and Corresponding Analytic Coding Dimensions

Policy 1080 Commitment	Analytic Interpretation	Coding Dimension
Ensure access to a culturally responsive and relevant curriculum.	Diverse perspectives are embedded consistently throughout curriculum materials	Content Representation
Student voice and agency	Historically marginalized groups are portrayed as active historical agents rather than passive recipients of events	Narrative Framing
Inclusive representation	Multiple social identifiers (e.g., race, ethnicity, culture, language) are reflected across curriculum content	Content Inclusion
Elimination of systemic barriers	Equity is structurally embedded in curriculum design rather than dependent on individual educator adaptation	Policy Alignment

Note. Equity commitments and analytic interpretations were derived from HCPSS Policy 1080: *Educational Equity* and informed deductive coding across curriculum documents in Phase 1 of the study.

Table E2

Policy 1080 Principle: Ensure Access to a Culturally Responsive and Relevant Curriculum

Deductive Codes	Operational Meaning
I-AA	Explicit inclusion of African American perspectives
I-MARG	Inclusion of marginalized or intersectional groups
C-MARG	Marginalized communities positioned as agents of change
T-MARG	Marginalized voices are added as discrete topics rather than organizing lenses
Cross-Lesson Evidence Pattern	
Lesson 2	Strong I-AA and R-MARG presence through abolitionist strategies
Lesson 5 & 7	African American postwar realities appear, but often after institutional narratives are established
Lesson 1–4	Early framing privileges C-GOV and C-SETTLER , delaying culturally responsive perspectives.
Overall Lesson Sequencing	Marginalized perspectives are introduced after dominant narratives, indicating T-MARG at the unit level.

Table E3

Policy 1080 Principle: Promote student voice through meaningful, dynamic learning experiences.

Deductive Codes	Operational Meaning
C-GOV	Government or institutional figures positioned as primary agents of change
O-MARG	Marginalized perspectives omitted from inquiry or discussion prompts
T-MARG	Superficial inclusion of diverse voices without sustained analysis
R-MARG	Marginalized agency and resistance are explicitly centered
Cross-Lesson Evidence Pattern	
Lesson 1, 3, 4, 8	Student participation structures (discussion, voting, writing) occur primarily within C-GOV frames, where government decisions or state systems define the historical narrative.
Lesson 3	Students analyze constitutional clauses (C-GOV) without structured prompts requiring engagement with enslaved peoples' lived experiences, resulting in O-MARG unless teachers intervene.
Lesson 8	Culminating writing allows for choice, but does not require equity-centered sourcing , creating conditions for T-MARG .

Table E4

Policy 1080 Principle: Ensure inclusive representation that validates diverse identities and experiences.

Relevant Deductive Codes	Operational Meaning
I-AA	African American perspectives included
I-INDIG	Indigenous perspectives included
I-ASIAN	Asian American perspectives included
I-H/L	Hispanic/Latine perspectives included
I-W	Women's contributions included
T-MARG	Tokenistic or episodic inclusion
Cross-Lesson Evidence Pattern	
I-AA	Appears consistently (enslavement, abolition, Reconstruction), though often framed through systems rather than sustained agency.
I-W	Present episodically (abolitionist women, suffrage), not as a continuous analytic strand.
I-INDIG	Referenced indirectly ("Indians not taxed") without Indigenous perspectives or historical context O-MARG / T-MARG .
I-ASIAN / I-H/L	Appear primarily in Lesson 6 via immigration discussions, often generalized rather than historically situated.

Table E5

Policy 1080 Principle: Ensure historically accurate instruction that reflects multiple perspectives and lived experiences.

Deductive Codes	Operational Meaning
C-GOV	Institutions framed as primary drivers of history
C-SETTLER	Eurocentric or dominant-group framing
D-MARG	Marginalized groups framed through deficit or harm without agency
R-MARG	Resistance, agency, and cultural contribution are emphasized
Cross-Lesson Evidence Pattern	
Lesson 3	Accurate constitutional analysis (C-GOV) foregrounds systemic injustice but limits enslaved peoples' voices to D-MARG risk .
Lesson 4 & 6	Economic and industrial narratives emphasize progress and infrastructure (C-SETTLER) with minimal attention to racialized impacts.
Lesson 2 & portions of Lessons 5 and 7	R-MARG appears when abolitionist resistance and postwar Black civic participation are explicitly discussed.

Appendix F

Document Analysis Protocol for Phase 1 Curriculum Review

This appendix details the systematic document analysis process used in Phase 1 to examine Unit 2: *Our Changing Nation* within the fifth-grade social studies curriculum of the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). Grounded in Bowen’s (2009) qualitative document analysis methodology and Saldaña’s (2016) iterative coding framework, the protocol was anchored in HCPSS Policy 1080: *Educational Equity* to support analytic rigor, reflexivity, transparency, and replicability. The document analysis aimed to identify content representation gaps, examine narrative framing, and assess alignment with district-defined equity commitments.

Step 1: Establish Analytic Purpose and Deductive Anchor

Document analysis was guided by the following research question: *What gaps in content and representation exist about historically underrepresented and marginalized groups in Grade 5 Social Studies Unit 2, Our Changing Nation, and how does the curriculum’s narrative framing align with the equity standards outlined in HCPSS Policy 1080?*

The analysis was deductively anchored in HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity, with particular attention to culturally responsive curriculum, inclusive representation, student voice and agency, and structural—not educator-dependent—equity. Policy 1080 served as the conceptual framework guiding analytic focus and code development.

Two analytic lenses structured the analysis:

- Content representation (the what): what content is included and whose histories and experiences are represented.
- Narrative framing (the how): how historical narratives are constructed, including whose perspectives are centered, marginalized, or omitted.

Step 2: Document Collection and Corpus Preparation

District-developed curriculum documents for Unit 2: *Our Changing Nation* were obtained through an approved Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) request, as applicable. The document corpus included unit overviews, lesson plans, instructional resources, guiding questions, vocabulary supports, and student tasks.

All documents were reviewed in full prior to coding to establish familiarity with scope, sequencing, and instructional intent. This preliminary review supported the identification of analytically salient features and informed subsequent coding decisions.

Step 3: Develop Equity-Aligned Coding Framework

A combined deductive–inductive coding framework was developed in alignment with Saldaña’s (2016) approach.

First Cycle Coding (Deductive Coding): Deductive codes were derived from HCPSS Policy 1080 and equity-centered curriculum research and included:

- Content inclusion: Presence or absence of perspectives from African Americans, Indigenous peoples, Hispanic/Latine individuals, Asian Americans, women, and other historically marginalized groups.
- Narrative balance: Representation of agency, resistance, and cultural contributions across groups.
- Policy alignment: Evidence of alignment or misalignment with Policy 1080's mandates related to equity, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness.

First Cycle Coding (Inductive Coding): Inductive codes were applied to capture emergent patterns not fully accounted for by deductive categories, such as implicit bias, silencing, oversimplification of historical events, and dominant cultural framing.

Step 4: Analyze Curriculum Content (Content Representation)

Curriculum content was examined to assess the inclusivity of lesson topics, historical figures, events, and source materials. Analysis focused on identifying representation gaps, including omissions of key perspectives, limited treatment of marginalized groups, and reliance on dominant narratives.

Content frequency counts and comparative analyses were used to document patterns of inclusion and exclusion across lessons and instructional materials.

Step 5: Analyze Narrative Framing (Textual Representation)

Narrative framing was analyzed using focused subcategories, including:

- Framing of historical figures: Who is positioned as a leader, innovator, or change agent.
- Framing of agency: Whether historically marginalized groups are depicted as active agents or passive recipients of events.
- Framing of motivations: How actions and events are explained (e.g., abolition, resistance, settler colonialism).
- Framing of cultural contributions: Recognition and valuation of non-European cultural influences.
- Framing of power and outcomes: How justice, progress, and resolution are portrayed.
- Language use: Identification of euphemisms, omissions, or value-laden terminology that may obscure power or reinforce bias.

Step 6: Second Cycle Coding and Pattern Development

Consistent with Saldaña's (2016) Second Cycle coding, First Cycle codes were reviewed, compared, and reorganized to identify patterns and analytic relationships. Codes were clustered into broader thematic categories, including:

- Implicit or explicit bias
- Underrepresented or marginalized perspectives
- Distorted, simplified, or omitted historical narratives

Analytic memos were used throughout this process to document coding decisions, evolving interpretations, and positionality considerations.

Following thematic clustering, patterns were further examined for cross-lesson recurrence and structural embedding within required lesson components. To increase analytic transparency and reduce impressionistic interpretation, each emergent cross-lesson pattern was assigned a relative strength classification based on explicit criteria.

Relative strength classifications reflect:

1. Cross-lesson recurrence (number of lessons in which the pattern appeared),
2. Structural positioning within required components (e.g., essential questions, core texts, required tasks),
3. Degree of embedding (whether the pattern functioned as a dominant organizing logic or as an optional/supplemental feature).

Patterns were classified as follows:

- **Strong:** Present across the majority of lessons (e.g., six or more of eight), embedded in required instructional components, and functioning as a dominant explanatory or narrative structure.
- **Moderate:** Present across multiple lessons but concentrated within specific lesson clusters or partially embedded within required components.
- **Moderate to Limited:** Present inconsistently across lessons and often dependent on optional tasks, supplemental materials, or teacher mediation rather than structurally required components.

Strength classifications were assigned only after cross-lesson comparison and verification procedures were completed. These classifications describe structural recurrence within curriculum design and do not indicate instructional impact or evaluative judgment.

Step 7: Evaluate Authenticity and Policy Alignment

Curriculum materials were evaluated for alignment with the expectations of HCPSS Policy 1080 for inclusive, culturally responsive instruction. Analysis examined whether historically marginalized voices were represented with complexity and dignity or relegated to peripheral roles and whether the curriculum challenged or reinforced Eurocentric narratives.

Step 8: Cross-Phase Triangulation with Educator Interviews

Findings from the document analysis were compared with data from Phase 2 educator interviews to examine convergence and divergence across data sources. Triangulation supported analysis of how representation gaps identified in curriculum documents were interpreted, negotiated, and addressed in instructional practice.

Step 9: Quantification of Analytic Findings

Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, were used to summarize trends in representation across curriculum documents. Quantification supported analytic claims and facilitated clear communication of systemic patterns.

Step 10: Synthesis and Reporting

Findings were synthesized into a narrative and coded summary identifying representation gaps, patterns of narrative framing, and areas of alignment or misalignment with Policy 1080.

Connection to Analytic Outputs

The document analysis protocol detailed in this appendix generated the analytic outputs presented in Section 3, including frequency tables, narrative framing patterns, and policy alignment judgments across Unit 2 lessons. Systematic application of this protocol enabled identification of recurring representation gaps, delayed inclusion of marginalized perspectives, and uneven narrative balance related to agency and power. These patterns were subsequently synthesized into analytic claims supported by cross-lesson evidence matrices (Appendix J), ensuring that findings were transparently derived from documented procedures rather than impressionistic interpretation.

Appendix G

Equity-Aligned Coding Framework and Code Definitions

The following tables present the analytic codebook used during Phase 1 document analysis.

Deductive Codes

Deductive codes supported systematic examination of content representation, narrative framing, and policy alignment, while inductive codes captured emergent patterns related to representation gaps, Eurocentric narrative framing, and instructional mediation. Together, these codes ensured analytic consistency across documents and supported cross-phase triangulation with educator data.

Table G1

Content Representation: Who or what perspectives are explicitly included in the curriculum?

Code	Description
I-AA	Inclusion of African American perspectives
I-INDIG	Inclusion of Indigenous perspectives
I-ASIAN	Inclusion of Asian American perspectives
I-H/L	Inclusion of Hispanic or Latine perspectives
I-W	Inclusion of women's contributions
I-MARG	Inclusion of other marginalized or intersectional groups

Table G2

Narrative Framing: How are historical narratives constructed, centered, or marginalized?

Code	Description
C-SETTLER	European settlers centered as the primary agents of change
C-GOV	The U.S. government is centered as the primary agent of change
C-MARG	Marginalized groups centered as agents of change
O-MARG	Marginalized perspectives omitted or minimized
D-MARG	Marginalized groups framed through a deficit lens
R-MARG	Representation of marginalized groups' agency and resistance
T-MARG	Tokenistic or superficial inclusion of diverse perspectives

Table G3

Policy Alignment: To what extent does the curriculum align with district equity policy?

Code	Description
P-ALIGN	Content aligns with HCPSS Policy 1080 equity principles
P-GAP	Identifiable gaps or misalignment with Policy 1080 expectations

Inductive Codes

Inductive codes were applied during iterative analytic cycles to capture themes not fully accounted for by deductive categories, consistent with Bowen's (2009) emphasis on latent meaning and Saldaña's (2021) guidance on analytic openness.

Table G4

Inductive Coding Descriptions

Code	Description
Marginalization and Exclusion	→ Historical erasure or limited recognition of specific groups
	→ Absence of counter-narratives to dominant historical interpretations
	→ Language reinforces Eurocentric or assimilationist ideologies
Power and Agency	→ Representation of student or community voice within curriculum materials
	→ Narrative framing influences student identity, belonging, or civic positioning
	→ Opportunities for inquiry, critique, or civic engagement embedded in lessons
Instructional Adaptations	→ Educator-led supplementation or revision of curriculum content
	→ Instructional resistance to Eurocentric or biased materials
	→ Student responses to inclusive or exclusionary representations

Table G5

Representative Codebook Excerpt (Illustrative Sample)

Code	Code Family	Analytic Focus	Example Indicator in Curriculum
I-AA	Content Representation	Explicit inclusion of African American historical perspectives	Abolition addressed without centering African American agency
I-INDIG	Content Representation	Inclusion of Indigenous perspectives beyond precolonial framing	Indigenous peoples referenced only prior to westward expansion

Code	Code Family	Analytic Focus	Example Indicator in Curriculum
R-MARG	Narrative Framing	Marginalized groups represented as active agents of change	Enslaved people are portrayed as self-emancipating rather than being freed solely by legislation
O-MARG	Narrative Framing	Marginalized perspectives omitted or minimized	Civil War impacts discussed without reference to formerly enslaved people
D-MARG	Narrative Framing	Deficit-based or passive framing of marginalized groups	Euphemistic language obscuring power relations
C-GOV	Narrative Framing	Government institutions are centered as primary agents	Federal action emphasized without community or grassroots agency
P-ALIGN	Policy Alignment	Alignment with Policy 1080 equity commitments	Multiple perspectives embedded and framed with complexity
P-GAP	Policy Alignment	Misalignment with Policy 1080 expectations	Equity is implicit or left to the educator's supplementation

Note. Table G5 illustrates how codes were translated into analytic interpretations during Phase 1 analysis. The representative excerpt is provided alongside the full coding framework to illustrate code application while maintaining analytic transparency.

Appendix H

Policy Alignment Evidence Across Lessons in Unit 2: Our Changing Nation

Table H1

Evidence of Alignment or Gaps with HCPSS Policy 1080

Lesson	Evidence of Alignment with Policy 1080 (P-ALIGN)	Evidence of Gaps or Misalignment (P-GAP)
Lesson 1 – Beginning Anchor	Uses deliberative discussion structures that promote student voice, justification, and civic participation.	Focuses primarily on abstract civic concepts without explicit inclusion of historically marginalized perspectives.
Lesson 2 – Abolition	Centers abolition as collective action; introduces abolitionists as agents of change; connects advocacy to justice-oriented action.	Emphasis is placed on well-known figures; intersectional and lesser-known perspectives are limited without supplemental materials.
Lesson 3 – Civil War Causes	Engages students in analyzing constitutional language (e.g., 3/5 Compromise, Fugitive Slave Clause); positions students as analysts of institutional power.	Indigenous peoples appear only indirectly (“Indians not taxed”) without sovereignty, resistance, or lived-experience framing.
Lesson 3 – Abolitionist Strategies	Centers Black abolitionists as strategists and leaders; examines multiple forms of resistance; includes women abolitionists.	Representation of marginalized agency is concentrated within abolition content rather than embedded across the unit narrative.
Lesson 4 – Maryland as a Border State	Encourages inquiry into geography, economics, and regional strategy; supports systems-level thinking.	Limited attention to the lived experiences of enslaved people, free Black communities, or dissenters in Maryland.
Lesson 5 – Impact of the Civil War	Names Reconstruction-era structural inequities (e.g., Black Codes, segregation, racial violence); references Black schooling and political participation.	Language and sequencing foreground White economic loss; dominant narratives are not explicitly interrogated.
Lesson 6 – Immigration & Industrialization	Introduces immigration as a historical force; includes multiple entry points (Ellis Island, Angel Island, Locust Point).	Immigration narratives emphasize entry experiences and do not consistently examine exclusion, race, or power across groups.
Lesson 7 – Reconstruction & Civil Rights (Supporting Materials)	Addresses Reconstruction Amendments and systemic barriers; introduces rights expansion and retrenchment.	Student tasks do not consistently require analysis of who benefited, who was harmed, or why inequities persisted.
Lesson 8 – Ending Anchor	Provides opportunities for synthesis, reflection, and student voice through discussion and voting.	Reflection emphasizes content mastery rather than sustained analysis of equity or contemporary relevance.

Lesson	Evidence of Alignment with Policy 1080 (P-ALIGN)	Evidence of Gaps or Misalignment (P-GAP)
<i>Facing History</i> Text: “He Was Always Right and You Were Always Wrong”	Centers a formerly enslaved person’s voice; exposes sharecropping as systemic economic exploitation.	Requires intentional teacher facilitation to extend analysis from empathy to systemic and policy-level critique.

Note. This table summarizes evidence of alignment and gaps using a deductive coding framework aligned to HCPSS Policy 1080: *Educational Equity*. Evidence reflects explicit curricular design features (lesson focus, required tasks, and required texts), not teacher enactment or student outcomes. Coding was conducted using NVivo qualitative analysis software.

Appendix I

Semi-Structured Interview Procedures (Phase 2)

This appendix outlines the structured approach for conducting semi-structured educator interviews in Phase 2 of the Capstone study. The framework is guided by Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) principles for qualitative research interviewing and supports the collection of educator perspectives related to *Unit 2: Our Changing Nation* in the fifth-grade HCPSS social studies curriculum. These interviews will elicit issues of inclusivity, curriculum representation, and instructional adaptations in alignment with HCPSS Policy 1080: *Educational Equity* (2020).

Clarify the Purpose

The primary objective of these interviews is to assess the degree to which *Our Changing Nation* aligns with the goals of HCPSS Policy 1080. Topics will include educator perceptions of critical historical content (the Civil War, the abolition of slavery, and Reconstruction in Maryland), curriculum representation, student engagement, and instructional needs related to inclusive practices.

Interview Design

The interview protocol follows a semi-structured format that balances consistency with flexibility. Structured questions ensure comparability across interviews, while open-ended prompts allow participants to share personal insights and elaborate on lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Participants will provide informed consent. Participation will be voluntary and confidential. Interviews may be paused or discontinued at any point without consequence. Interview data will be anonymized in transcripts and reports.

Establish an Ethical Interview Climate

To encourage openness, interviews will be held in quiet, private spaces outside of school buildings and instructional hours. The researcher will clarify their dual role as administrator and researcher and maintain a non-evaluative stance. Rapport will be established through conversational entry questions prior to addressing more sensitive topics.

Practice Active Listening

The interviewer will use follow-up prompts and probes to clarify and deepen participant responses. Interviews will be audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed for accuracy. Field notes will be used to capture non-verbal cues and initial analytic impressions.

Maintain Flexibility

Interview questions may be adapted in response to participant input. Unexpected but relevant themes will be explored as they emerge during the interview process.

Ask Clear and Open Questions

All questions will be phrased in accessible, non-leading language. The interview protocol (Appendix D) will be pilot tested for clarity and relevance.

Minimize Bias

The interviewer will maintain neutrality throughout the interview process. Participants will be encouraged to express a full range of perspectives.

Documentation and Recording

Audio recordings and detailed field notes will be used to document responses. Non-verbal cues will be noted as part of meaning-making and interpretation.

Iterative and Reflexive Analysis

Data will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, with early interviews informing subsequent data collection. Thematic analysis will integrate deductive codes drawn from Policy 1080 and Phase 1 findings with inductive codes reflecting emergent insights.

Reflexivity

The researcher will reflect on their assumptions, positionality, and potential influence on participants. Analytic memos will be used to document decision-making processes and interpretive insights throughout the study.

Appendix J

Interview Protocol and Phase Alignment Crosswalk

This appendix presents the full semi-structured interview protocol used in Phase 2, followed by a crosswalk table illustrating how interview questions were intentionally revised and aligned with the findings from the Phase 1 document analysis and HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity. Together, these materials document coherence across study phases and transparency in instrument design.

Section J1. Semi-Structured Educator Interview Protocol

Introductory Remarks

Hello, my name is Tracey Albright, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I am interested in understanding your experiences teaching the fifth-grade social studies curriculum, particularly Unit 2, Our Changing Nation, as it relates to inclusivity, historical representation, and student engagement.

This is a semi-structured interview. While I have a set of guiding questions, you are welcome to share any insights you feel are relevant. With your permission, this interview will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. Your responses will remain confidential, and identifying information will be removed from all reports and presentations.

Interview Purpose

The purpose of this interview is to elicit how educators interpret, adapt, and enact the fifth-grade social studies curriculum in practice, particularly in relation to representation, narrative framing, and equity expectations outlined in HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity. Findings from these interviews informed analytic interpretation and the development of a curriculum equity framework.

Interview Questions

A. Background and Instructional Context

1. How closely do you follow the district-developed curriculum when teaching Unit 2: Our Changing Nation?
2. What resources, guidance, or professional learning—if any—most influence how you make instructional decisions when teaching social studies?

B. Identifying Gaps in Content and Representation

3. Are there perspectives or experiences you notice are consistently missing, minimized, or introduced later in the unit rather than embedded throughout?

4. Have students ever raised questions or concerns about what is included, emphasized, or omitted in Unit 2? If so, how did you respond instructionally?
5. What challenges, if any, do you encounter when trying to incorporate diverse perspectives?

C. Curriculum Inclusivity and Narrative Framing

6. What strategies or tools do you use to evaluate whether the curriculum centers multiple perspectives—not only in content, but in who is portrayed as having agency or influence?
7. If you could revise *Our Changing Nation*, what structural changes—such as sequencing, required tasks, or guiding questions—would you recommend to better reflect diverse historical narratives?

D. Student Engagement, Inquiry, and Critical Thinking

8. How do you encourage students to analyze or question dominant narratives in social studies instruction, particularly around power, agency, or historical change?
9. What kinds of student responses or reflections have you observed when engaging in inquiry-based learning around identity, equity, or historical interpretation?
10. When curriculum materials emphasize government action or dominant perspectives, how do you decide whether to interrupt, supplement, or proceed as written?

E. Policy Awareness and Equity Expectations

11. How familiar are you with HCPSS Policy 1080, and in what ways—if any—does it influence your curriculum or instructional decisions?

F. Professional Support and Structural Needs

12. What kinds of professional development or practical tools would best support your efforts to address representation and equity without significantly increasing planning time?
13. If you had access to a short equity review tool or checklist, what would you want it to help you notice or decide as you plan or teach Unit 2?

G. Closing Reflections

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences teaching *Our Changing Nation* or integrating diverse perspectives into social studies instruction?
15. What advice would you give to curriculum designers or district leaders seeking to make social studies instruction more equitable and engaging?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and thoughtful insights. Your contributions directly informed the analytic findings and recommendations developed in this study.

Section J2. Alignment of Phase 2 Interview Questions to Phase 1 Findings and Policy 1080

Table J1

Alignment of Phase 1 Findings, Original Interview Questions, and Revised Interview Questions

Phase 1 Document Analysis Finding	Original Interview Question	Trigger for Revision (Phase 1 Insight)	Revised Interview Question	Analytic Purpose	Aligned RQ(s)	Aligned Policy 1080 Principles
Equity enactment is educator-dependent rather than structurally embedded	How familiar are you with the district-developed social studies curriculum for fifth grade?	Findings suggested variability in curriculum fidelity and reliance on educator discretion	How closely do you follow the district-developed curriculum when teaching Unit 2: Our Changing Nation?	Examine whether equity-aligned instruction is structurally supported or discretionary	RQ2, RQ3	Access to culturally responsive curriculum; Elimination of systemic barriers
Marginalized perspectives appear episodically	How well does Unit 2 reflect underrepresented groups?	Document analysis showed uneven sequencing and episodic inclusion	Are there perspectives or experiences you notice are consistently missing, minimized, or introduced later rather than embedded throughout?	Surface structural silencing through sequencing	RQ2, RQ3	Inclusive representation; Validation of diverse identities
Institutional figures centered as agents of change (C-GOV)	What strategies do you use to evaluate inclusivity?	Coding revealed the dominance of the governmental agency	What strategies or tools do you use to evaluate who is portrayed as having agency or influence?	Examine the educator's attention to narrative framing	RQ2	Culturally responsive instruction
Marginalized agency exceptionalized	How do you encourage students to question dominant narratives?	Phase 1 showed the agency framed as rare or peripheral	How do you encourage students to analyze or question dominant narratives related to power and historical change?	Identify instructional strategies fostering critical consciousness	RQ2	Student voice and agency
Equity policy additive rather than embedded	Are you familiar with Policy 1080?	Policy alignment gaps surfaced in documents	How familiar are you with Policy 1080, and how does it influence your instructional decisions?	Assess policy enactment without deficit framing	RQ2, RQ3	System accountability for equity

Phase 1 Document Analysis Finding	Original Interview Question	Trigger for Revision (Phase 1 Insight)	Revised Interview Question	Analytic Purpose	Aligned RQ(s)	Aligned Policy 1080 Principles
Eurocentric framing normalized	Are there guidelines that inform your teaching decisions?	Language analysis revealed neutralized Eurocentric framing	When materials emphasize dominant perspectives, how do you decide whether to interrupt, supplement, or proceed?	Examine discretionary equity disruption	RQ2	Historical accuracy; Inclusive narratives
Equity support is optional	What PD would support inclusive instruction?	Educators identified workload and time constraints	What professional development or tools would support equity work without increasing planning time?	Inform the low-lift design of the impact product	RQ3	Equitable access to instruction
Need for structural equity review tools	How might curriculum changes impact outcomes?	Phase 1 highlighted a lack of consistent equity review	If you had an equity checklist, what would you want it to help you notice or decide?	Directly inform the Phase 3 framework design	RQ3	Translated into analytic interpretations of equity policy

Note. This alignment table demonstrates how Phase 2 interview questions were intentionally revised in response to findings from Phase 1

document analysis and policy alignment needs. Revisions strengthened coherence across study phases and supported triangulation between curriculum analysis and educator perspectives.

Appendix K

Invitation to Participate in Educator Interview (Recruitment Email)

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research Interview on Fifth-Grade Social Studies Curriculum

Dear HCPSS Fifth Grade educator,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Tracey Albright, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park, pursuing a Doctor of Education in School System Leadership. I am conducting a capstone research study titled *Disrupting Eurocentrism in the Fifth-Grade Social Studies Curriculum*, which has been approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRBNet #2322687-1).

As part of this study, I am inviting fifth-grade educators to participate in a semi-structured interview to share their experiences teaching Unit 2: Our Changing Nation in the Howard County Public Schools' social studies curriculum. The goal is to examine how the curriculum reflects—or fails to reflect—diverse historical narratives and to understand how educators interpret, adapt, and implement it in practice. Your insights will be instrumental in shaping an equity framework for curriculum that supports inclusive, culturally responsive teaching aligned with HCPSS Policy 1080: Educational Equity.

Details of Participation:

- The interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes.
- It will be scheduled at a convenient time and held in a private setting outside of school hours.
- Participation is entirely voluntary and confidential.
- With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis.
- You may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without consequence.

Please review the attached Consent Form for additional details. If you are willing to participate or would like more information, kindly reply to this email or contact me directly at talbrig1@umd.edu or 443-695-5096.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to a study aimed at enhancing equity and representation in our social studies curriculum. Your perspective as a classroom educator is deeply valued.

Warm regards,
 Tracey Albright
 Doctoral Candidate, University of Maryland, College Park
 Ed.D. in School System Leadership
 Email: talbrig1@umd.edu
 Phone: 443-695-5096

Appendix L

Step-by-Step Interview Analysis Process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015)

This appendix documents the analytic procedures used to analyze educator interview data in Phase 2. The process follows Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) meaning-focused interview analysis and ensures analytic coherence, transparency, and methodological rigor. This checklist reflects analytic procedures enacted by the researcher and is not an assessment instrument.

1. Re-anchor analysis in the study purpose

Re-state the purpose of the interview inquiry and the type of knowledge sought (e.g., educator meaning-making, instructional reasoning, equity enactment).

Translate the purpose into analytic questions guiding interpretation.

Confirm alignment between analytic focus and study research questions.

2. Prepare transcripts as analytic documents

Determine the appropriate level of transcription detail (cleaned verbatim).

Review transcripts against audio recordings for accuracy.

Add speaker identifiers and organizational markers as needed.

Treat transcription as an interpretive stage shaping analytic possibilities.

3. Read for holistic understanding

Read each transcript in full without coding.

Record initial analytic memos noting key impressions, tensions, repetitions, and points of emphasis or contradiction.

4. Identify meaning units

Re-read transcripts to identify meaning units (segments expressing a single idea, experience, claim, or justification).

Preserve participant language during initial segmentation.

Avoid premature interpretation at this stage.

5. Condense meanings

Create concise restatements of each meaning unit that preserve participant intent.

Reduce transcript volume while retaining analytic substance.

Use excerpt–condensed meaning pairings to support transparency.

6. Categorize meanings

Group condensed meanings into analytic categories.

Apply deductive categories informed by Phase 1 findings and Policy 1080.

Allow inductive categories to emerge from recurring patterns.

Refine category boundaries iteratively.

7. Interpret meanings

Interpret categories in relation to participant context and instructional setting.

Examine how interview interactions shape responses.

Analyze meanings in relation to research questions and equity frameworks.

Attend to tensions, contradictions, emphases, and silences.

Attend to affective intensity within participant language, noting repetition, emphasis, emotional qualifiers, and expressions of caution, frustration, or conviction as indicators of analytic weight.

8. Consider narrative structuring (as appropriate)

Identify narrative elements within educator accounts (e.g., agency, responsibility, constraint).

Examine how participants position themselves, students, and institutions.

Determine whether findings are best presented thematically or narratively.

9. Apply ad hoc analytic moves

Compare responses across participants to identify convergence and divergence.

Search for negative or deviant cases.

Develop response profiles or typologies when warranted by patterns.

Map relationships among categories to support synthesis.

During cross-case comparison, consider not only thematic recurrence but also relative intensity across interviews, examining how frequency and affective emphasis collectively inform category development.

10. Verify analytic interpretations

Confirm that all claims are supported by transcript evidence.

Assess coherence of categories across the full dataset.

Consider alternative interpretations.

Use reflexive memoing and analytic review to strengthen credibility.

11. Report findings with analytic transparency

Present a clear analytic trail from excerpt to condensed meaning to category to interpretation.

Select quotations purposefully to advance analytic claims.

Document analytic decisions and category refinement processes.

Note. This checklist reflects the interview analysis procedures enacted in Phase 2 and aligns with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) conceptualization of interview inquiry as an integrated process of design, analysis, interpretation, and verification.

Appendix M

Affective Tone and Intensity Coding Framework

Table M1

Affective Tone Coding Key

Affective Descriptor	Operational Definition	Linguistic or Contextual Indicators Used for Coding
Neutral / Descriptive	Statement delivered without emotional qualifiers; informational tone	Absence of evaluative language; straightforward recounting of events or observations
Observational	Analytical description of curriculum features without affective markers	"It doesn't flow," "Hardly any mention," "It's late in the unit."
Reflective	Thoughtful commentary acknowledging limitations or possibility without heightened emotion	"Policy gives comfort," "I think..." "I notice..."
Evaluative	Direct critique or value judgment about curriculum design or implementation	"It's all over the place," "They've taken away teaching."
Frustration Implied	Indirect expression of workload burden or resource constraint	"I have to do a lot of research," "Time is so constricted."
Compliance-Oriented	Language emphasizing adherence to district expectations or approved materials	"I follow it exactly," "Everything on Canvas," "County-approved."
Cautionary	Language signaling risk management or concern about misinterpretation	"Dicey," "Careful what I say," "Stay away from saying."
Anxiety-Related	Explicit statements of fear, nervousness, or apprehension	"Afraid," "Nervous," "Double check everything," "Hard not to be biased."
Elevated Professional Risk	Repeated references to fear of parent reaction, scrutiny, or professional consequence	References to pushback, misinterpretation, and professional vulnerability
Instructional Aspiration	Expressed desire for improved materials or tools	"I'd love journals," "Any social studies PD would help."

Note. Affective coding was applied using explicit linguistic markers, repetition within interviews, strength of evaluative phrasing, and references to professional risk. Coding decisions were documented during cross-case comparison and analytic memoing procedures described in Appendix L.

Table M2*Intensity Level Coding Scale*

Intensity Level	Operational Definition	Application Criteria
Low	No emotional qualifiers; informational or descriptive tone	Single mention; no repetition; no risk language
Low–Moderate	Mild evaluative or reflective tone	Limited emphasis; no strong emotional markers
Moderate	Clear evaluative or frustration language without explicit fear	Single or brief emphasis; moderate affect
Moderate–High	Explicit concern or implied professional vulnerability	Strong phrasing; contextual risk language
High	Direct anxiety markers or repeated cautionary language	Words such as “afraid,” “nervous,” “dicey”; repeated emphasis within the interview

Note. Intensity levels were determined by examining the presence of emotional qualifiers, repetition within a single interview, strength of evaluative phrasing, and references to professional risk.

Appendix N

Sample Coded Transcript Excerpts and Condensed Meaning Tables

Table N1

Sample Coded Transcript Excerpt and Condensed Meaning Table: Interviewee 1

25 years in education at HCPSS; third year as a Grade 5 teacher; team leader

Transcript Excerpt (Quote Anchor)	Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning	Analytic Category	Affective Tone	Intensity Level
“They try to be inclusive... but there are gaps... I supplement because I feel like they skip over something.”	Curriculum intent vs. omission	Inclusion is partial; the teacher compensates	Teacher supplementation as an equity workaround	Reflective	Low–Moderate
“They jumped after the Civil War... it just doesn’t flow... I add in a lesson.”	Structural gap in sequence	War omitted, disrupting coherence	Civil War avoidance and misframing	Observational	Moderate
“What about Asians?... What about Chinese people?”	Student questioning of absence	Students notice missing groups	Student inquiry reveals curriculum gaps	Neutral / Descriptive	Low
“I went to our own library... county-approved resources.”	Constraint on materials	Supplementation limited to approved texts	Fear-driven fidelity to curriculum	Compliance-Oriented	Moderate
“They’ve taken away teaching and turned it into presenting.”	Loss of professional agency	Scripted delivery constrains teaching	Teacher agency vs. scripted instruction	Evaluative	Moderate–High
“They need baby steps... in their home language.”	ML/EL instructional need	Access requires scaffolding	Lack of inquiry-ready resources	Reflective	Low–Moderate
“I’ve read Policy 1080... it’s not in my brain while I’m teaching.”	Policy awareness	Policy not guiding daily practice	Policy awareness with limited integration	Reflective	Low

Table N2

Sample Coded Transcript Excerpt and Condensed Meaning Table: Interviewee 2

29 years in education at HCPSS; fifth year teaching Grade 5

Transcript Excerpt (Quote Anchor)	Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning	Analytic Category	Affective Tone	Intensity Level
“We just really talk about key points... not people’s feelings.”	Focus on facts over experience	Human impact minimized	Surface-level coverage over lived experience	Neutral / Descriptive	Low
“We’re only emphasizing heroes... not all people involved.”	Narrow actor focus	Collective experience sidelined	Hero-centric narrative framing	Evaluative	Moderate
“It’s a very dicey conversation... what a parent might take out of context.”	Fear of misinterpretation	Caution drives strict fidelity	Fear-driven fidelity to curriculum	Cautionary	High
“We were told to stay away from saying the Civil War was over slavery.”	PD-driven avoidance	Slavery de-centered	Civil War avoidance and misframing	Cautionary	Moderate–High
“I have to do a lot of research... we don’t have resources.”	Curriculum thinness	Teacher bears research burden	Lack of vetted, inquiry-ready resources	Frustration Implied	Moderate
“They thought sharecropping meant sharing crops.”	Vocabulary without context	Terms lack explanatory depth	Surface-level coverage over lived experience	Observational	Low
“Where are the women?... Native Americans?”	Student questions	Curriculum lacks perspectives	Student inquiry reveals curriculum gaps	Neutral / Descriptive	Low

Table N3

Sample Coded Transcript Excerpt and Condensed Meaning Table: Interviewee 3

14 years in education at HCPSS; fourteen years in Grade 5; fourth year as team leader

Transcript Excerpt (Quote Anchor)	Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning	Analytic Category	Affective Tone	Intensity Level
“I follow it exactly... however I address certain language.”	Fidelity with interruption	Teacher mitigates bias	Teacher supplementation as an equity workaround	Compliance-Oriented	Low–Moderate
“What do you think is missing?”	Prompting omission analysis	Students identify gaps	Student inquiry reveals curriculum gaps	Reflective	Low
“Hardly any mention of newly freed slaves or families.”	Omission of lived experience	Enslaved voices minimized	Delayed or fragmented inclusion	Observational	Moderate
“I’m nervous to pick certain things... double check everything.”	Fear of harm/pushback	Vetting slows equity work	Fear-driven fidelity to curriculum	Anxiety-Related	High
“I go to Beth all the time.”	Informal vetting	Colleagues replace formal tools	Lack of vetted, inquiry-ready resources	Reflective	Low–Moderate
“So redundant... Tubman, Douglass.”	Limited abolitionist scope	Narrow historical lens	Hero-centric narrative framing	Evaluative	Moderate
“Policy gives comfort... but it’s not explicit.”	Policy reassurance	Policy supports but doesn’t guide	Policy awareness with limited integration	Reflective	Low–Moderate

Table N4

Sample Coded Transcript Excerpt and Condensed Meaning Table: Interviewee 4

2 years in education at HCPSS; second year teaching Grade 5

Transcript Excerpt (Quote Anchor)	Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning	Analytic Category	Affective Tone	Intensity Level
"It's all over the place."	Incoherent sequencing	Unit lacks narrative flow	Surface-level coverage over lived experience	Evaluative	Moderate
"I teach with fidelity... everything on Canvas."	Strict adherence	Script governs instruction	Fear-driven fidelity to curriculum	Compliance-Oriented	Low–Moderate
"It was put in as an afterthought."	Marginal placement	Representation is secondary	Delayed or fragmented inclusion	Evaluative	Moderate
"I hold power... careful with what I say."	Teacher authority concern	Neutrality constrains dialogue	Teacher agency vs. scripted instruction	Cautionary	High
"Are we talking about women... Native Americans?"	Student clarification	Rights framed narrowly	Student inquiry reveals curriculum gaps	Neutral / Descriptive	Low
"I'd love journals, letters, documents."	Desire for sources	Need for humanized history	Lack of vetted, inquiry-ready resources	Instructional Aspiration	Moderate
"I haven't been introduced to a tool like that."	Tool absence	No framework for review	Need for practical equity tools and PD	Neutral / Descriptive	Low

Table N5

Sample Coded Transcript Excerpt and Condensed Meaning Table: Interviewee 5

Fourth year in education at HCPSS; third year teaching Grade 5

Transcript Excerpt (Quote Anchor)	Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning	Analytic Category	Affective Tone	Intensity Level
“Unit Two doesn’t really hit on the necessary points.”	Missed learning targets	Change over time unclear	Surface-level coverage over lived experience	Evaluative	Moderate
“I really just follow the county’s lessons.”	High fidelity	Little supplementation	Fear-driven fidelity to curriculum	Compliance-Oriented	Low–Moderate
“I don’t think slavery comes until lesson six or seven.”	Late inclusion	Enslavement marginalized	Delayed or fragmented inclusion	Observational	Low
“Native American people would be a big one missing.”	Identified omission	Major group absent	Student inquiry reveals curriculum gaps	Reflective	Moderate
“Time is so constricted.”	Pacing pressure	Equity work deprioritized	Teacher agency vs. scripted instruction	Frustration Implied	Moderate
“Hard not to be biased... afraid to say the wrong thing.”	Teacher anxiety	Silence over risk	Fear-driven fidelity to curriculum	Anxiety-Related	High
“Working through packets... hunting for answers.”	Passive learning	Engagement limited	Lack of inquiry-ready resources	Frustration Implied	Moderate
“Any social studies PD would help.”	PD gap	Need for equity guidance	Need for practical equity tools and PD	Instructional Aspiration	Moderate

Appendix O

Phase 3 Impact Product

A Structured Tool for Equity-Centered Curriculum Review & Instruction

The Curriculum Equity Framework translates findings from Phase 1 (curriculum analysis) and Phase 2 (educator interviews) into a structured process for equity-centered curriculum use. These findings identified a *design-to-enactment gap*, in which equity expectations are present within policy but are not consistently embedded within curriculum materials or required instructional practices.

This framework is designed to operate within existing pacing guides, fidelity expectations, and institutional constraints, providing a structured process for identifying and addressing representation gaps during instruction.

Rather than replacing curriculum, this framework supports consistent, structured equity enactment so that equity work does not depend solely on individual educator discretion.

Step 1: Structured Noticing (Representation)

Step 2: Consistent Interpretation (Framing)

Step 3: Aligned Instructional Response (Enactment)

Step 4: Working Within Institutional Constraints (Conditions for Enactment)

Step 1: Structured Noticing

(Responding to A1: Afterthought Integration of Marginalized Perspective)

Purpose: Identify where and how representation is positioned within lesson sequencing.

Before teaching a lesson, examine:

1. When do marginalized perspectives appear?
 - Are they introduced early and sustained across lessons?
 - Positioned later as brief additions or concluding references?
2. Who is represented—and who is omitted or referenced indirectly?
3. How are groups positioned?
 - Are marginalized communities presented as central historical figures and change agents?
 - Primarily as populations affected by institutional decisions?
4. Whose story is centered?
 - Does the lesson prioritize institutional or government perspectives?
 - Are lived experiences, resistance, and community agency visible?

Goal: Move representation from episodic inclusion to intentional, sustained positioning within curriculum sequencing.

Step 2: Consistent Interpretation

(Responding to A1: Afterthought Integration of Marginalized Perspective and A3: Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent)

Purpose: Interpret what representation and narrative patterns signal about equity alignment.

Equity Indicators (Alignment Signals)

- Representation appears across multiple lessons (not isolated)
- Marginalized groups are positioned as active civic participants
- First-person or contemporaneous sources are included
- Analysis of power, inequity, resistance, and agency is embedded within the required tasks

Equity Red Flags (Signals to Pause)

- Representation appears only once or as a sidebar
- Marginalized groups are portrayed passively or without a voice
- Institutional or government perspectives dominate without a counterbalance
- Equity analysis is labeled optional, supplemental, or enrichment

Goal: Translate noticing into structured instructional mediation.

Step 3: Aligned Instructional Response

(Responding to A2: Equity Work as Curricular Supplementation and A3: Culturally Responsive Inquiry as Teacher-Dependent)

Purpose: Provide structured strategies that reduce reliance on individualized initiative alone.

When **red flags** are identified, select an aligned strategy that fits within existing curriculum structures:

Add perspectives (Addressing A1 gaps):

- Incorporate a brief primary or first-person source
- Include a counter-narrative or community account

Extend inquiry (Addressing A3 contingency):

- Add questions that foreground agency, resistance, or lived impact
- Prompt analysis of whose voices are amplified or muted

Reframe required tasks (Reducing A2 discretionary burden):

- Adjust discussion or writing prompts to center multiple viewpoints
- Embed equity-focused reflection into required assignments rather than as add-ons

Goal: Shift equity work from individualized initiative to structured, supported mediation.

Step 4: Work Within Institutional Boundaries

(Responding to A4: Systemic and Institutional Constraints)

Purpose: Ensure equity enactment remains feasible within fidelity, pacing, and professional risk conditions.

This framework is designed to:

- Operate within the required lesson structures
- Maintain alignment with district-approved materials
- Reduce perceived professional risk by formalizing equity review
- Support low-lift adaptation rather than curriculum redesign

Goal: Equity-centered instruction becomes a structured routine rather than a discretionary extension.

Framework Design Principles

This framework is designed to address the documented design-to-enactment gap:

Low-Lift: Builds on strategies educators already described using (A2)

High-Impact: Targets documented leverage points—representation, sequencing, agency, and optionality (A1–A3)

Constraint-Aware: Operates within fidelity and time boundaries (A4)

Policy-Aligned: Operationalizes HCPSS Policy 1080 expectations

How It Works

1. **Notice** representation and sequencing patterns (A1)
2. **Interpret** narrative framing and task expectations (A1–A3)
3. **Respond** with structured, aligned strategies (A2–A3)
4. **Adapt** within constraints rather than outside them (A4)

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