Investigating the Intersection of Race and Histories in the Classroom

Christopher C. Martell

Framingham Public Schools

cmartell@framingham.k12.ma.us

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Abstract

In this practitioner research study, a social studies teacher examined the intersection between his students' race/ethnicity and their experiences learning history. Using the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy as a lens, this study employed mixed methods, analyzing teacher journaling, classroom artifacts, and student reflections, as well as survey and interview data from the non-White students. The results showed that the teacher's attempt to use culturally relevant pedagogy had a positive impact on his non-White students, but it also could be improved with a greater inclusion of more ethnic and racial histories and examinations of U.S. history from foreign perspectives. This study highlights the importance of White teachers in listening to the voices of their non-White students when planning instruction.

Purpose

Over the last decade, research has shown there are differences in the experience of studying history between White students and students of color (Banks, 2008; Epstein, 1998, 2000; Epstein & Shiller, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Other studies have shown that people, particularly in oppressed groups, often understand and reconcile multiple and competing histories at once (Banks, 1998; Wertsch, 2000). Yet, Manfra (2009) highlights that there are very few published studies by K-12 social studies teachers of their own practices. As such, there are few studies that help us understand the experience of students of color from inside the history classroom. Although university-based research has made a significant contribution to our understanding of teaching and learning history

in multicultural settings, it also overlooks the local knowledge that can be generated from a teacher research perspective.

As a social studies teacher in an ethnically and economically diverse urban high school, I wanted to better understand the intersection between my students' race/ethnicity and their experience studying histories in my classroom. In this study, I intentionally use the term "histories" to describe the multiple and often conflicting histories that my students may understand and attempt to reconcile when studying the subject of "history." To achieve this, I examined the perceptions of my non-White students, specifically probing what classroom practices and subject-matter they believed helped them learn the histories of their racial or ethnic groups, as well as the barriers in my classroom to learning those histories. This study examined the following research questions: Are my teaching practices culturally relevant and do they address the educational needs of my students of color? If so, how and to what extent do my practices address the race/ethnicities of my students? If not, what barriers are created and how might I overcome these barriers?

Theoretical Framework

This study uses critical race theory of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997) as its lens. Rooted in critical theory, critical race theory has three main assertions: 1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States. 2. U.S. society is based on property rights, rather than human rights. 3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social and school inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48). By applying critical race theory to education, Ladson-Billings and Tate explain that previous and

current racial oppression continues to manifests itself through the incredibly high rates of academic failure and dropout among African-American and Latino students. With the overwhelming evidence of an educational opportunity gap based on race, teachers must continually challenge the status quo and examine if their practices are addressing the educational and social needs of their students. Applying critical race theory to the classroom, both Tyson (2003) and Howard (2003) have argued that teachers must critique the traditional teaching of social studies through teaching race-conscious history. This includes both exposing how race is an institutionalized politically oppressive construction and placing race at the center of historical discussions.

As a teacher, I push back against the traditional education power structures that not only marginalize my students of color, but also educate for property ownership rather than human rights. To achieve this, I attempt to teach using culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). According to Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant teaching must develop students academically, nurture and support cultural competence, and develop a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Moreover, culturally relevant teachers' conceptions of self and others include a belief that their students are capable of success, their pedagogy is art, and they are members of the community giving back. They have a Frierian notion of teaching as "mining." These teachers' social relationships with their students are fluid, they demonstrate connectedness with all students, and they encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another. Finally, these teachers' develop conceptions of knowledge as shared, recycled, and constructed, while also viewing it critically. I use this theory not only as the lens through which I analyze this study's data, but also as a lens to reflect on my practices as a teacher.

Furthermore, I use the concept of Whiteness to examine my teaching practice. Various scholars have described Whiteness as the institutionalized power that privileges White Americans (Chubbuck, 2004; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 2000; McIntyre, 1997; Skattebol, 2005; Sleeter, 2001, 2008). White teachers that acknowledge their Whiteness recognize this institutionalized power and intentionally work against it. As a White teacher working with students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, my action research intentionally examines my own place in an institutionalized system that gives me privilege and power based on my race. Moreover, any study of the development of my students' racial and ethnic identities, and how it interacts with the history curriculum, must also include an examination of my own identity as a White teacher.

This work is also situated within the research on teaching about race and ethnicity in the history classroom. The history curriculum in U.S. schools has long been a tool of racial oppression (Banks, 1998). Despite this, family stories and personal experiences have a major impact on how students' understand history (Seixas, 1993). Moreover, there are specific differences between how White and Black students perceive history (Epstein, 1998, 2000). Black students often express a belief that they are taught primarily "White people's history," while also being more likely than White students to recognize the multiple narratives within U.S. history. White teachers are often uncomfortable talking about race (Almarza & Fehn, 1998). As such, White teachers often leave race out of their classrooms, which alienates students of color. However, when teachers make racism a part of their explicit curriculum, it helps students become more critical of racism and the system that produces it (Bolgatz, 2005). Yet, there is still a gap in the research on

multicultural education practices, with studies missing at the high school level and from within the perspective of the classroom (Bolgatz, 2005).

Methodology

This study uses action research to examine my practices as a high school history teacher. Action research is an opportunity for teachers to learn from their work by critically and systematically examining it. Moreover, I work from a position of *inquiry as stance* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), which uses teacher research to question issues of power, equity and social justice (Campano, 2007; Carr & Kremmis, 1986). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe inquiry as stance as, "instrumental in the sense of figuring out how to get things done, but also and more importantly, it is social and political in the sense of deliberating about what to get done, why to get it done, who decides, and whose interests are served" (p. 21). I take on the dual role of teacher and researcher of my own practice and to challenge status quo practices that perpetuate power structures that maintain inequity.

Context and Participants

This study takes place at an urban high school of approximately 2,200 students. The school is located in a New England factory town that has experienced an economic decline. Traditionally an immigrant community, the town has been a recent home to a very diverse group of immigrants/migrants from the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Brazilians are one of the largest immigrant populations in the community. As a result, the high school's student body is economically, racially, and linguistically diverse.

The participants in this study were the 49 students of color in my U.S. history classes. The overall ethnic and racial make up of my U.S. history classes was 33% White,

30% Brazilian, 16% Latino/a, 7% Black, 6% Asian, 6% multiracial/other, and 3% American Indian. Thirty-eight percent of my students identified as having a language other than English as their first language and 49% were immigrants or children of immigrants. Approximately 30% of the school's students are considered low-income.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, I collected data through five sources: interviews, a teacher journal, student reflections, classroom artifacts, and a survey. Using what Creswell and Plano Clark (2006) called an embedded mixed methods design, I employed a qualitative analysis to examine the interview, journal, artifact, and open-response survey data, and a quantitative analysis to look at the closed-response survey data, where both data sets had complimentary roles.

Survey. Initially, all students were given a survey that included 32 Likert-style closed-response and six open-response items on their perceptions of learning history. The survey was administered to all my U.S. history students (N=74), with the analysis focusing on my students of color (N=49). The complete survey is available in Appendix A. To increase validity, I pilot tested the survey questions with a colleague's students before using it with the students in the study. The survey also collected basic demographic information, so I could compare my students demographically to the larger school context. Descriptive statistics showed general patterns in student responses to survey closed-question items, and independent samples t-tests were conducted on all questions to compare students of color to White students.

Interviews, Journaling, and Classroom Artifacts. Following the survey, I choose a purposive sample of four students of color to provide a deeper understanding of

their experience. Students were chosen based on two factors: their representation of the racial/ethnic diversity of students and their willingness to be interviewed. Table 1 shows the background and characteristics of the four interview participants.

Table 1. Participants

Participant	Race/Ethnicity, Gender	Grade
Ernesto	Chicano, male	10th grade
Letisha	African American, female	11th grade
Maria	Latina/European American/ Iroquois, female	10th grade
Paula	Brazilian, female	11th grade

A semi-structured interview protocol consisting of 10 questions was used, with questions grouped around two themes related to learning history and the students' backgrounds. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview protocol is available in Appendix B. Throughout the year, I also kept a weekly teacher journal on my computer. Every Friday I would reflect on the events and interactions from my classroom and their relation to my students' race/ethnicity and histories. I also collected artifacts in the form of student work and my own class handouts. On the last day of school, I also asked my students to reflect on the class using several reflection prompts.

In the first stage of the qualitative analysis, I took multiple passes through raw data. This involved three thorough readings through all of my interview, teacher journal, student reflections, and open-ended survey data, taking extensive notes through each reading. After a rough coding of the data using a coding scheme I created based on my research questions, I used the work of Erickson (1986) for guidance in the generation of assertions and then preliminary testing of those assertions. Those assertions that had

evidentiary warrant are displayed in my qualitative findings. Finally, I proceeded to a final coding of the data. This was an iterative coding process, where my codes remained flexible, working through cycles of induction and deduction to power the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 61). These codes were organized into three main categories: student learning, student identity, and teacher identity. Figure 1 displays a hierarchical organization of the codes into three levels. In sum, there were 34 individual codes under the three main categories. The coding dictionary can be found in Appendix C.

There were also several "in vivo" codes, or what Miles and Huberman (1994) described as "Phrases that are used repeatedly by informants" (p. 61). The "in vivo" codes included: "Other Peoples of Color Important," "Family History," "Include Brazilian History," "Immigrant History," "Gender History," and "Outsider." "Other Peoples of Color Important" represents when participants described learning about other non-White peoples' histories that helped them see history as more inclusive of their own cultural history. "Family History" represents when participants discuss connections between their family's history or discussions of history and the experience of other people in history. For example, several immigrant students discussed that learning about other immigrant groups connected to their histories. "Include Brazilian History" represents when participants discussed the need for more Brazilian history to be included in the U.S. history curriculum. "Immigrant History," "Gender History," "Social Class History" represents when participants discussed the importance of learning about the immigrants, women, and poor or working classes, respectively, throughout history, which helped connect them to U.S. history through their own background or circumstances. "Outsider" represents when participants described themselves as being outsiders from the

curriculum or the other students in the school. “Empowerment” represents when participants described something from our class that increase their feeling of power or control over their future.

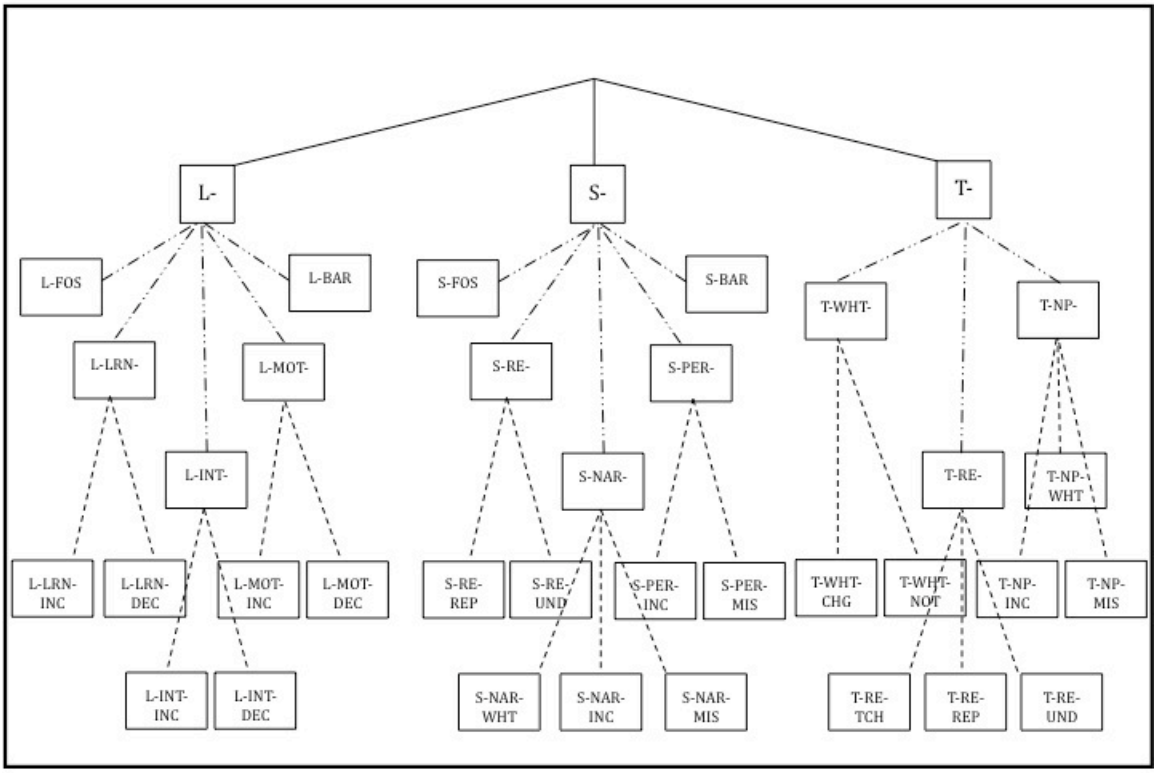

Figure 1. Map of Coding Hierarchy. “L-” represents codes related to student learning, “S-” represents codes related to the development of students’ identity, and “T-” represents codes related to the teacher’s identity.

Results

Rooted in Ladson-Billings’ (1995b) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, I focused the analysis on the principle of demonstrating connectedness with all students. Demonstrating connectedness with all students implies that student-teacher “relationships are equitable and reciprocal” (p. 480) where teachers teach, but also learn from, their students. This is at the core of what Ladson-Billings describes as a “Frierian notion of

'teaching as mining' (1974, p. 76) or pulling knowledge out" (p. 479). As a White teacher who works with students of color, this is also an examination of my own Whiteness (Chubbuck, 2004; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, et al., 2000; McIntyre, 1997; Skattebol, 2005; Sleeter, 2001, 2008). Through this work, I challenge the institutionalized power that privileges White Americans.

Challenging "Teaching White History"

As highlighted by previous research, students of color often believe that they are taught primarily "White people's history" in school. Moreover, White teachers are often uncomfortable discussing race, which is a disservice to the learning of their students. As such, I use the term "teaching White history" to describe when history teachers portray most historical events through almost exclusively European American lenses, while avoiding discussions of race. With this in mind, I problematize the idea of "teaching White history," and to challenge this, I intentionally racialized the curriculum. I make the examination of race and ethnicity a core component of my teaching. Through making race overt, I challenge Whiteness and racial privilege, while also expanding and including the diverse narratives of history. In turn, my goal is to empower my students of color through the learning of history and their histories.

Through an analysis of my curriculum and teacher journal, there is evidence that my curriculum focused on the diverse histories of my students of color. Although the events and figures in the state history curriculum framework were primarily from European American history, I included many missing events related to the history of people of color (i.e. Slave Revolts, the Battle of Wounded Knee, Zoot Suit Riots, Detroit Race Riots, the Black Panthers, the Boston Busing Crisis, the LA Riots). I encouraged

my students through projects and work in class to explore their own cultural histories. I individualized research papers and presentations, offering topics to the students that reflect their diversity (i.e. the Haitian Revolution, Black Abolitionists, the California Gold Rush, the Second Battle of Wounded Knee, Japanese Internment). I used teacher-created reading packets, which had students read competing documents or interpretations from history, in place of the textbook. These reading packets emphasized the experiences of people of color throughout U.S. history. I encourage students (including White students) to incorporate their race and ethnicity into class discussions.

The Impact of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Learning to teach culturally relevant history is a continual, recursive, and reflective process. In this study, there is evidence that I was making progress away from "teaching White history" through my use of culturally relevant pedagogy. The survey data revealed that 87.5% of students of color said they agreed/strongly agreed that the activities we did in class helped them see that history is made of many different perspectives. Moreover, 71.4% of students of color said they agreed/strongly agreed that they like learning about history more after taking this class.

Personal Connection to History. During student interviews, students of color described my class as helping them connect more to history. Ernesto said,

> I believe I learned more in this class, then any other class I have been in this whole year or in high school… Like I always want to know why things were like this or for a certain reason or through perspectives and this class actually helped me. Instead of going [the] textbook… only seeing what they want us to see. (Interview, June 2, 2011)

Ernesto described my class as allowing him to navigate the multiple narratives of history, where in other history classes the textbook and teacher supplied only one narrative of history. This was common across the interviews, where students expressed my emphasis on teaching the perspectives of history. Students expressed that my class exposed them to many different views of the past. This was also reflected in my teacher journal, where I wrote:

> We had a class debate over which direction of the civil rights movement was more effective using evidence (speeches, documents, etc.) from both factions. Letisha, a Black student, told me that she had never studied the Black Panthers or Malcolm X before. She found some of their ideas very important, especially their view of social programs, and wondered why more people didn't listen to some of these ideas. (Teacher Journal, March 11, 2011)

Letisha expressed the importance in learning multiple views, particularly those that many people find disagreeable. For her, the perspective that should prevail of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers were their views of social programs, rather than their typical textbook portrayal of violent rhetoric.

In my teacher journal data there were also many examples of my Latino students' choosing to take stances on topics related to their ethnic culture. This was particularly common in the project topics that students chose and the work they created. I wrote,

> Pedro chose to do a class presentation on the Zoot Suit Riots in the 3rd term, where he had to teach the class about the racist attacks on Chicano teenagers by White sailors in Los Angeles. In the required reflection assignment, he discussed how this helped him better understand how he was part of the Mexican-American

> struggle. He strongly identified with the teenagers and their treatment by the police. (Teacher Journal, January 22, 2011)

I noted in my teacher journal several weeks later,

> This week we studied Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. Pedro told me that because of this he started reading Chavez's biography for his English class…. Pedro is a very talented student and I wish he would do his homework more often, but he works many hours a week at McDonalds. In fact, he said the other day that many of the workers at McDonalds are Latino immigrants and it is like the farm workers of California, but recently there has been a crackdown on illegal immigrants and many of the workers have been replaced by high school kids. (Teacher Journal, March 4, 2011)

Other students described my attempt to include many different groups' perspectives in my class as important for them to develop their own perspectives. Paula, a Brazilian student said,

> Because every people, every person has a different way to look at the situation. Maybe their past may effect what you see. I have really different opinions then perspectives of one like of anything of yours, the same way they have. I am from a different country, a different culture, and different past, history past then you too, so if something happens, we are going to look at it differently. I think [the textbook] is the same thing, because a book is a person's opinion about it. The textbook is written by someone. It has an opinion that if the person looks at what happened, they would write it as what they think is right. They are not going to write as you think is right. (Interview, June 7, 2011)

Paula connects the curriculum of the class to her identity as a Brazilian, while at the same time noting my culture (and here I interpret that she meant my White culture) as giving me a different lens to look at history through. This shows an important development in her historical understanding, as she can see that a person's race and ethnicity influences how they see history.

Ethnic and Racial Identity and Historical Identity. In the interviews, students expressed that my attempts to make history more inclusive of their specific histories helped them further develop their racial identity, while also increasing their historical identity or view of themselves as scholars of history. Letisha, an African American student, said,

> [In English class,] we are now reading a book called the Native Son and it is about race, … [the teacher] said the word "race" and she said to write down everything that comes to mind when you heard that word. I ended up writing some stuff I remember learning in class. Like Emmett Till, the Black Panthers, like some stuff I did not hear about until I got to your class. Like I never heard of the Black Panthers. I was able to explain and say what they were. It made me feel like, it made me know way more about my own race. (Interview, June 3, 2011)

For Letisha, it was important that she learned about the Black history that is often missing from the mainstream curriculum. Her racial identity outside of the history classroom now included the histories of Emmett Till and the Black Panthers. Maria, who is multiracial (Latina, European American, and Iroquois), expressed about the class that, "It made me feel really connected to who I am, when we were talking about the French and Indian War, because that involved the Iroquois and that is the tribe that I am from" (June 2,

2011). She noted that she rarely learned about the Iroquois outside of her family's discussions.

The impact of challenging White history was not only seen in the thoughts of my students, but also their actions. One notable event occurred on a field trip to Boston. Some of my students of color choose to eat quickly during a scheduled lunch break, and spent the remainder of their time searching for a famous civil rights-related historical site nearby (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. "The Soiling of Old Glory." Copyright 1976 by Stanley J. Forman. The picture depicts an attack on a Black lawyer by a White teenager during a racially charged anti-busing protest outside Boston City Hall in 1976. Inspired by seeing this picture in class, this is the historical site that my students visited.

I wrote about this event in my teacher journal,

> An amazing thing occurred this week. A few of my students, led by Pedro Hernandez, went on a search, instead of eating lunch [downtown], to find the site where a famous incident occurred during the busing riots. They were so excited they found it that they took a picture of themselves at the location on their cell phones and showed me. I think studying this was not only important to them because it happened in Massachusetts, but because it also exposed the racism that exists here. I am going to be sure to bring all my students to that site next year. (Teacher Journal, April 8, 2011)

In addition, Pedro had mentioned to me that he wanted to now major in history in college; because he liked the way I taught and now wanted to be a history teacher like me (Teacher Journal, June 3, 2011). This was particularly important comment. First, while Latinos are one of the fastest growing student populations, there is an incredible shortage of Latino teachers. Second, earlier in the year Pedro had told me that his future profession would be regional manager and maybe even CEO of McDonald's, the place he had a part-time job. The change in career aspiration showed not only the power of the curriculum for Pedro, but also how seeing himself in the curriculum helped him see that he could be one day the teacher of that curriculum.

One unexpected finding was that the inclusion of diverse perspectives of the past in my course also helped students see more opportunities for themselves as people of color in the present. For example, in an interview, Ernesto remembered a side conversation we had three months earlier during a class focusing on the diversity of the California Gold Rush (including the role of Mexicans in the Gold Rush), he said,

> There were actually some surprises that I didn't realize about my own people. Like you said something about working at Microsoft, you know some Mexican Americans work at Microsoft. … Actually, I was born in California, so it is funny about that. Usually when Mexicans come to America, [Whites think] we're usually poor and don't even have cards. So hearing about that, we are actually doing something better than getting insulted all the time, and we do important jobs, that helps (Interview, June 2, 2011).

This conversation had included my response to Ernesto's off-the-cuff comment that Mexicans during the Gold Rush, like Mexicans today, don't usually get good jobs. Unknowingly, my comment that there are many Chicano professionals, including Mexican Americans who work at Microsoft, challenged the narrative that Ernesto often heard Whites express that depicted Mexicans as not achieving success in the professional world. Ernesto was proud to be Chicano and often discussed his pride in class, especially when we were discussing interactions between the U.S. and Mexico in history. However, he felt that White Americans misunderstood his people and he needed more evidence to support this argument that Mexicans are an important part of the United States. This was an example of my challenge to Whiteness. As a White teacher, I offered a counter-narrative to the one Ernesto usually heard Whites say about Chicanos.

Conflicting Historical Narratives. In the interviews and open-response survey items, students of color expressed that the class helped them challenge the view that U.S. history is perpetually moving forward and that racial discrimination was solved with the civil rights movement (or the election of Barack Obama president). Instead, my class

helped validate some of the historical narratives they are told by their families that often highlight lack of progress. Letisha said of the class,

> It helped me know. I already knew like about the slavery going on and everything. Like the way that I learned it, slavery happened, it ended, everything was all good. … I got to go more into detail. We get to debate in our own heads. We are not told it was a happy ending. Like we get to say to our self whether or not we thought that [history] was a happy ending our self. … Or if we thought what happened was right or not. Like our own opinions. (Interview, June 3, 2011)

Similarly, Maria expressed that the teaching of the French and Indian War was, "not only from the White's view. It also showed how bad Indians have been treated. It is like when I talk to my dad about the Iroquois" (June 2, 2011). Another example of this came from a reference about Pedro, a Chicano student, in my teacher journal.

> Pedro told me that his father often tells him stories of Mexican history and that it often conflicts with what he use to read in the school's history books. However, he said my class often agrees with his father and this helps him give evidence to back up what his father says. (Teacher Journal, March 4, 2011)

The curriculum in my class was aligned more closely to their cultural or family narratives that often conflicted with a view of American history that was always making progress. Letisha said of this conflict in narratives, "To me that is a liberation. … What I feel in my heart is, this is what happened, based off of what I read" (Interview, June 3, 2011). Other students of color expressed a liberating quality to incorporating their histories into the curriculum of my class. Ernesto, a Chicano student, said,

> Well I am one out of a lot of people, just being in New England, usually in my classroom, I would be like the only Mexican. That might be why I see it another way… In history class, I thought it use to be just Black and White. One side against another. But now that I realize there are so many, even thousands of sides and different types of perspectives. I can add a Mexican perspective. (Interview, June 2, 2011)

Ernesto highlights that in other classes U.S. history was "Black and White," where in my class there are instead "thousands" (perhaps using hyperbole) of perspectives, which allows him to bring in the Mexican perspective and importantly expand the discussion of race in history class to his people and culture.

Absence of Brazilians in the Curriculum

The survey and interview data revealed that I was not addressing enough of my students' histories in my history class, particularly my Brazilian students. This was concerning, as 30% of my students are of Brazilian descent. Where 32.6% of my students of color (including 100% of my Black students) agreed/strongly agreed that they learned about their own race/ethnicity in this class, problematically 38.7% of my students of color disagreed or strongly disagreed. Of those students who disagreed, 68.4% (N=13) were Brazilian, 15.8% (N=3) were Latino, 10.5% (N=2) were Asian, and 5.2% (N=1) were Middle Eastern. Although I have attempted to diversify the histories that are represented in my class, this finding illuminated a need to include more histories of the non-Black students of color in my class.

Although their specific ethnic groups might have only been covered for a small portion of the curriculum, studying the multiple histories of the past did make non-White

students feel more connected to history. For example, many Brazilian students felt studying Latinos, Blacks, as well as European immigrants was, in a way, part of their history as Brazilians and often immigrants to the United States. This was expressed when I asked Paula if this class helped her learn about people from her own racial or ethnic background:

> Paula: I think it did. Kind of. They talked more about the Hispanic people… It was most parts about Hispanics. There wasn't a whole lot about Brazilians…
>
> Christopher: So the experience of Brazilians and the experience of Hispanics… What could I have done better as a teacher to help you learn more about your ethnic background?
>
> Paula: I don't know. I know more about the US history than I know Brazilian [history] from Brazil. So it is kinda tough. Maybe in the immigration part. Like in the immigration, how it effects us. Do you remember how we talked about recent immigration in like [this town], where Brazilians are the most. I think it helped a lot.

Still, the experiences of Paula and other Brazilian students raised concern that their histories were being relatively left out of the history in my classroom. As a teacher engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy, I continue to grapple with the difficult task of including the voice of Brazilians more into the U.S. history curriculum. From the evidence in my plan book, I was only able to spend one class period on Brazilian immigration to the U.S. during the 1980s and 90s. This class was also captured in my teacher journal.

> This week I taught a lesson about Brazilian immigration to [this town]. I showed images of downtown and… images of Brazil and Minas Gerais… where many of our students come from. So many students shared stories of their family's journey here… After class, some students told me that this was the best class we had all year and that no teacher had ever talked about Brazil before.

This dilemma of including Brazilian history in my U.S. history course led me to ask the students for answers.

From the interview and student reflection data, my students suggested that to expand a connection to their diverse histories, I should continue to increase the amount of history related to immigrants and women, even if those histories are from that of White people. The students suggested a connection to the experiences of White immigrants or White women could, especially in cases when their particular ethnic or racial group was diminished in U.S. history, offer another connection to their histories because White history shares some historical threads with their histories. As a White teacher, I had overlooked the importance of building a commonality between the stories of White immigrants to the non-White immigrant experience. I had also overlooked the importance of empowering women of color to see their experience in the greater struggles women have had throughout U.S. history.

Many immigrant students suggested that I include more examinations of U.S. history from the perspective of those in foreign countries to add another way to help them connect to the curriculum. I often looked at multiple competing perspectives within the U.S. history (i.e., Black, White, Asian, Latino, immigrant, labor), but as some of my students pointed out, I rarely looked at how people and governments in Latin America,

Asia, or Africa saw these events of American history. That is something as a White non-immigrant person I had never considered. Amadi, an immigrant student from Nigeria, wrote in his reflection,

> Some tips that I would give is to, if possible, show the effects of U.S. history in the immigrant's country history... Of course this cannot be done with every ethnicity, but it would provide a better connection between the student and the material being discussed.

Other students suggested we connect their nations' histories with that of the United States. In her reflection Carolina, a Brazilian immigrant, suggested that, "we learn about Brazil, while we learn about the United States." This offers another way to better integrate the diverse histories of my students into history class, but discussing the main events of their histories as they occur concurrently with U.S. history.

Implications and Conclusions

The power of action research is its ability to guide a practitioner's future decisions. However, action research also allows practitioner-researchers to share their findings with the intention of guiding the future decisions of other practitioners. This study offers some important findings for other educators. First, students of color can be empowered by a curriculum that connects to their ethnic and racial backgrounds. As history teachers, we must strive for a more inclusive history curriculum. We must move people of color from the margins of the textbook to the center of our classrooms. Teachers must not stray away from discussions of race and ethnicity in the history classroom; instead these conversations must be at the core of our curriculum. Ultimately,

all students benefit from a U.S. history curriculum that includes the voices of all Americans.

Second, White teachers of students of color must concentrate their efforts on understanding the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of their students. They must know the cultures and family histories of their students. They must be continually problem solving to find new ways to connect their students' diverse backgrounds to history, even when these groups of students are left out of the mainstream curriculum. Once students are able to see themselves in the history curriculum, they will not only learn, they may also embrace history as part of their own identity.

Finally, White teachers, but especially White teachers who work with students of color, must examine their Whiteness. Without understanding the institutionalized power that privileges White Americans, White teachers will continue to teach primarily "White history" to the detriment of their students. Teachers must find ways to challenge "White history" as the only narrative by presenting race and ethnicity overtly, as well as the many historical narratives that exist within our pluralistic society. When teachers enable their students to examine historical events through diverse ethnic and racial lenses, they open numerous worlds to their students.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggested that one way teachers can improve their culturally relevant pedagogy is through, "conducting their own research about their practice. Their unique perspectives and personal investments in good practice must not be overlooked… this work challenges us to reconsider what we mean by 'good teaching, to look for it in some unlikely places, and to challenge those who suggest it cannot be made available to all children" (p. 163). Using practitioner action research, this study shows the

important impact that culturally relevant pedagogical practices have on students of color. By listening to the voices of my students of color, I continue to challenge my own perspectives as a White teacher. I strive to continue improving my practice and searching more ways to include my students of color, and particularly my Brazilian students in the history curriculum. It is the only way I will be able to engage my students in learning not only history, but also their histories.

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Appendix A

SECONDARY STUDENTS AND PERSPECTIVES IN HISTORY CLASS

SURVEY OF STUDENTS AT COURSE COMPLETION

Survey Questions

Please answer the following statements about our history class this. Please circle the best answer for all of the questions.

1. There are many different perspectives of each event from history.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

2. People in the past often viewed the events of their time differently than people view those same events today.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

3. Before this year, I did not view history as made of many different perspectives.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

4. The activities we did in class helped me see that history is made of many different perspectives.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

5. The reading packets we used for homework helped me see that history is made of many different perspectives.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

6. The term projects we did for class (i.e. research paper, PowerPoint presentations, immigration journal, etc.) helped me see that history is made of many different perspectives.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

7. I like learning about history more after taking this class.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

8. This course helped me identify or connect with the people from history we learned about.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

Continue to next page please.

9. This course helped me understand how the people felt in the periods we were studying.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

10. This course helped me know how the common people experienced events in the past.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

11. This course helped know how the people in power experienced historical events.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

12. I learned about my own race/ethnicity in this history class.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

13. I learned about races/ethnicities other than my own in this history class.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

14. The experience of immigrants was reflected in what we learned in this history class.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

15. I can recall more information from this history class than my past history classes.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

16. I have talked with people outside my history class (i.e. family, friends, teachers) about information I learned in this history class.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

17. I looked forward to coming to this history class.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

18. I did not like history class in past years.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

19. I put my best effort into this class.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

20. This class helped me see that I should speak out against discrimination or other things I believe are wrong.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

Continue to next page please.

21. This class helped me see that I should vote in the future.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

22. This class helped me see that I should pay attention to government and politics in the future.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

23. This class helped me see that I should go to a protest in the future of something I strongly believe in or against.

1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly agree

Demographic Information

24. What is your age? 14 15 16 17 18 19

25. What is your grade level? 9 10 11 12

26. What course and level are you currently enrolled in?

1-US History I CP1 2-US History I Honors 3-US History II CP1 4-US History II Honors

28. What is your gender?

1-Male 2-Female

29. What is your race/ethnicity (If you are multiracial, please circle more than one)?

1-American Indian/Native American 2-Asian 3-Brazilian 4-Black/African American

5-Latino/a or Hispanic 6-White/European American 7-Other: _____

30. Is a language other than English your first language?

1-Yes 2-No

If you answered "Yes," please list your first language here:_____

31. Do you speak a language other than English fluently?

1-Yes 2-No

If you answered "Yes," please list your first language here:_____

32. Are you or your parents immigrants to the United States?

1-Yes (Both I and my parents) 2-Yes (My parents only) 3-No

Continue to next page please.

Please answer the following questions. Try your best to be descriptive as possible. Please use margins of the page if you need more room.

33. What were your favorite activities in class?

34. What activities in class best helped you see historical events from different perspectives?

35. What could the teacher have done better to help you see history from different perspectives?

Continue to next page please.

36. What activities in class best related to your own ethnicity or race?

37. What could the teacher have done to help you learn more about your own ethnicity or race?

38. Can you elaborate on any of the multiple-choice questions by providing examples?

End of survey.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

(Student)

I. Learning History

1. Do you think you learned more from this history class than other history classes? Why or why not?

2. What activities in this class did you like the most? Why?

3. Which activities in this class did you not like or like the least? Why?

4. Before this year, did you view history as made of many different perspectives?

Probe: If yes, can you think of what may have influenced your seeing history as being made of many perspectives?

Probe: If no, what about this class helped you see history as made of many perspectives?

5. Do you believe that you are part of history? Do you think regular people make history?

6. Did you ever talk with people outside of history class (i.e. parents, family members, co-workers, other teachers) about what we were learning? Do you remember what you talked about?

7. Did this class make you feel like you should speak out against discrimination or other things you believe are wrong?

8. Some students have told me that they believe that the textbook was more trustworthy than the reading packets we used, because it offered facts, where the packets offered many opinions? Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Probe: What could I do as a teacher to help you or other students see that the textbook also has opinions?

II. Student Background

9. Did this class help you learn the history of people from your racial or ethnic background?

Probe: If so, what activities helped you learn about your ethnic or racial background?

Probe: If no, what could I have done better to help you learn about your own ethnic or racial background? Are there any important events we did not cover? Did I leave out important perspectives about events we did study?

10. Did this class help you learn the history of people from your gender?

Probe: If so, what activities helped you learn about people with your own gender?

Probe: If no, what could I have done better to help you learn about your gender? Are there any important events we did not cover? Did I leave out important perspectives about events we did study?

Appendix C

Coding Dictionary

CODING DICTIONARY

Research Questions: Are my teaching practices culturally relevant and do they address the educational needs of my students of color? If so, how and to what extent do my practices address the race/ethnicities of my students? If not, what barriers are created and how do students suggest I overcome these barriers?

LEVEL ONE CODES (L-)
LEVEL TWO CODES (L-LRN-)
LEVEL THREE CODES (L-LRN-INC)

NOTE: There is no dash (-) if there are no levels below

Nickname	**Full Code Name**	**Description**
L-	**Student Learning**	**Related to students' learning**
L-LRN-	***Learning***	***Related to the students' learning of history***
L-LRN-INC	Increased Learning	Student expressed an increase in the learning of history
L-LRN-DEC	Decreased Learning	Student expressed a decrease in the learning of history
L-INT-	***Interest***	***Related to students' interest in curriculum***

L-INT-INC	Increased Interest	Student expressed her/his interest was increased
L-INT-DEC	Decreased Interest	Student expressed her/his interest was decreased
L-MOT-	***Motivation***	***Related to students' motivation to learn related to the curriculum***
L-MOT-INC	Increased Motivation	Student expressed her/his motivation was increased
L-MOT-DEC	Decreased Motivation	Student expressed her/his motivation was decreased
L-BAR	***Barriers to Learning***	***Related to barriers to student learning***
L-FOS	***Fostered Learning***	***Related to fostering student learning***
S-	**Student Identity**	**Related to the development of the students' identity**

S-RE-	***Racial or Ethnic Identity***	***Related to the development of the students' racial or ethnic identity***
S-RE-REP	Represented Race or Ethnicity	Students expressed that her/his race/ethnicity represented in curriculum
S-RE-UND	Underrepresented Race or Ethnicity	Students expressed that her/his race/ethnicity was not represented in curriculum
S-PER-	***Multiple Perspectives***	***Related to the multiple perspectives found in the curriculum***
S-PER-INC	Included Multiple Perspectives	Students expressed that multiple perspectives were included in curriculum
S-PER-MIS	Missing Multiple Perspectives	Students expressed that multiple perspectives were missing in curriculum
S-NAR-	***Multiple Narratives***	***Related to the multiple narratives found in the curriculum***
S-NAR-WHT	"White History"	Students expressed that history is often from a White Perspective

S-NAR-INC	Included Multiple Narratives	Students expressed that multiple narratives were included in curriculum
S-NAR-MIS	Missing Multiple Narratives	Students expressed that multiple narratives were missing in curriculum
S-BAR	***Barriers to Student Identity Development***	***Related to barriers to the development of student's identity***
S-FOS	***Fostered Student Identity Development***	***Related to fostering the development of student's identity***
T-	**Teacher Identity**	**Related to the teacher's (my own) identity.**
T-WHT-	**Whiteness**	**Related to the concept of Whiteness.**
T-WHT-CHG	Challenge Whiteness	Teacher (myself) challenged Whiteness and institutionalized power that privileges White Americans.
T-WHT-NOT	Did Not Challenge Whiteness	Teacher (myself) did not challenge Whiteness and institutionalized power that privileges White Americans.

T-RE-	***Teaching Racial or Ethnic Identity***	***Related to the teacher's (myself) focus on the students' racial or ethnic identity***
T-RE-REP	Teaching Represented Race or Ethnicity	Teacher (myself) focused on the students' racial or ethnic identity
T-RE-UND	Teaching Underrepresented Race or Ethnicity	Teacher (myself) missed an opportunity to focus on the students' racial or ethnic identity
T-RE-TCH	Race or Ethnicity of the Teacher	Teacher discussed (my own) race/ethnicity
T-NP-	***Teaching Multiple Narratives and Perspectives***	***Related to the teaching of multiple perspectives***
T-NP-INC	Teaching Multiple Narratives and Perspectives	Teacher (myself) focused on multiple narratives and perspectives
T-NP-MIS	Not Teaching Multiple Narratives and Perspectives	Teacher (myself) missed an opportunity to focus on multiple narratives and perspectives
T-NP-WHT	"Teaching White History"	Teacher (myself) focused on history primarily from a White narrative or perspective