Doing Their Best: How Teachers in Urban Social Studies Classrooms Integrate Culturally Relevant Pedagogy with Historical Literacy Instruction

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Doing Their Best: How Teachers in Urban Social Studies Classrooms Integrate Culturally Relevant Pedagogy with Historical Literacy Instruction.

By

Maria Tope Akinyele

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

Doing Their Best: How Teachers in Urban Social Studies Classrooms Integrate Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Teaching Historical Literacy.

By

Maria Tope Akinyele

Advisor: Terrie Epstein

What occurs when teachers in urban social studies classrooms want to do their best by incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into their historical literacy instruction? While culturally relevant pedagogy and historical literacy are complementary in theory and a few scholars have demonstrated how teachers have integrated the two approaches in practice, I questioned the ease or seamlessness of the integration within an urban context. This dissertation examined how three teachers in an urban high school managed the tensions and possibilities of teaching historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy in U.S. and global history classes. In this case study, I explored how each teacher’s lived experiences affected their conceptions and enactments of historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy, and its effects on student perceptions of instruction and their academic achievement.

In recent years, educators have promoted teaching social studies and other subjects using culturally relevant pedagogy as a means to promote the academic achievement, cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness of urban youth of color. In addition, many states have enacted Common Core Learning Standards that in the case of history, require students to develop historical literacy skills or the ability to interpret primary and secondary historical sources and make historical claims or arguments based on evidence from the sources. In theory, culturally relevant teaching and instruction in historical literacy can be seen as complementary.
Teachers can instruct students to interpret evidence and make claims by employing historical texts and stimulating historical discussions that use counter-narratives to connect students’ cultures and experiences to historical events and develop young people’s political consciousness. However given the contemporary contexts of schooling in urban spaces, I found that teachers faced challenges in trying to integrate both approaches.

Findings suggest teachers are cultural beings whose lived experiences influenced their perception of students and approaches to instruction. The two teachers of color in the study broadened the purpose of historical literacy instruction as a means to build positive student academic identity and self-empowerment. They also exhibited a social justice orientation towards history and offered alternative ways of knowing and doing history that questioned the historical literacy research stance on what counts as evidence and contextualization. All three teachers struggled with the systematic integration of historical literacy instruction and culturally relevant pedagogy. Overall when attending to the context and academic needs of students, the teachers focused mostly on providing students with general literacy rather than historical literacy skills. Exploring the tensions teachers faced and the ways in which they resolved them provides knowledge of ways to manage the obstacles that teachers may encounter in attempting to integrate the two approaches in the teaching of history to students of color in urban spaces.
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I thank you God for everything. You have shown me over and over again that all things are possible through you. To you, I give the supreme thanks, glory and praise.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family:

Mummy, I love you so much.

Samuel and Abayomi, you are amazing brothers.

Daddy, I love and miss you.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

On January 24, 1964 in New York City, Malcolm X began his first of a three part weekly lecture series on the history of African Americans and Black civilizations. He started his speech congratulating audience members’ tenacity in showing up for the lecture despite the inclement weather, drawing a parallel between their committed presence and the dedication also needed in one’s quest to learn true black history. Malcolm underscored that like the weather, the challenges in learning black history should not undermine one’s persistence to revisit past historical narratives with a critical eye; he posits this work of historical investigation as a singular step in helping African Americans develop a new historical consciousness, a sound understanding of the past that would enable them to be better prepared to take action in the present and future. Throughout the speech, Malcolm conveyed a sense of urgency in advocating for the project of reformulating the black historical narrative. He stated:

Now then, once you see that the condition that we're in is directly related to our lack of knowledge concerning the history of the Black man, only then can you realize the importance of knowing something about the history of the Black man. The Black man's history—when you refer to him as the Black man you go way back, but when you refer to him as a Negro, you can only go as far back as the Negro goes. And when you go beyond the shores of America you can't find a Negro. So if you go beyond the shores of America in history, looking for the history of the Black man, and you're looking for him under the term Negro, you won't find him. He doesn't exist. So you end up thinking that you didn't play any role in history (p. 1).
Fast forward to 2016. Malcolm’s passion for helping the masses develop a new historical
consciousness is reignited within Mr. Vargas’ fifth period high school Advanced Placement (AP)
U.S. history class. Mr. Vargas asked, “Tell me something Pedro, how have Dominicans
contributed to American history?” He decided to ask this provocative question in response to
students’ palpable apathy even after listening to and reading Malcolm X’s speech. Pedro
responded with “I don’t know. Nothing? Platanos?” Mr. Vargas moved to ask another student,
Natasha who was Filipino the same question. She responded with silence. Mr. Vargas let
silence sit in the air and then stated, “I want you now to reread the excerpt from Malcolm X
speech in light of the question I just asked each of you.” After five minutes of silent reading, one
student raised his hand and said with some apprehension, “We’re more than what they say?”

This vignette illustrates a set of particular challenges many social studies educators face
as they construct classroom experiences using pedagogical and instructional strategies that push
students in marginalized communities to develop historical thinking skills. Students’ initial
indifference to the text and gradual enlightened understanding of Malcolm’s message provides a
glimpse into the innovative and often undocumented ways teachers engage marginalized students
or students of color in the learning of history. Some of the instructional moves such as close
reading that Mr. Vegas incorporated into his instruction align with what research has deemed as
best practices in helping students attain historical literacy skills which describe students’ abilities
to think (read) and produce (write) texts like historians. (Wineburg, 1991b; Monte-Sano, 2008;
Wineburg & Riesman, 2015). However, other artful instructional moves utilized in Mr. Vargas’
lesson, such as his use of silence, cold call, provocative questioning and use of texts inspired
students to also make deeper connections with the text. These types of instructional moves that
foster engagement and deeper ability to comprehend texts, however, are not reflected in the
research literature on historical literacy. Like many social studies educators, Mr. Vargas seeks to impact students’ historical consciousness, an awareness that students’ understanding of the past influences and creates possibilities for their present and future realities. Encouraging students to uncover the hidden assets of their own ethnic identities and connect this with Malcolm’s declaration “that the history of black peoples did not begin with the term Negro” goes beyond the project of historical literacy and captures the work of teachers who aspire to cultivate historical thinking and who also utilize culturally relevant pedagogy as a method for teaching towards students’ strengths and cultures rather than their deficiencies and other people’s cultures. This work of combining historical literacy with culturally relevant pedagogy impacts students of color in particular ways and is wrought with challenges and successes that could potentially inform the teaching and learning of students in social studies classrooms today.

As I sat observing Mr. Vegas, his incendiary teaching style transported me back into my own days as a former high school history teacher in the South Bronx. For five years (2003-2008), I taught students of color global and U.S. history according to the New York State Social Studies Learning Standards which at the time, meant covering rather than teaching historical topics from the textbook. Although my primary goal was to have my students pass the New York Regents Exam so that they could graduate high school, I often sought opportunities to push my predominately Black and Latino students into thinking beyond the master historical narratives they had unknowingly internalized in hopes that they would formulate new narratives about their own histories, enabling them to develop empowered identities and sense of place in U. S. history and contemporary society. I had the experience and academic training to know that their history did not start with the “Negro”, a social/political construct that reflected U.S. racial ideology at the time and negated black history prior to European encounter. In essence, I
realized that I always sought to ensure each student knew that his or her own peoples were more than “Platanos.”

After my third year of teaching, I felt disheartened by the pressure to teach towards the Regents Exam when I witnessed the effects of systemic racism in the lives of my students. It came in explicit forms such as students teased for the darkness of their skins, or when my Latino students of mostly black origin would deny any ties to Africa because of what they perceived as a barbaric country (not even continent). The effects of systemic racism also manifested in covert ways when teachers would often praise African students for being more academically fit than their African American counterparts, whom were deemed as lazy or the by-products of parents who contributed to the cycle, because they too, did not value education. Many students schooling experiences were unfortunately informed by teachers and administrators who believed in cultural deficit theory, a perennial focus on students’ weaknesses rather than their strengths (Pace, 2015). My assistant principal sensed my frustration and feared losing a teacher like me who “got results,” meaning, I positively affected students’ abilities to pass the Regents. As a result of student performance on the Regents exams, I was granted permission to teach an Ethnic Studies class. Planning for this class reinvigorated my purpose and passion for teaching history to students of color in urban contexts.

Teaching Ethnic Studies at Bronx Leadership Academy allowed me to see firsthand the effects of teaching students’ the “origins of themselves” (X, 1964, p.1). Students who were disengaged in previous history classes I had taught were enlivened by researching topics such as Africans who came before Columbus, the history of Hispaniola, and how colorism evolved as the result of its colonial history. Students excelled in this class. At the time, I didn’t have the language or framework of culturally relevant pedagogy to articulate the particular dynamics of
my teaching style and successful results of the class. I just knew that teaching students about themselves worked and I wanted to know more about how to make this practice widespread in other schools. I decided to leave teaching after those two wonderful years of teaching Ethnic Studies.

I began working as an iterant Instructional Coach for the New York City Department of Education and since then have been exposed to a myriad of successful and unsuccessful teaching practices in social studies classrooms within a wide variety of New York City urban schools. My work in different schools throughout the city has enabled me to experience successful social studies classrooms in which students learn through historical inquiry, acquire historical thinking skills and feel good about themselves. In my experience, these successful classrooms unfortunately are the exceptions rather than the norm in urban schools. Given a population of students with similar instructional needs and economic disadvantages, why are some classrooms successful and others not? This research study captures how three history teachers in urban classrooms attempted to do good work by using culturally relevant practices to engage students in learning experiences that also built their historical literacy skills. My hope is that this case study research will highlight practices that other social studies teachers with similar populations can use in their own way to create successful social studies learning experiences for their students.

**Statement of the Problem**

Efforts to reform the teaching and learning of history solely though the adoption of new standards such as the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and newly written New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies (NYSLSS) have remained futile. According to Grant (2001), standards do not positively affect teacher practice or student learning outcome.
Accountability measures such as new standards and new tests have yet to lead to an increase in student engagement, better performance on the New York Regents exams or mastery of historical literacy skills (Grant, 2001). Furthermore, both the CCLS and NYSLS approach teaching history from a purely cognitive and behavioral stance to learning, implying student attainment of historical literacy skills and processes can be devoid of the socio-cultural context in which student learning occurs. Sole focus on the skills and process of historical literacy have continued to undermine the systemic effects that racist and neoliberal schooling have had on the lives of students of color, which comprise the majority of students educated in New York City.

Research has shown that although student engagement is inextricably tied to positive learning outcomes, students of color are not engaged in their schooling experiences (Pace, 2015). Culturally relevant teaching methods however, have proven to be one way to increase engagement and academic performance amongst students of color (Pace, 2015; Howard 2017; Milner 2011). While studies have examined how social studies teachers use culturally relevant teaching to engage students (Epstein, Mayorga & Nelson, 2011; Martell, 2013; Cati, López, & Morrell, 2015), research is lacking on how teachers use culturally relevant pedagogy and historical literacy to enable students of color to succeed academically. The purpose of this study was to examine how three New York City teachers used culturally relevant pedagogy to engage students in the learning of history and acquire historical thinking skills in order to actualize the goals of social studies education. This study also sought to capture how teachers maintain their desire to teach in culturally relevant ways amidst challenges common to teaching in urban schools.
Challenges of Implementing Historical Literacy and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in an Urban Context

Standards

In 2011, New York adopted the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) as a framework for teaching and learning. In the context of history education, the new standards require that students engage in historical thinking, argumentation and close reading, as opposed to the knowledge-mastery approach that had previously emphasized content memorization (CCLS, 2011). Educators are now challenged with teaching towards the new standards while still expected to prepare students for the Regents Exam, a test that is currently not aligned with CCLS. The implementation of standards deemed rigorous have yet to lead to an increase in student academic performance (Grant & Salinas 2014). In fact, in 2010, only 12% of secondary students were at or above the proficient level on the National Assessment of Education Progress in History (NAEP, 2011). In New York City, only 56% of students who took the Global History Regents Exam passed it in 2015, and of that, only 16% scored 85 or higher (New York Times, 2015). Engaging students in the mastery of historical content or knowledge, as well as historical literacy skills, necessitates pedagogical approaches that go beyond a set of standards couched as reform.

Achievement of Social Studies Goals

Extant schooling structures and concomitant teaching practices also fall short in achieving the purpose of social studies education, which is to “help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 1994, p.1). Social studies classroom experiences are supposed to cultivate an appreciation for cultural diversity as a way to build empathy and
understanding in order to sustain and improve a democratic way of life (NCSS, 2010). Although intended, the classroom instructional practices needed to cultivate this civic competence among students such as inquiry learning and historical literacy are not widespread (Pace, 2015). Culturally relevant pedagogy with its emphasis on helping students develop a sociopolitical consciousness about the potential and pitfalls of democracy can assist teachers in actualizing this ideal within social studies classrooms.

Diverse Student Needs

More than ever before, teachers must be prepared to teach a diverse population of students (Pace, 2015; Banks, 2005). Over the past 20 years, New York City schools have seen a rising population of Emergent Bilingual students. From the 1997 to 2009, the number of English-language learners enrolled in all public schools increased from 3.5 million to 5.3 million (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011). Connecting curriculum to students’ cultures requires that teachers understand the cultural, racial, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds as well as learning differences of students. Current literature in historical literacy does not attend to ways that teachers can modify their instruction to serve these students’ needs.

Research Questions

As discussed above, the teaching of social studies in urban classrooms includes new pressures and demands for which there is little research to date (Riesman, 2012a; Monte-Sano, Paz, Felton, Piantedosi, Yee, & Carey, 2017). Some of these demands include standards based teaching and historical literacy acquisition while still being accountable to state mandated exams like the Regents. Teaching social studies also implies a dedication to cultivating civic competence among youth (NCSS, 2015). Finally, research on best practices related to historical
literacy and social studies in general, do not provide specific strategies for engaging students of diverse racial and academic needs to support historical literacy skill acquisition (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

In order to better understand what it means to teach social studies to students of color, students in urban spaces and diverse student populations, I conducted a case study of how three New York City social studies teachers used culturally relevant pedagogy to teach historical literacy skills. My major research questions are:

1. How do teachers’ lived experiences impact how they conceptualize and implement instruction?
2. What, if any tensions emerge when teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into historical literacy instruction?
3. What are the implications of the study for research, policy and practice?

**Concepts and Definitions**

**Historical literacy**

Historical literacy is a term that proposes that there are discipline specific ways of reading, writing and speaking in academic contexts (Wineburg, 1991; Reisman, 2012a, 2012b; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012). Traditional reading strategies espoused in schools such as determining importance, making connections and writing summaries do not necessarily enable students of history to practice historical literacy skills espoused by NCSS (2015) that include evaluating historical evidence, developing comparative and causal analyses of historical events, and constructing sound historical arguments and perspectives on which informed decisions in contemporary life can be based. Literacy instruction in history that goes beyond the basic
literacy practices and is centered upon the skills of sourcing, corroboration and the close reading of multiple primary source documents yields positive student outcomes in overall literacy acquisition (Wineburg & Reisman, 2015).

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)**

Scholars (Delpit, 2006; Howard, 2010; Gay, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1994) have contended that when teachers respond to the needs, concerns, and strengths of diverse learners, students excel academically. Culturally relevant pedagogy is an asset-based framework for teaching towards the strengths of learners in one’s class. In trying to dismantle culturally deficit theory that dominates educational discourse of students today, culturally relevant pedagogy posits that each child brings an array of cultural, academic, linguistic strengths that teachers can use to design and tailor instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Gay, 2010; Paris & Alim 2017). Scholars of culturally relevant pedagogy affirm three tenets: Teachers hold students to high expectations; students’ experiences are viewed as assets in designing learning; and learning experiences should seek to help students develop civic competence to question and take action against unjust systems in the world.

**Methods**

**Setting**

The case study took place in an urban high school in Brooklyn in a high poverty area with a substantial population of Black and Latino students, many whom are newcomers, i.e., first generation immigrants who came to the United States at age 12 or later. For the past three years, I’ve worked at the school as an Instructional Coach, helping teachers structure their curricula and lessons to incorporate literacy practices that enable students to gain language acquisition and
deepen their reading and writing skills. Under the leadership of a new principal, the school has gradually adopted new instructional practices that have shifted its status from a renewal school in danger of closing to a school in good academic standing. Part of its success was due to leadership’s adoption of culturally relevant teaching practices that focused on the needs of the schools’ diverse learners. I’ve observed how the school’s professional development model also responded to the needs of the teachers in learning how to incorporate CCLS into their instruction.

The school was therefore selected because (1) School Population: Student population was comparable to many other New York City urban schools that receive Title 1 funding where population consists of mostly students of color from lower socioeconomic background. This school also had a high population (65%) of incoming freshman who entered school scoring 1’s and 2’s (below average/average) on their eighth grade English Language Arts exam (School Quality Guide, 2015). Furthermore, the school has seen an increase in its newcomer population. The school therefore has to respond to the varying academic and language needs of its population. (2) Focus on disciplinary literacy: There was a school-wide expectation that all content area teachers had to teach literacy skills and advanced literacy skills. The assistant principal at the school who is also head of the social studies department encouraged history teachers to incorporate historical literacy practices such as engagement with primary sources into their lessons. (3) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: The school also expected teachers to respond to the diverse needs of the students by identifying students’ cultural and academic strengths and using them as a basis for designing instruction. The school also endorsed AVID, a teaching framework built on culturally relevant principles. AVID promoted student collaboration and provided teachers with clear structures and routines for helping students read and produce discipline specific texts. All teachers were expected to use specific AVID strategies in their
curricula and delivery of lessons. (4) Access: I worked closely with all teachers at the school. These professional relationships had given me knowledge of the evolution of the school and its vision, as well as teacher and student development.

Participants

Three out of the four social studies teachers in the school were selected for the study. Participants were selected based on my observations that they aspired to teach historical literacy using culturally responsive teaching methods. Furthermore the three teachers were in good evaluative standing and had strong classroom management skills, which allowed me to focus on their instruction and student learning outcomes. The fourth teacher was not chosen because he was new to the school. In order to research the impact of the teachers’ use of culturally relevant pedagogy and historical literacy practices, I invited student volunteers from each of the teachers’ classrooms to participate in focus groups. I recruited five students from each teacher’s class who ranged in academic performance.

Data Collection

To answer my research questions, I conducted 15-20 observations in one of each teacher’s class, using an historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy observational protocol (Appendix E). I took field notes during my observations. Teachers also participated in formal interviews during the beginning, middle and end of the semester and informal interviews before or after each lesson. Finally, I also collected from each observed lesson all instructional materials in the form of lesson plans, class materials and student work.

Data Analysis

As a qualitative study, I used concepts related to historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy to interpret the data on teachers’ instruction, classroom materials, and
students’ work. I analyzed the teacher interviews and student focus group interviews by examining teacher and student concepts related to historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy and comparing/contrasting the to the research literature. I also used triangulation within and across data sources to assess how student and teacher perceptions about teaching and learning compared with my observations, student work samples and the literature in the field.

Limitation

My position as the Instructional Coach shifted once I became a researcher: I moved from an evaluator who gave feedback to teachers to a researcher who simply observed and collected data. My bias as a former coach and evaluator of teachers’ instruction can be considered a limitation inherent in the design, but I attempted to counteract this bias as much as possible by relying on the data I collected and analyzed as evidence of effective and/or ineffective instruction, rather than on my previous work and impressions as an instructional coach.

Significance of Study

I hope to contribute to the research on history teaching and learning by providing descriptions and interpretations of the instructional practices of three teachers who dealt with challenges common to urban history teachers and who were invested in supporting students’ cultural knowledge and identities, as well as building their historical literacy skills. Findings from the study potentially will inform history teachers who, as a result of CCLS, are under increased pressure to teach historical literacy skills yet need to provide culturally relevant pedagogy. I hope this study has significant implications for policy makers, researchers and teacher educators interested in developing effective instructional strategies in urban schools that will empower millions of urban youth or color to know that “We are more than what they say.”
Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Each year thousands of high schools students take one of the New York history Regents exams. Students are expected to pass each exam with a grade of 65 or higher in order to graduate high school. For many urban schools, the Global and U.S. history Regents exams statistically proves to be the most challenging for high school students to pass.¹ Low passing rates have been attributed to a variety of causes, including the overwhelming volume of content that is “covered” throughout the year (Decker, 2012). Covering the scope and sequence of historical material tested on Global Regents history exam requires that students remember a vast array of key facts and details from ancient civilizations until modern times.

Today, teachers’ pedagogical propensity to cover material within the confines of limited instructional time has been largely interrupted by the instructional demands limned by CCLS, which promulgates depth or breadth, meaning teachers should develop deeper student engagement with content in order to gradually develop masterful skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. This instructional shift now requires more than ever before that content specialist teachers become literacy teachers by affording strategic opportunities for students to gain literacy skills in their respective subject areas. The advent of CCLS has strengthened arguments for teaching a type of advanced literacy called disciplinary literacy (Nokes, 2013), which emphasizes subject-specific ways of thinking about and producing texts within content areas. Teachers tasked with the challenge of helping students remember content are expected to have the pedagogical skills and awareness to teach disciplinary literacy skills within their content areas.

Lackluster student performance in social studies has been attributed to a myriad of reasons that include lack of teacher preparation (Bohan & Davis, 1998); student apathy in content (Chiodo & Byford, 2004); lack of engaging texts and materials (Pellegrino & Russell, 2008; Wineburg, 2004). Given the lack of success in a plethora of initiatives related to accountability measures, and new standards in raising student achievement, school leadership and teachers are left to figure out solutions on their own. Collegiate High School (pseudonym), like many other urban schools tasked with raising student achievement quickly, aimed to find a strategic solution to their problem and decided to adopt culturally relevant pedagogy as a framework to address student achievement in social studies and school-wide.

The purpose of this study is to understand what happens when schools and teachers want to use student culture to inform instructional practices and raise student achievement in social studies classrooms. Essentially this study examined how three social studies teachers in an urban context conceptualized and implemented historical literacy instruction within a culturally relevant pedagogical framework. The main questions of this study are:

1. How do teachers’ lived experiences impact how they conceptualize and implement instruction?
2. What, if any tensions emerge from teachers incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy with historical literacy?
3. What are the implications of the study for research, policy and practice?

Sociocultural Theory

Both historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy are teaching and learning frameworks based largely on the theoretical tenets of sociocultural theory. Lewis, Moje, and Enciso (2007) in *Reframing Sociocultural Literacy Research* cited Werstch (1995) who argued
that “sociocultural theory examines the relationship between mental functioning, on the one hand, and cultural, historical and intuitional setting on the other” (p. 2). In other words, sociocultural theory situates the learner and the learning with a cultural and social context. Sociocultural theorists largely argue that learning is a social activity (Werstch, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1998; Holland, 1998). Sociocultural theorists acknowledge learning is not merely a cognitive process, but is largely contingent on the context of learning, which is the result of the cultural, historical and institutional settings and influences. In examining the instruction of three teachers within this study, I used concepts of historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy to inform not only the reading and writing processes teachers and students engaged in to develop historical literacy skills, but also as useful concepts that lend credence to the urban context in which the learning occurred.

My research focused primarily on how within the urban context of social studies classrooms, teachers interpreted and implemented historical literary and culturally relevant pedagogy. I also examined the teachers’ instructional impact on student perceptions of learning and academic outcomes. I used sociocultural theory as a framework to contextualize and evaluate the historical literacy literature by elucidating how cognitive aspirations related to historical literacy are produced through discourses (specifically the result of institutional, historical and cultural contexts) and to acknowledge the ways social studies teachers build communities of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1991). Historical literacy research, rooted in the traditions of cognitive theory, overemphasizes the cognitive skills of reading and writing history over the context in which the skills are learned. I argue primarily from a critical sociocultural standpoint (Epstein & Peck, 2017; Lewis, Moje, & Enciso, 2007) that conceptions of historical literacy are institutionally and culturally situated. I also used critical sociocultural lens to
highlight how culturally relevant pedagogy in its emphasis on cultural and context can bolster historical literacy as a framework for engaging diverse student populations and lead to enhanced student outcomes. Lastly, I use critical sociocultural theory to position teachers and students as cultural beings, an under-theorized component of historical literacy, to highlight how teachers’ perceptions of teaching are also historically and culturally situated.

**Historical Literacy**

Disciplinary literacy describes discipline specific ways of reading and writing, and “emphasizes the unique tools that experts in a discipline uses to engage in the work of that discipline” (Shanahan, 2012, p. 2). Disciplinary literacy is a broad term to describe various content specific literacies, such as mathematical literacy, scientific literacy and historical literacy; each discipline specific literacy has its own form the thinking and means of producing work. Historical literacy, a particular kind of disciplinary literacy, comes from this tradition and can be used interchangeably with the term “disciplinary literacy.”

Shanahan (2008) and other scholars (Monte-Sano 2011; Reisman 2015) agree that disciplinary literacy is distinctive from basic literacy. According to Shanahan (2008) there are three categories of literacy:

- basic literacy (e.g., decoding, knowledge of sight words);
- intermediate literacy (e.g., reading comprehension strategies, vocabulary strategies, and fluency);
- and disciplinary literacy, which is the most advanced level of literacy. These are skills specialized to a particular discipline (e.g., mathematics, history, science) (p. 44).

Given these definitions, researchers acknowledge that students will not develop advanced skills in history, for example, if teachers do not explicitly teach historical reading and writing skills.
Although there are many different purposes attributed to teaching and learning history in schools, among the most prevalent in the second decade of the 21s century related to historical thinking and reasoning (Wineburg, 2001) and historical literacy (Monte-Sano, 2015; Nokes 2013). Each term conceptualizes particular cognitive processes and dispositions of the historian, as well as discipline-specific approaches to reading and writing in history. An overall goal for proponents of historical thinking, reasoning or literacy is to elucidate the reading and writing skills necessary to do the work of history with integrity. I used the term historical literacy to describe the discipline specific instructional intentions of teachers in this study. I employed Nokes’ (2013) conception of historical literacy, which he defined as:

historical literacy is the ability to glean appropriate information about the past from resources of many genres. It is the ability to engage in historical processes—to not simply possess knowledge, but to know how to build it. It is the ability to work with historical evidence in all of its genres (p. 20).

Nokes’ definition suggests that historical literacy involves having the skills to gather evidence for the purpose of creating knowledge by engaging in historical thinking processes. I appreciate Nokes’ use of the word “resources” to encompass what other scholars would call evidence (Wineburg, 1991). It might not have been Nokes’ intent, but the use of resources broadens the view of what counts as evidence in helping to frame a historical argument.

Although most scholars emphasis the cognitive processes students and teachers need to engage in to do the work of historical literacy well, Nokes’ conception of historical literacy is equally grounded upon concepts of sociocultural learning. Nokes (2011) wrote that historical literacy has been framed along two traditions: cognitive theory and sociocultural theory and explains that “socio-cultural theorists suggest that learning is facilitated through nurturing social
interactions” (p. 381). In classrooms where historical literacy is valued and done well, students enter a community of practice. Nokes continued, “Thus, a history teacher must design activities within the students' ZPD and gradually remove scaffolding as students become increasingly sufficient” (p. 381). Other scholars (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Seixas, 1993; Bain, 2005; Grant 2001) also emphasize the shared process of teaching and learning historical reading, writing and interpretation.

Advocates of disciplinary literacy believe that subject-specific ways of thinking and writing will ultimately address the literacy crisis, specifically by improving dismal student performances in analytical thinking, logical reasoning and overall writing proficiency. They have argued that most literacy instruction focuses on strengthening basic student reading comprehension and consequently ignores the importance of critical thinking and writing. By helping students achieve advanced disciplinary literacy, students will be better prepared for success in the future and in their other subject areas. Although altruistic in their intent to propose a panacea to the literacy crisis in the U.S., they largely ignore the social, economic and historical conditions that contributed to the framing of this crisis and further privilege apolitical discourses regarding literacy instruction.

Endorsement of disciplinary literacy has evolved from growing concerns over the inadequacy of generic reading and writing strategies to prepare students with college and career ready skills (Wineburg 1991a, 1991b, 2008; Reisman & Wineburg, 2008, 2012; Moje, 2015). A spate of reports on adolescent literacy affirm the need for student exposure to a variety of complex texts that require discipline specific reading and writing skills. Once revered, strategies such as summarizing and paraphrasing, are now considered to minimally prepare students for the cognitive demands and literacy practices germane to each discipline, positioning them as what
Wineburg & Reisman (2015) describes as “spectators, passively gazing the arena of knowledge production” (p. 636). Disciplinary literacy scholars argue that an emphasis on disciplinary literacy disrupts this spectatorship role students have largely occupied by positioning them as co-constructors of disciplinary knowledge who actively engage with texts to produce new meanings rather than recall facts covered in the curriculum.

In reviewing over thirty articles using key words such as disciplinary literacy and historical literacy, most of the articles tout disciplinary literacy as the answer to a prevalent adolescent literacy problem. Historical literacy researchers cite statistics from the National Educational Progress such as “only 31% of 8th graders and 24% of 12th graders in the United States write at or above the proficient level” (p. 539, Monte Sano, 2010) to convey a sense of urgency and position disciplinary literacy as the solution to the this problem. Scholars also position traditional banking style methods of education as a persistent problem in social studies classrooms. For example, Paz (2016) in her study of historical writing, cited “only 32% of eighth graders attested to writing long answers to questions or assignments for history/social studies” (p. 3) suggesting that most students aren’t pushed to perform rigorous reading and writing tasks that emulate historians’ work. Furthermore, when students are asked to write, summary writing is the primary focus (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009).

Without problematizing the conceptualizations of basic and advanced literacy, researchers and teachers may unintentionally reinforce positivist notions about how students learn. A positivist understanding of literacy assumes an objectivity of skills and processes needed to read and write regardless of situational context. The goal of the teacher becomes to inculcate these skills through objective instruction or teaching best practices, negating the varying social, emotional and academic needs of students. Teaching literacy entails not only the
skills and processes needed to read and write, but also understanding and creating the contexts that value literacy as a social practice. Recommendations for teaching disciplinary literacy often ignore how social context impacts the ways students understand and produce texts in the classroom. Rather than just teaching students the skills and drills of reading and writing, a critical view of literacy acknowledges it as a set of social practices that acculturate individuals into communities of practice where members develop understandings and produce meanings through social interaction. Extant conceptions of disciplinary literacy privilege cognitive and behavioral frameworks--mostly on student mastery of historical skills and mental processes within a classroom.

The framing of disciplinary literacy as a response to the growing adolescent literacy crisis assumes that students and teachers are immune to the contexts in which they teach and learn. Although some scholars (Wilson, 2011) have framed disciplinary literacy as “distinguishable communities of practice, each with its own history of solving particular sets of problems in particular ways according to particular epistemologies” (p. 436). The framing of disciplinary literacy as a panacea undermines the contexts in which individuals teach and learn. Emphasis on cognition tends to undermine the urban school context that impacts the communal interpretative work of historical literacy. This study aims to capture the context and instructional practices that contribute or hinder students’ abilities to do historical literacy work.

Who the historian is and does:

Much of how we think about historical literacy and consequently what students should learn and the instructional practices teachers should emphasize is informed by how scholars frame the purpose and cognitive work of the historian. Wineburg’s (1991) seminal study on historians has largely framed the discipline’s view in the U.S. of the historian and the necessary
skills needed to do the work of the discipline. Although widely accepted, the concept of “the historian” is however historically situated. I argue, this historically situated view of the historian is based on a white male and assumes the work of the historian is objective and value neutral.

Scholars agree that the work of the historian is to develop a specialized interpretation of the past Wineburg & Reisman 2015; Nokes, 2013; Monte-Sano, 2011). Wineburg (1991a) asserted that historians seek to understand the uniqueness of specific events given the time and place of the occurrence and the people involved. In conducting research on the facets of historical thinking, Wineburg (1991b) engaged historians in metacognitive exercises which asked them to perform think alouds describing their mental processes used to read primary and secondary sources. From these results, Wineburg identified evidenced based reasoning as a hallmark of historical thinking. Essentially these specialized interpretations are seen through the texts historians produce after consistently engaging in core thinking process or what Wineburg referred to as heuristics. These heuristics include contextualizing, corroborating, sourcing and close reading.

Other scholars argue that in addition to the heuristics, historians also apply other concepts in their thinking. Barton and Levstik (2004) emphasized historical empathy as a necessary concept in doing historical work. Seixas and Morton (2013) offered six concepts of historical thinking: (1) establishing historical significance, (2) using primary source evidence, (3) examining continuity and change, (4) analyzing cause and consequence, (5) taking historical perspectives, and (6) attempting to understand the ethical dimension of history.

These historical concepts and practices shape arguments that again help historians maintain disciplinary integrity.
Although slightly varied in the essential concepts and heuristics a historian must use to maintain disciplinary integrity, all theories of “doing the work” are contingent upon the questions and texts historians choose and the work of close reading that help the historian to “analyze evidence, weigh conflicting accounts, consider the influence of bias and develop evidenced based arguments” (Monte-Sano, 2011, p. 216). For historians, texts are seen as not neutral documents but human constructions with particular biases. The goal of historical literacy is not straight comprehension, but rather reading the text for reasons quite different from the ones intended when it was created (Nokes, 2013). Although historians “produce a variety of texts, including monographs, maps, cartograms, population pyramids, charts, graphs, and diagrams” (Nokes, 2010, p. 520), they typically express these specialized accounts as written arguments. Historians rely primarily on written texts as the sources of evidence.

Many of the concepts of historical thinking are historically situated. In 1987, the Bradley Commission on History in Schools was created in response to the “widespread concern over the inadequacy, both in quality and in quality of the history taught in elementary and secondary school classrooms” (Bradley Commission in Schools, 1989, p. 7). The book invited what were deemed prominent historians to provide evidence of the inadequacy of historical literacy instruction and provide “recommendations on how teachers can improve the teaching of history as the core of social studies in schools” (p. 8). All of the historians invited to write in this canonical text were white.

Within an urban school context, historical literacy with the prototype of the white historian ignores the ways that it has normalized the ideological positionality of the white historian as the way to do history. Scholars, Howard and Rodriguez (2017) offer that “The epistemological origins of knowledge values, culture, content and examples, analogies and
practices is heavily steeped in a Eurocentric worldview” (p. 10). In this study, however, students as historians will mean acknowledging the varied ways communities have documented their histories. Trouillot (1995), the late and prominent historian argued that he’s not so much as concerned with what history is, but how history works. The idea of the historian offered predominately in the literature sees history primarily as an interpretative discipline in which one develops arguments about the past from multiple sources of evidence (Monte-Sano, 2011; Nokes, 2013). However, from the perspective of marginalized groups, the historians’ job is to uncover the “particular bundles of silences” (Salinas, Blevins & Sullivan 2012) that have worked to marginalized groups’ voices and perspectives in the process of historical production often touted as having been done with integrity. From the perspective of subjugated peoples, the work of the historian is not to put together historical arguments to maintain disciplinary integrity, but to question this integrity by uncovering historical production and the processes that led to it.

In this study, I posit that historical literacy conceptions of the historian is in fact historically situated and comes largely from a tradition that has subjected the voices, perspectives and historical meaning making processes of marginalized groups. Barton (1997) cites other research studies (Bodnar, 1992; Cohen, 1994; Gillis, 1994; Kammen, 1995; Schwartz, Zerubavel, and Barnett, 1986) to emphasize how “communities retain, pass on, and commemorate perceptions of the past that may stand in contrast to official stories encountered in school or other institutions” (p. 422). I acknowledge that students of color and teachers of color who represent historically marginalized groups may have historically situated understandings of the concept of the historian and consequently alternative historical production or meaning-making processes. For this study, I therefore used teachers’ understanding of the historian or historical literacy as a lens for evaluating their own pedagogical actions and student outcome. In
my observation of classroom practices, I used the concept of the historian offered by Wineburg and other historical literacy researchers as starting points for observations, but not rigid indicators of evidence of historical literacy.

**Best Instructional Practices for Historical Literacy**

Cultivating disciplinary literacy in social studies helps students understand and apply key concepts that historians use in reading and writing about historical events. Cognitive approaches to disciplinary literacy (Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b) view students as novice learners who become experts by doing the discipline: they examine how historical accounts are constructed and where historical knowledge comes from rather than viewing history as an absolute given truth.

According to Wineburg (1991b) novices become experts in historical thinking as they master and apply different facets of evidenced based reasoning: sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading. Wineburg’s framework aimed to excavate the seemingly intuitive thinking practices of historians for students to emulate as they master historical thinking.

Historians engage in sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating and close reading simultaneously, but each skill has to be unpacked and scaffolded by teachers through explicit instruction to help novices develop their historical thinking capacities. Historians practice sourcing when they question the authenticity and perspectives of texts. Experts view text meaning as not finite truths but indicative of particular values of an author revealed by deliberately questioning the perspective and intent of the author. Texts therefore can become contentious sites for meaning making achieved by determining the author’s purpose.

According to Monte-Sano (2011, 2012), most literature on disciplinary literacy examines how historians read texts, but not necessarily on best practices for making meaning through historical writing. Although inextricably connected, reading and writing demand that students
use different faculties of the mind: Students read to learn and write in order to showcase understanding. The skills of historical writing that cultivate evidenced based reasoning therefore needs to be explicitly deconstructed to afford novice learners time to evolve into expert writers. Historical literacy not only involves the ability to think about a text, but also produce the types of texts that historians use and produce (Draper, Broomhead, Jensen, Nokes, & Siebert, 2010; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Previous studies on historical writing have focused mainly on how historians thought about the purposes and goals of writing history. Monte-Sano sought to expose how historians made sense of other aspects of the writing process such as planning, composing and revising, specifically to understand the ways that historians constantly reframe their composition and ideas based on the availability of new evidence to construct arguments. Historians continually alter their claims to account for available evidence (Monte-Sano, 2011). According the Monte-Sano, the benchmarks of historical writing differ from historical thinking with its emphasis on factual and interpretative accuracy and persuasiveness of evidence (Monte-Sano, 2008, 2011).

Constructing strong arguments in history involves historical thinking, but also the ability to write cogent arguments.

Unfortunately, many of the writing tasks given in a typical social studies classroom do not ask students to develop their own interpretations or original arguments. Most classrooms, in fact, require students to write summaries that may only potentially enhance their basic reading comprehension skills (Monte-Sano, 2008). The New York Regents exam’s thematic essay question is indicative of commonplace writing assessments that limit the development of historical literacy:
Students are asked to describe, explain and discuss the policies of leaders and their impact rather than exhibit any of the skills of historical literacy such as sourcing different historians’ viewpoints and arguments about a topic or time period. A student may score a high rating on this question simply by summarizing major content facts covered throughout the year without applying any of the key skills linked to evidence-based reasoning.

High stakes assessments like the Regents exams heavily influence the learning experiences and assignments offered to students, which potentially limits opportunities for them to move from novices who recall factual knowledge to experts who employ historical thinking to transfer and construct new knowledge. Assigning argumentative writing prompts, Document Based Questions (DBQ) essays and problem solving writing tasks are the best ways to assess disciplinary literacy (Monte-Sano, 2012). Frequently administering these assessments therefore increases the likelihood that instruction will strengthen students’ historical thinking and writing skills.

Implementation of strategic instruction to build historical literacy means that teachers move beyond general content specific reading and writing strategies. Disciplinary literacy differs from content literacy in its emphasis on teaching specialized ways of knowing and

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communicating in different disciplines (Shanahan, 2008; Reisman, 2015). Incorporating generic literacy practices into one’s teaching therefore does not always foster historical literacy. For example, argumentative writing prompts encourage novice learners to develop claims and analyze evidence, but historians use specific reasoning strategies to explain the connection between these claims and evidence, which include acknowledging bias, and the inclusion of footnotes and quotations from sources. The nature of data and warrants (the evidence and connection between evidence and claim) seem to be discipline specific (Monte-Sano, 2011).

From a disciplinary literacy stance, not all argumentative writing prompts are created equal. Recognizing that many teachers use content literacy strategies in their teaching, Monte-Sano and De La Paz (2012) researched which discipline-specific argumentative writing prompts would evoke adolescents’ historical reasoning. The authors constructed and administered three writing prompts using primary source documents to measure students’ historical thinking skills. The first prompt asked students to imagine themselves as historical agents who were living in 1947. The second prompt encouraged students to think about the motivations of an historical figure. The final prompt asked students to consider why two historical figures decided to publicly denounce communism. Each prompt was randomly administered to each student in eleven classes. Researchers gave students a subtest, observed classroom sessions on building background knowledge and analyzing historical documents, and monitored teachers’ administration of the writing prompt. Student responses indicated writing prompts which focused on sourcing, corroboration of documents, and causation were more likely to elicit adolescents’ attention to historical perspectives than prompts that ask students to imagine themselves as historical agents (Monte-Sano, 2012).

Although developing assessments that measure historical thinking is an important
component of backwards planning, allowing students to work towards the goal of performing well, strategic instruction that incorporates the best practices of disciplinary literacy truly helps students move from novices to experts. Teachers whose stated focus is disciplinary literacy must identify instructional best practices that help students make progress in historical writing. Monte-Sano (2011) analyzed the instructional practices of one teacher, Mr. Lyle, to highlight specific strategies that ensured student skill development in historical literacy. Student progress was measured by examining growth from pre to post DBQ essay test results. She used the following criteria to assess student historical reasoning:

“I sought the following: whether the evidence provided supported students’ interpretations; the degree to which students accounted for documentary evidence in their claims; the extent to which students explained the historical perspective being asked about; and whether students placed evidence in context, accounted for biases in their sources, recognized causal relationships, and qualified their arguments” (p. 222).

Monte-Sano used these criteria to measure the effectiveness of Lyle’s instruction. Over the course of the year, most students in Lyle’s classroom advanced their historical literacy skills. Three teaching strategies specifically garnered maximum growth in historical thinking and writing: annotating primary sources, regular informal writing prompts and focused feedback for the writer. Lyle explicitly taught students how to annotate historical texts to measure the metacognitive conversations students had as they read. Highlighting key words and phrases and posing questions as students read helped with understanding historical perspectives. Eventually students were able to use marginal notations and quotations to explain different historical perspectives using evidence from the text.

Students also benefited from informal writing prompts that focused on understanding and
analyzing a single historical perspective in conjunction with periodic writing tasks requiring
synthesis of multiple perspectives and complex issues. Lyle constructed expository writing
prompts ranging from simple tasks requiring students to develop a political profile to more
complex prompts that asked students to justify reasons for a political climate by citing evidence
from multiple sources. Scaffolding the complexity of writing tasks allowed students, like
historians, to practice and utilize different rhetorical structures in developing qualified
arguments. Academic literacy requires writers to adapt to a variety of tasks and rhetorical
structures (Monte-Sano, 2008). Lyle also provided students with focused feedback on their
writing. He commented on the historical accuracy of students’ claims, demanded more
substantial evidence from text, purposefully disagreed with students’ interpretations of events
and encouraged the inclusion of more content that would further claims. Lyle sequenced his oral
and written feedback to first focus on helping students develop accurate claims with substantial
evidence. Monte-Sano used writing excerpts from Lyle’s students to highlight how writing
growth was not necessarily a linear process, especially as the historical texts students read
became more complex in structure and meaning.

Monte-Sano’s classroom observations showed how Lyle’s instruction exemplified best
practices for teaching historical literacy and overall sound pedagogy. By scaffolding the process
of writing convincing historical arguments, Lyle helped students develop an underlying grasp of
the topic and discipline, through conceptual understanding and procedural knowledge of
historical analysis (Monte-Sano, 2008). Most of Lyle’s students showed significant growth in
historical writing because he used all three strategies simultaneously throughout the school year.
Student responses provided Lyle with data on individual student needs, helping him to tailor
instruction that promoted skill development in each student.
Monte-Sano’s veneration for Lyle’s instructional approach aimed to provide an exemplar model for educators, but undermined the pedagogical and content pedagogical awareness that most teachers need to actually teach disciplinary literacy. Lyle deliberately became her research subject as a result of her pre-requisites, Lyle’s advanced degree in history, and focus on writing and inquiry orientation towards history (Monte-Sano, 2008). Her pre-requisites, specifically Lyles’s content knowledge and inquiry approach to history are reflected in the sophistication of his writing tasks and construction of ideal learning experiences for students. Researchers advocating teachers’ commitment to disciplinary literacy may assume all teachers have the pre-requisites skills and epistemological stances needed for teaching inquiry-oriented history. However, teachers, like their students, need to become historically literate.

Monte-Sano’s studies were cited in this section to illuminate effective instructional moves teachers make to enhance students’ historical literacy skills. However, for the most part these studies that are deemed “best instructional practices” were created outside of an urban under-resourced school context. In urban schools, students come with a variety of needs and abilities and best instructional practices as reported by Monte-Sano may not be the best starting points for certain students. In this study, Monte-Sano’s best instructional practices in historical literacy are useful in diagnosing some of the students’ academic strengths and areas of improvement, but are not wholly sufficient in determining whether a teacher engaged in best instructional practices or not.

Critics of disciplinary literacy contend that teachers were never historians themselves and therefore struggle with doing the “work” of the discipline (De la Paz, Malkus, Monte-Sano and Montanaro, 2011). How then do teachers learn to do the work of teaching historical literacy? Aside from a keen understanding of disciplinary literacy, teachers must also aptly organize
curricula and assess student understanding to construct meaningful learning experiences that allow students’ to become more historically literate. More professional development opportunities are needed for teachers interested in developing their historical literacy capacity and pedagogical skill set.

Using data from the Teaching American History (TAH) grant, researchers (De la Paz, Malkus, Monte-Sano, & Montanaro, 2011) evaluated the effects of teacher professional development practices on students’ responses to measure the students’ historical literacy. Researchers also wanted to understand the relationships between teacher participation and student learning over one academic year (De la Paz, et al., 2011). A total of fifty-three teachers from various grade levels were divided into two subgroups: Teachers who engaged in 30 hours of professional learning and follow-up networking opportunities versus those teachers who only participated in professional development sessions. Professional developers intended to provide teachers with information related to historiography through the discovery, analysis and interpretation of primary documents. Before the onset of the instructional year, teachers participated in a four-day intensive summer workshops where historians shared content knowledge using framework of Wineburg’s Historical Thinking Framework. Other sessions focused on helping teachers incorporate active participation into their teaching and promote critical thinking through the construction of moral dilemmas in history. Teachers were then randomly assigned to networking and non-networking groups. The networking groups received ongoing professional development opportunities throughout the year that included 7 additional meetings, 40 hours of collaborative time and assistance from librarians in developing instructional resources.
Results comparing students pre-test DBQ at the beginning of the year with post-test spring results revealed that mere participation in the follow-up networking activities did not correlate with significant gains in students’ academic outcome unless it was 40 hours or more. Unfortunately in terms of identifying best instructional practices for teachers and students, results from this study did not indicate which professional development activities positively affected teachers’ abilities to improve student historical literacy. The question still remains: What then does it mean for teachers to teach the discipline? And, what types of professional development experiences are most productive?

According to researchers, analysis of results revealed that students’ pretest score variables contributed to students’ post-test DBQ scores, indicating students’ initial skill readiness directly related to their academic performance at the end of the year. In essence, teachers’ experience with TAH professional development sessions did not positively affect students’ initial reading and writing readiness by the end of the instructional year. Perhaps teaching disciplinary literacy not only involves building teacher historical literacy capacity, but also includes ensuring that students have the pre-requisite reading and writing skills needed to acquire historical literacy. Critics of disciplinary literacy argue that depending on the skill level of students, they may still need more content-area reading strategies because disciplinary literacy is in fact advanced literacy. Essentially teachers cannot build historical literacy without doing what Gee (2014) describes as “repair work” regarding students’ mastery of “basic literacy” (p. 57).

**Nature of knowledge:**

In 2008, Wineburg and his Stanford team developed the *Reading like an Historian* curriculum, a framework for teaching historical thinking, writing and speaking. The curriculum is a compilation of document based lesson plans aimed as an intervention to help teachers
develop the pedagogical skills needed to cultivate historical literacy in classrooms. The curriculum is comprised of readymade document-based lesson plans that provide teachers with the necessary background knowledge and supporting sources to evaluate a key historical question. According to Reisman (2012a), the curricula addresses teachers’ lack of pedagogical experience around historical inquiry, while providing apt classroom materials that present texts with strong historical narratives that builds student capacity to develop historical literacy.

Although the curricula provided teachers with primary source documents, a necessary and often missing requirement to teach historical literacy, the question of whether it alone sufficed in positively impacting student academic achievement was explored in a study (Reisman, 2012a) involving 11 classrooms’ engagement with the curriculum over six months. Reisman and her team of researchers analyzed the effects of Reading like an Historian on student historical thinking and overall retention of factual knowledge. The study was novel in the sense that they also measured the curricula’s impact on student reading comprehension. Most research prior to this study did not explore how historical literacy affected students’ basic literacy faculties. Five treatment groups of teachers were given 4 days of professional development prior to receiving the curriculum while the control group received curricula materials without training. All 236 students were administered baseline assessments measuring their reading comprehension, mastery of historical facts and facets of Wineburg’s historical thinking framework (sourcing, corroborating, contextualizing and close reading).

Researchers observed treatment groups twice weekly to evaluate curricula implementation while the control group was visited only four times across a six month time span. Results from the study indicated treatment students outperformed control group students on reading comprehension despite having lower scores on the baseline assessment. They also
retained more historical facts on the final assessments and scored higher on two historical thinking facets—sourcing and close reading—but did not make significant gains in their ability to contextualize and corroborate texts. Treatment students’ opportunities to read daily, engage with and make meaning of complex texts heavily contributed to gains in reading comprehension. These findings rebut arguments which previously suggested that students need strong basic literacy skills before attempting to build historical literacy skills strengthening arguments for disciplinary literacy as a framework to address student struggles with generic reading and writing.

Interestingly, missing gains in students’ abilities to contextualize and corroborate evidence may be linked to the study’s lack of exploration of students’ understandings of the historian’s epistemological stance: viewing history as an act of construction. Lack of student growth in these areas may be due to the curricula’s reflection of Wineburg’s (1991a; Wineburg & Reisman, 2015) heavy emphasis on sourcing as the “touchstone” that distinguishes the expert from the novice. Contextualization, however—the act of placing events in proper context—arguably is equally important, engendering a mild form of empathy, requiring one temporally suspend understanding of their own beliefs and knowledge in order to understand a foreign time period or concept. Historical empathy (Reisman & Wineburg, 2012) allows an awareness of one’s historical subjectivity and tempers judgment of historical topics, figures and actions. Disciplinary literacy as a route towards civic engagement is strongly contingent on students’ capacities to empathize a skill enhanced by practice with contextualizing multiple sources. Without an apt ability to contextualize, difficulties in corroborating sources naturally arise. Students may find it challenging to corroborate arguments from multiple sources if they haven’t been skilled at putting into context the positionality of each source. Although Wineburg (1991a,
2015) underscores sourcing as a singular facet of his framework, the close reading of multiple texts is a signature move of the historical expert. Student performance on contextualization and corroboration therefore should not be ignored if students are to achieve the skills of historical thinking and civic engagement.

In this information world, the most critical challenge of our society may be to cultivate skills which allow humans to comprehend and integrate multiple, varied and prolific information sources (Goldman, 2004). Mastering the skills of historical literacy ideally positions students to adequately face Goldman’s identified challenge of multi-text synthesis. Most of the research on reading comprehension across disciplines uses a single text paradigm that is out of step with the “inter-textual reality encountering most readers in present-day society” (Braten, Stromso, & Rouet, 2011, p. 49), explaining why most college students often fail to apply historians’ expert strategies of sourcing and corroborating without specific training. Braten (et. al 2011) study explored how and if epistemic beliefs about knowledge affected student comprehension and synthesis of multiple texts. They hypothesized that one’s epistemological stance towards the nature of knowledge and knowing within a discipline affected their comprehension of multiple texts.

Students’ epistemic beliefs were explored in two categories: (1) the nature of knowledge and (2) the nature of knowing. The first component is the simplicity of knowledge which measured the extent to which students believed that knowledge represented an accumulation of simple facts or viewed knowledge as complex, the result of interrelated concepts. Within this nature of knowledge domain is the second component called the certainty of knowledge, concerned with whether students viewed knowledge as absolute and unchanging versus tentative and evolving. The literature revealed that many students studying history view knowledge in
history as simple, the result of isolated facts and fixed (Wineburg, 2008). Teachers’ pedagogical content instruction may contribute to students’ fixed perceptions of history as most only use sources to illustrate points in a textbook or promote interpretations that are decidedly ahistorical (Westhoff, 2009).

Researchers (Braten et. al 2011) also identified the source of knowledge and knowledge justification as two key components that comprise the nature of knowing within a discipline. Source of knowledge is the belief that knowledge originates in oneself or from outside experts; it involves tendencies to believe authority versus one’s inner understanding. The second component involves whether one decides to justify knowledge through expert opinion or experience. The nature of knowing and nature of knowledge formulate students’ overall epistemic beliefs towards history.

Researchers (Braten et. al 2011) found undergraduate students who viewed knowledge as flexible and evolving were more likely to perform well on inter-textual comprehension tasks than readers who believed knowledge about the topic of was absolute and unchanging. Students with a flexible view on knowledge construction also benefitted more from doing argumentative writing tasks than engaging in summary or narrative assignments. Instructing students to construct arguments from what they read, a task much applauded by teachers, is not necessarily optimal for every student depending on their epistemic beliefs. Although researchers artfully defined these knowledge domains from a cognitive stance, they did not evaluate impending factors such as culture that may have influenced the development of students’ epistemic beliefs. Braten (et. al 2011) posited inter-textual comprehension as a major cognitive achievement, ignoring the role of culture in cognition, and more importantly, disciplinary literacy’s other goal of producing citizens who are civically engaged. School texts can work as colonizers (Moje,
2008) and possibly impact students’ beliefs in their validity. Furthermore, over-emphasis on cognitive processes position students in a win-lose scenario. You win if you believe knowledge is flexible, but lose if you don’t. How then are students whose histories have been silenced, preventing them from having a flexible view of history, to thrive within this framework? Findings suggest that further research is needed on understanding the nature of students’ epistemic beliefs about history to inform classroom instruction.

**Historical Literacy and New York City**

In response to Moje’s (2010) declaration that schools should endorse disciplinary literacy as the singular solution to the adolescent literacy crisis, Heller (2010) questioned the effectiveness of this model within the current state of many secondary schools. He argued that students need not learn the skills of disciplinary scholars, an endeavor not readily achieved even by most college students, and only by those who matriculate into doctoral programs. Furthermore, it is unrealistic for secondary students to master the skills of all disciplines, when in college, students are only seemingly required to master one upon declaration of a major. He cited her explanation of the persistent challenges to implementation of disciplinary as argument for its futility in secondary education:

> Persistent challenges, including student resistance to such instruction, the lack of institutional support for it, a scarcity of the sorts of professional development that it would require, and—most important—the scarcity and unequal distribution of secondary-level teachers who have the truly solid disciplinary background that they would need to teach in this way (p. 270).

Moje’s (2010) rebuttal acknowledged Heller’s point in the difficulty of implementing disciplinary literacy amidst these challenges, but cautioned that “just because something is
difficult doesn’t mean one shouldn’t pursue it” (p. 291). According to Moje (2010), the project of disciplinary literacy is social justice enabling one to have the tools of knowledge production within a discipline to transform it. A current examination of structures that enable and hinder its implementation within New York provides direction on its potential and areas for growth in raising student academic achievement and their ability to become knowledge producers who transform the discipline forward.

In early 2000, the New York Department of Education followed historical precedent: In response to student lackluster performance on state history exams, new standards-based tests were designed as a catalyst and panacea for improving teaching and student learning. Despite specious evidence correlating a linear relationship between testing and teaching (Reich, 2009; Grant, 2001; Shepard, 1991; Cizek, 2001), the newly revised Global and United States History Regents exams was administered in hopes of raising educational standards throughout New York. Since its inception however, the exam has yet to actualize any widespread and notable instructional shifts in teacher practice and student mastery of history—both in content knowledge and disciplinary skill acquisition (Reich, 2009). Both exams therefore have garnered considerable critique as promulgated drivers of teaching practice and effective assessors of historical literacy (Reich, 2009; Grant, 2001).

Recent trends in teacher evaluations have positioned state exams as a strong measure of student academic skills and pedagogical abilities of teachers. State exams and standards primarily focus on assessing outcomes, considered the “what” of good teaching without offering any particulars on the “how”—solutions or methods which cultivate quality pedagogical practices that are sustainable. The New York State Board of Regents’ Scope and Sequence (2002) a document outlining content specifications of each grade level, proposed that the primary
outcome of social studies classrooms was to emphasize specialized thinking skills: “the ability to gather, interpret, organize, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information by engaging students in problem-solving, decision-making, inquiry, and conceptualizing” (p. 12). The Department of Education hoped a curriculum with these new outcomes combined with standards aligned Regents exams would address the “how” of cultivating historical literacy in classrooms. By framing the “what” through new curricular standards and exams, teachers were expected to create learning experiences that ensured all their students would perform at higher levels, consequently eradicating dismal history test scores. In essence, the state believed testing would raise standards and drive instruction (Grant, 2001).

Policy makers within the New York Board of Regents assumed direct causation between stating and assessing these new historical thinking skills, to be accomplished with quality teaching. In other words, qualifying these exams as high stakes would serve as effective means of assessing student progress in meeting the content based standards and historical thinking skills, and ensure the practice of higher-order thinking as a quotidian part of instruction. Unfortunately, state exams have yet to occupy what Eisner (2005) described as the true purpose of an assessment, “to inform the creation of curricula, anticipate the educational needs of students and prioritize professional development needs of teachers” (p. 154).

Like other accountability measures which support high stakes standardized testing, the New York Global History Regents exam has solidified rather than transformed extant educational inequities in student learning and teaching. The Regents global history exam, for example, proves to be the most challenging for urban students to pass, limiting their chances of graduating high school within four years (Decker, 2012). Under this mantle of accountability, which seeks to foster instructional changes through high stakes testing, students are required to
pass more Regents exams than they were in 2007, with a higher minimum grade of 65, a ten-point increase from previous exam years (New York State Education Department Graduation Requirements, 2016). In addition, student scores on Regents exams now account for fifty percent of a teacher’s yearly evaluation. The underlying message is clear: Tests do matter, but to what end?

S.G Grant and researchers (2002) examined the extent to which New York’s efforts to purposefully raise teaching standards through high-stakes testing actually led to better teaching and student mastery of social studies skills. In a study involving 11 schools and 13 teachers from rural, urban and suburban areas, they documented teacher responses to the newly administered exams in 2002. Overall, data from interview responses and classroom observations confirmed teachers’ and researchers’ prescient suspicions that “testing only made sure that test prep got taught and historical knowledge did not get learned” (Grant 2002, p. 489). Although, a new phenomenon in 2002, thirteen years later, many critics (Saiger, 2015) still scoff at the presumed alignment of the exam with state standards and classroom instruction.

In response to the imminent test, policy makers anticipated teachers would make sweeping instructional shifts in their classrooms by developing “rich, engaging, and meaningful social studies programs” (New York Department of Education, 2002). Underlying these instructional expectations was an implicit belief that most social studies classroom instruction lacked the academic rigor needed to cultivate high-level thinking. The exam therefore would ideally provide the needed catalyst for transforming instruction. Evidence from Grant’s study however, indicated the exam failed to motivate a significant number of teachers from making any transformative shifts in their curriculum planning or instruction. Other research (Amrein & Berliner 2002) actually showed that in many cases testing pressure led teachers to “teach to the
test” by incorporating explicit instruction of test-taking skills into their teaching. Even documented changes made by 3 out of the 13 teachers involved in Grant’s study reflected only additive content changes instead of stark substantive pedagogical shifts. Findings from the study also revealed that many of the teachers questioned the alignment between the exam and curriculum, labeling its relationship as tenuous, which further attenuated any compelling need to “shift” their instruction.

When the new exam was finally administered in 2003, some teachers griped that their own instructional expectations were actually higher than the ones measured by the state (Grant, 2002). Suspicion of the exam’s lack of rigor was corroborated by a 10% increase in overall passing rates throughout the state, despite evidence that many teachers did not tailor their instruction to the “newly improved” historical thinking standards (Grant, 2002). Exam results further disproved the speculated causation between test scores and good teaching. The results instead confirmed how it is possible to raise test scores through test taking strategies and narrowing of curriculum without improving student mastery of historical thinking or elevating teacher practice (Shepard, 1991).

The structure of both Regents history exams actually serves as a measurement of basic literacy and test-taking skills more than an evaluation of advanced literacy. Reich (2009) sought to understand the thinking of adolescents who scored highly on both the Global and U.S. History Regents exams. In analyzing think-alouds and personal interviews of 13 students, Reich found that students who scored well on the multiple choice questions frequently relied on “test-wiseness,” i.e., the ability to use test-taking skills to correctly answer multiple choice questions without a deep understanding of content knowledge.
Teachers and researchers (Reich, 2009; Shepard, 1991) alike question whether multiple choice questions such as the one below adequately assess historical thinking:

The Berlin Conference is most closely associated with the colonization of

(1) South Asia
(2) Latin America
(3) East Asia
(4) Africa

(New York State Department of Education Global History Regents Exam, 2015)

In order to answer the above question, the student need not possess a conceptual understanding of imperialism but must have some factual content knowledge about the Berlin Conference, as well as basic literacy skills. A student may answer this question correctly using only memorization skills and the test-wise strategy of word association, prompting them to associate the Berlin conference with Africa. In fact, high school history students who possessed test-wise skills and factual content knowledge were able to score as well as history professors on a multiple choice quiz (Wineburg, 1991a). One must question whether the New York Department of Education actually values historical thinking when multiple choice questions are weighted more heavily on the new exam than in previous years. To date, test takers are able to pass the exam without writing a full essay if they answer more than 90% of the multiple-choice questions correctly (Reich, 2009). Researchers (Grant 2004; Reich, 2009) continually question
whether these standardized exams adequately measure historical analysis and disciplinary literacy.

In Reich’s 2009 study, he also analyzed student think-alouds to identify: (1) evidence of higher levels of thinking according to Bloom’s taxonomy (2) facets of Wineburg’s framework of historical thinking, (3) and student mastery of standards. Student responses showed that most students did not utilize higher order levels of thinking, much less disciplinary-specific thinking, to answer questions. Conclusions from this study suggest that although New York history standards are organized around second-order historical thinking concepts such as empathy, time, and significance, students in Reich’s study did not draw upon these concepts.

Unfortunately, the remaining portions of the Global history exam—the thematic essay and document based short answers and essay—further impugn the integrity of the exam as a standards-aligned or historical literacy assessment tool when it only mildly invokes student’s analytical thinking in history, the ability to inquire, question and investigate historical events. The thematic essay asks students to recall and summarize historical events that exemplify the given historical theme. The New York Department of Education (2009) insisted the thematic essay prompts students to “compare and contrast events, analyze issues, or evaluate solutions to problems” (p. 1). Yet, researchers again have shown that the exams’ essay/s prompt lower rather than higher levels of comprehension or knowledge. Teachers in Grant’s study, for example, not only dismissed alignment between the test and the social studies learning standards, but also remarked on the lack of rigor within the new rubric used to grade the essay. One teacher commented, “The way we graded the essays was really ridiculous. Anybody, even if they wrote a couple of historical words, we could give them a couple of points” (Grant, 2002, p. 497).
Cultivating the skills of historical literacy necessitates that students analyze multiple sources and produce meaning through argumentative writing. Considering all of the components of the exam, the document based short answers and its subsequent essay possess the greatest potential to assess students’ critical thinking and facilitate historical thinking through writing. However, it too falls short by prompting students only to use the lower-level thinking skills of explanation and summarization. “Teachers who participated in the state-sponsored practice scoring sessions universally reported feeling less anxiety when they realized that their expectations for student performance on the essays were higher than the state’s” (Grant 2002, p. 505).

Overall, researchers have questioned the utility of all parts of the Regents history exams as authentic assessments of historical literacy (Grant, 2002, 2004; Reich, 2011); they acknowledge the tests’ debilitating role in allowing teachers to approach historical topics from a stance of inquiry because of the overwhelming amount of content assessed. To date, the exam’s structure has not changed nor has there been any attempts to mollify teachers’ historically documented discontent even as the Regents global history exam is the most-failed of the five Regents tests students must pass to graduate high school³. Teachers and students are expected to master the skills of historical literacy yet the Regents exams mainly function as an assessor of basic literacy and thinking. Compounding these difficulties are the equally problematic, Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) which are intended to promote substantial changes in the teaching and learning of social studies.

Skeptics (Loveless, 2012) place CCLS amongst other accountability measures which promise to raise rigor, change teaching and improve student performance simply through public

promulgation and development of new assessments. While proponents of CCLS (National Governor’s Association, 2010) espouse familiar accountability rhetoric by forecasting that teachers will implement stark instructional shifts as a result of the new standards, CCLS significantly deviates from historical precedents, with a gradual rather than immediate implementation plan. Although New York social studies teachers are currently expected to incorporate some of the CCLS anchor reading and writing standards for history, a Common Core aligned Regents exam will not be administered until June 2018 for Global History and June 2019 for United States History.

Since 2011, the New York Board of Regents has worked with a Social Studies Content Advisory Panel (comprised of teachers, policy makers scholars and researchers) to revise three draft versions of a new Social Studies framework, a document that integrates extant social studies standards with CCLS with an overarching arc of inquiry (New York Department of Education, 2014).

Figure 1: Components of NYS K-12 Social Studies

![Figure 1: Components of NYS K-12 Social Studies](image)

Historical topics (content specifications) are cohesively framed into key ideas or enduring understandings that students explore from using inquiry techniques, allowing them to pose and
evaluate essential questions that deepen their conceptual understandings while engaging students with specific disciplinary literacy practices. Although content (historical topics) may vary, students are instructed across the K-12 spectrum by using a cohesive set of themes, key ideas, concepts and disciplinary practices that get progressively more challenging as they matriculate into higher grades.

In creating the new framework, the advisory panel requested revisions to address the problem of too much content; they implored the Board of Regents to attenuate content within the new framework in order to provide instructional opportunities for greater depth and mastery of historical literacy skills. In the finalized 2014-2015 version of CCLS, issues related to the problem of an overabundance of content have not been diminished through a jettison of content, but have been addressed only slightly through acknowledgement of its challenge for teachers:

“The volume of social studies content included in each year’s course of study presents some challenges. Teachers are faced with large amounts of content to be “covered” and yet want to provide their students with opportunities for in-depth inquiry and exposure. This issue of “depth versus breadth” is not a new construct but it requires teachers to accept that not all content is created equal. The dilemma of depth versus breadth is not easy to address. It is also not something that can be decided for us. It requires all teachers to make the best decisions given our knowledge of the content, assessments, instructional goals, and most importantly our understanding of student learning (students’ needs, interest and readiness)” (NYS Social Studies Framework, 2014-2015, p. 1).

In the case of Arc of Inquiry Framework, the outcomes of learning are easily identifiable, but the
“how” of achieving these objectives are conveniently left as abstract constructs to be demystified by the teacher. How then are teachers expected to cultivate historical literacy with vague implementation plans and within educational structures that have not changed?

After finalizing the New York Social Studies Arc of Inquiry Framework, the Department of Education developed a field guide to provide a practical example of how teachers may currently implement the framework. The field guide showcases a four-week unit on Reconstruction to serve as a model curriculum that integrates key ideas, conceptual understandings, and content specifications needed for an inquiry-based approach to teaching social studies while preparing students for mastery of historical literacy. The sample unit also serves to exemplify three new instructional shifts that they expected teachers to make in their classrooms related to CCLS: (1) conceptual understandings, (2) student inquiry, collaboration, and informed action, (3) content and skill integration (NYSED Field Guide, 2014).

The first instructional shift maintains that teachers help students develop conceptual understandings of historical topics, instead of asking students to just memorize facts. For example, students examine the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments not as isolated historical occurrences but through the concept of freedom to prove that “between 1865 and 1900, constitutional rights were extended to African Americans but their ability to exercise these rights was undermined by individuals, groups, and government institutions” (NYSED Field Guide, 2014, p. 25). Conceptual understandings are deepened, the field guide comments, when students and teachers develop compelling and supporting questions, such as how did Frederick Douglass define freedom before and during the Civil War.

From a cursory glance at the field guide the first instructional shift shows how to cultivate the skills of analysis and interpretation by explicitly including an activity that requires
students to develop their own questions. Such skills are buttressed by what the NYSED calls “consistent practice” (NYSED 2015, p. 7) of deeper learning that unequivocally involves longer engagement with fewer historical topics. The problem of too much content however resurfaces within this unit as the content requirements from the 1996 Social Studies Learning Standards curriculum are the equivalent to those presented in the new Arc of Inquiry Framework.

Although the field guide with its exemplar unit intended to address the “how” in the teaching of historical literacy, the impossibly large amount of content students are expected to know, as well as problematic and inchoate structure of limited time and resources that threaten the implementation of disciplinary literacy practices in schools still remain.

The second instructional shift that the new social studies framework endorses suggests teachers become facilitators rather than as disseminators of historical knowledge so that students “do” the discipline of history themselves. Invoking the language of disciplinary literacy, the framework asserts: “Just as students ‘do’ chemistry or physics in the science laboratory, students can ‘do’ social studies in the “laboratory” of the past and present (NYSED Field Guide, 2014, p. 8). As historians are motivated by self-generated questions, students “do” the discipline when they are allowed to develop and explore their own questions. When this inquiry occurs in collaborative contexts, they can prepare students for civic engagement and informed action. In making this point, the new social studies framework broadens the concept of “doing” disciplinary literacy from simply writing arguments like historians, and instead suggests that students and teachers “use the past to instruct the course of the future, care deeply about issues facing humanity and implementing real solutions” (NYSED Field Guide, 2014, p. 20). This second shift deals more with the ideological underpinnings of social studies as a discipline that
can prepare students for civic participation through purposeful engagement with historical literacy or advanced thinking and writing skills.

The final instructional shift encourages teachers to integrate historical content and the skills purposefully and seamlessly. As students explore content, they should have an opportunity to think, read and write like social scientists/historians. In exploring the concept of freedom within this Reconstruction unit, for example, students are meant to master the historical reading skills of gathering and using evidence by engaging in practices of defining and framing questions and recognizing arguments within sources present (NYSED Field Guide, 2014)

Although more aligned to the tenets of historical literacy, the Arc of Inquiry framework repeats a similar pattern of placing too much emphasis on the instructional shifts and not necessarily on the “how’s” of cultivating these skills consistently. Furthermore, the issues that the teachers in Grant’s study identified during the 2002 Global History Regents exam haven’t been resolved. Specifically, the instructional shifts don’t really address the problem of “covering content” and the lack of assessment of students to measure the instructional shifts. The conceptualization of these shifts seem to disregard the current limitations faced by social studies educators such as limited instructional time, resources to teach historical literacy and teachers’ content-pedagogical skills (Moje, 2011).

In 2014, the New York Board of Regents issued a memorandum announcing the adoption of a finalized version of a New Social Studies Framework which included endorsement letters by social studies teachers, affinity groups and researchers like S.G Grant, who had previously admonished the state’s previous standards-based accountability measures. S.G Grant, Lee and Swan wrote a letter (2015) in response to the New Social Studies Framework, however which included a caveat: the new New York Social Studies Framework will not transform social studies
teaching and learning by itself. “Teaching and learning are complex activities and so, while new curriculum can help teachers engage their students in inquiry and historical literacy, equally important are the assessments that follow” (Grant, Lee & Swan, p. 1). Grant’s statement unveils the complex dynamics between assessments and teaching; one cannot be done well without the other. And yet, in the 60 years of international research on school testing, the policy of emphasizing test performance to improve teaching and learning in education has never been validated (Shepard, 1991).

The interpretative nature of history and social studies contributes to the difficulty of creating assessments that value the multiplicity of truths inherent in any historical event. Perhaps the task of creating an exam that assesses historical literacy skills, instructional shifts and civic engagement proves impossible, or problematic on a large scale. The Regents exams attend to the practical concerns of the state regarding the feasibility of grading and assessing content on a wider scale but at the cost of misalignment and truly assessing standards with historical thinking skills. More authentic assessments that emulate the tasks of historians and are couched within real-world applications, would require innovative solutions beyond the declaration of a new exam and curriculum. The framework of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) offers possibility for teachers to design tasks and work products on a smaller scale that cultivate historical thinking skills and promote civic engagement.

The use of exams and curricula as tools for engaging students with historical thinking will not thrive under extant school structures and commitment to the current curriculum. These instructional shifts will not be sustainable without systemic policy changes to the curricula with regards to content, skills and values. Adopting a culturally relevant approach to designing
curricula and assessments however is one step towards preparing students for college, careers, and participation in civic life.

According to NYSED, student mastery of social studies is more than the acquisition of advanced reading and writing skills but also involves a keen awareness of how the past informs the future (NYS Field Guide, 2014). Such awareness of the past coupled with advanced literacy skills potentially cultivates agency in students, equipping them with the necessary knowledge on how to effectively use the past to civically impact their present and future realities. The current discourse on historical literacy focuses mainly on academic skills and does little to inform teachers on how to help students become empowered agents of change who take informed action. Helping students to think critically about the past, present and future occurs when teachers employ “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings 1994, p. 200). Culturally relevant pedagogy potentially addresses the perpetual “how” gap faced by teachers by providing them with standpoints and approaches to cultivate historical literacy within students in marginalized communities.

According to Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2008, 2014), CRP posits cultural experience as the foundation for helping students achieve academic success and developing critical consciousness. Students’ histories are assets foregrounded in the development of curricula and classroom learning experiences. Under this framework, students are repositioned from passive receivers of historical knowledge to critical agents of change who challenge dominant interpretations of history through the analysis of their lived histories and culture. When implemented, well, CRP helps students to see themselves as and members of their community as agents of change rather than simply as victims of oppression (Epstein, 2009).
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:

In this section, I begin by describing the concept of culture and it how it helps to frame the major theoretical concepts of CRP. I then describe the major tenets of CRP research and its implementation. Finally, I describe the limitations of CRP as it relates to a framework for informing the teaching and learning of urban students and its role in buttressing historical literacy as a framework.

Culture

A common definition of culture is hard to find within research scholarship (Banks, 1994). Although problematic in the lack of scholars consensus in what culture is, even more problematic is ubiquity of the use of the term “culture” in scholarship and how the concept of culture is used to frame educational experiences and outcomes for students of color and students in urban spaces. In this section, I will explicate Geneva Gay’s concept of culture and then illuminate how culture has been used to frame culturally relevant scholarship.

Geneva Gay, a prominent scholar of multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching offered this definition of culture:

Culture refers to a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our lives as well as the lives of others (Delgado-Gaitan & Tueba, 1991).

Gay’s adoption Delgado-Gaitan & Tueba’s definition aligns with other multicultural scholars who use the concept of culture as way to acknowledge the diversity of lived experiences and beingness students of color bring to a classroom space. Culture in this regard, is dynamic, meaning it is constantly shifting and not static. Furthermore, this definition of culture lacks an
attributing value of good or bad, but offers research guidelines for identifying and interpreting
group and individual subjectivities or experiences.

Formally trained as an anthropologist, Ladson-Billings sought to illuminate how culture
affected students of color and complicate our understanding of the concept. Schools as
institutions value dominant culture which Carter (2005) defined as “the system of mainstream
and widely acceptable social practices and ideas, often based on the ways of life of social groups
with the most power in society” (p. 185). Dominant culture or White American culture has
largely framed the cultural ideals of schools. In other words, dominant culture is the invisible
norm or standard to which all other students are measured. Although students of color make up
the majority student population in urban spaces, they are taught predominately by White
teachers, which has led to what Milner (2010) described as “cultural conflicts” between teachers
and students.

Ladson Billings (2006) identified all of the pernicious ways culture as a construct has
been used against students of color in teaching in her article “It’s Not the Culture of Poverty, It’s
the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education.” Culture in teaching has
contributed to a problem of exclusion and over-determination. For example, she argues that
whenever there is an issue of learning with students of color, educators and researchers alike
“point to students’ culture as a culprit. Educators and researchers must be weary of the over-
determination of culture in trying to develop pedagogical approaches to learning for students of
color.

Not having a dynamic cultural understanding of culture benefits the dominant culture.
Ladson Billings (2006) affirmed the concept of culture is attributed to minorities while members
of dominant society are not seen as cultural beings. The result of such practices is that dominant
culture is maintained while students of color are positioned as individuals needing to be fixed. Ladson Billings encourages educators and researchers to link conversations of culture to context as well. Context conversations helps educators to think also about students socioeconomic status and not just attribute “culture” to behaviors that need to be fixed. For Ladson Billings, it’s not so much the need to have a coherent understanding of culture, but an awareness that we all are cultural beings. She studied the educational practices of teachers of colors to students of color to illuminate the cultural beingness of everyone and to situate context as integral to effectively engage students of color in learning.

**Tenets of CRP**

The term culturally relevant pedagogy was coined by Ladson-Billings 1995 as a way to describe effective instructional practices with students of color. According to Ladson Billings (1995a, 1995b) culturally relevant pedagogy is pedagogy that affirms the agency and experiences of people of color. Ladson-Billings and Dixon (2017) have argued that “historically what was deemed best practices had been predicated on what is best as it pertains to mostly white, middle-class, students” (p. 1). Ladson-Billings’ framework was in response to the deficit-thinking paradigm that plagued research and practice about students of color and their culture. Because Eurocentric views of schooling and culture dominated the educational landscape, students of color and their cultures were seen as aberrations to the dominant culture and were constantly framed in terms of what needed to be fixed (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson Billings maintained that students of color were not subpar because of any innate cognitive ability or cultural deficiencies, but attributed the achievement gap between whites and blacks to the structural inequalities that plagued schools. Instead of an achievement gap, Ladson Billings (2006b) contended that there was actually an “opportunity gap” where U.S. schools had failed
students of color and thereby owed them an educational debt. Ladson Billings work showed that when given the right resources, and when teachers believed in their students, students of color were able to succeed.

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), CRP teachers are committed to (1) high expectations and academic achievement of all students, (2) use of culture as a leverage for instructional practices and (3) cultivating a critical consciousness within students. Ladson-Billings’ (1995a) work on CRP took place when most students of color were taught by white teachers. Even though almost 20 plus year later, students of color account for half of the student population according data from the department of education, over 80% of their teachers are white, middle class and monolingual (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Ladson’ Billings work is still pertinent. Howard (2017) noted that Ladson-Billings offered CRP to serve as an important theoretical tool to analyze how instructional practices could be arranged by teachers “in a manner that could tap into a wide array of communicative and cognitive processes for the most students” (p. 7). CRP is not just a framework for teachers of color, but for all teachers with diverse student populations.

**CRP and Historical Literacy: Potential and Challenges**

CRP challenges the notion that history is devoid of racial, gender and/or class influences and instead employs critical social justice concepts such as power, race and class as central constructs in the investigation and doing of history. Students are encouraged to explore history through the lens of power in order to critically imagine a better future. CRP’s emphasis on critical consciousness reflects the use of power as a theoretical foundation for analyses of history, offering an integral but missing component within New York’s and other social studies frameworks. CRP possibly encourages teachers to develop activities that invoke student civic
participation. The lack of this needed critical lens is apparent in the absence of the concept of racism within the Arc of Inquiry Reconstruction unit as the exemplar unit for teaching disciplinary literacy and understanding how the past informs the future. From a CRP stance, it is impossible to divorce concepts or racism from the Reconstruction era. As Epstein, (2009) suggested, disciplinary approaches to teaching are necessary but insufficient considerations in planning and implementation; teaching history and humanities also are political acts in which teachers emphasize some topics, themes or interpretations over others. CRP makes these social justice concepts explicit as to engage and positively affect marginalized populations of students.

The potential of CRP to develop historical literacy and prompt civic engagement is promising as evidenced by Epstein and Gist’s (2015) study that evaluated students’ interpretations of history, a key facet of disciplinary literacy. Epstein & Gist assessed the effects of one teacher’s CRP instruction on her students’ historical and contemporary understandings. Selected students were given the task of explaining and writing the eight most important historical actors and events in U.S. history at the beginning and end of the year. Additionally, students were asked to summarize the experiences of whites and people of color over the course of national history, as well as the role of the government in shaping racial group experiences. Such tasks aptly assessed the skills of historical understandings, prompting students to consider the connections between past and present, while aligning with the school’s broader instructional focus of teaching students to use evidence to support claims, recognize multiple perspectives on events and issues, see the relevance of subject matter to contemporary life, and develop strong writing and verbal skills (Epstein & Gist 2015).

Epstein and Gist’s findings also revealed the teacher’s instruction enabled most students to express sophisticated understandings of the individual’s and government’s roles in the
development of historical events. Students at the end of the year also readily attributed more qualities of agency to marginalized groups throughout history and offered a more complex conceptualization of racism as a historical process. However, students continued to refer to whites as a monolithic group; they did not seem to grasp the concept that although members of a dominant group, whites had a diverse array of experiences. The outcomes of the study positions CRP as an effective framework for guiding teachers on how to build conceptual understandings of historical events that enhance students’ critical thinking. However, the study evaluated students’ conceptual understanding of history and its agentic potential. It is unclear the extent to which CRP serves as the panacea for historical thinking among marginalized youth, since the researchers did not provide specific evidence of student mastery in historical literacy skill acquisition such as writing samples. Nor did the study reference students capacity to exhibit critical consciousness or initiate informed action.

CRP as an asset based pedagogy maintains that students possess cultural capital—behaviors, mindsets and practices--before they enter classroom spaces that are often ignored or eschewed because of dominant views of teaching and learning history (Paris & Alim, 2014). Therefore teachers should elicit students’ “pre-instructional knowledge and beliefs, connecting new content and themes to students’ “existing understandings and provide ongoing opportunities for students to incorporate new and more complex concepts into existing frameworks (Epstein, 2009). The few studies in history/social studies (Epstein, 2009; Martell, 2013) that examined the impact of CRP on learning focused mainly on the progression of student concepts and beliefs and not necessarily on specific disciplinary skills of reading and writing. For CRP to successfully help students achieve academic success, an asset-based evaluation of disciplinary literacy skills must be an integral component of the instructional knowledge assessed. This
means designing specific pre-assessments that garner data on the historical literacy capital students possess as assets or foundations for developing curricular units that build upon these skills or address its gaps. Currently, such research does not exist.

CRP advocates that students develop a critical consciousness which enables them to challenge the status quo of the current social order to evoke collective and individual change (Ladson-Billings, 2006b). Students who study history through this framework should exhibit the agency to advocate for themselves and their communities while achieving academic success. For Ladson-Billings, CRP’s component of critical consciousness specifically prepares students for the active citizenship purported by many state social studies curricular frameworks. Few studies however have evaluated the extent to which CRP actually impacts students’ critical consciousness and agency—ability to act. Most of the research on CRP evaluates students’ ability to think critically about race or social justice topics without analyzing its correlation with student agency. Even though social studies is replete with content for students to critically analyze, current studies of instructional practices in social studies have yet to garner considerable documentation of civic engagement. Irrespective of the lack of research, there is potential for teachers to use CRP to engage students with the past in strategic ways that garner critical consciousness and buttress agency in the present and future.

CRP has been discussed and implemented for over 20 years. Even before Ladson-Billings published her influential 1995 article, other scholars (Banks, 1994; Gay, 1993) had written about the role of culture in teaching and learning. Yet CRP has yet to be implemented in school districts system wide. Howard and Dixon (2017) eschew claims that there are not enough empirical examples of the implementation of CRP by citing numerous studies to show evidence of CRP and student learning. However true this may be, there are few if any studies that link
CRP to student academic outcomes in terms of reading and writing. This study speaks to this perceived void by examining how teachers’ instructional practices impacted student academic achievement as it is informed by historical literacy skills.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy:**

In 2014, scholars Paris and Alim offered what they considered a “friendly critique” of culturally relevant pedagogy. Although appreciative of Ladson-Billings seminal work and CRP framework in positing the culture and context as integral to understanding students of color and educational experiences, they felt CRP as an asset pedagogy formulated in 1995 did not reflect contemporary schooling issues and populations. They conceptualized culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) as an extension and critique of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Paris and Alim (2017) affirmed the cultures and lived experiences of students of color should not be relevant to dominant culture but instead sustained in schooling. When students of color cultures are made relevant, it typically leads to a superficial add-on into curriculum practices rather than an embedded an ongoing practice. They argued when cultures are simply made relevant, dominant culture still reigns. Paris and Alim are seeking a culturally sustaining practice that seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation” (Paris & Alim 2017, p. 5). CSP pushes educators to “disrupt dominant narratives that superficially affirm differences and diversities while maintaining the status quo” (p. 28). Essentially Alim and Paris are calling for a dismantling of the dominant culture as dominant.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy has utility as a framework for extending CRP’s emphasis on students’ cultures to also be inclusive of their linguistic practices. This framework encourages one (or me) to consider to what extent do schooling and teacher practices honor the
cultural and linguistic diversity of students? Furthermore, since “CSP emphasizes and demands pluralist outcomes” (p. 12), how do subjects in this study produce new ways of doing historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy?

Although CSP is useful in considering pluralist outcomes of historical literacy, CRP will be used as the primary analytic framework for two main reasons. One, CRP is framework teachers in the study received professional development training. Also, CSP as a theoretical framework introduced in 2014 has had little empirical research in the field of social studies. Whereas there has been research done on CRP with regards to student engagement with content in social studies.

**Teachers Beliefs and Practices**

Despite knowledge that instructional contexts matters, the daily instructional decisions of teachers have the most significant effects on student achievement (Stronge, 2013). Some studies (Jussim & Harber, 2005) suggest a strong correlation between teachers’ perceptions of students and student performance. Working in an urban school context means working with students with diverse academic needs. Ladson-Billings and other scholars (Lipman, 1995, 2013; Gay 2010) urge such contexts require teachers who believe all students can learn despite the context of the learning environment. In a recent paper examining the effects of CRP on education twenty years after its theoretical conception, Howard and (2017) reaffirms the role that teacher belief and commitment has on impacting student achievement:

“Something that has been consistent in the literature is that CRP embodies a deep professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition and is centered on fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, literacy, students, their families, and their communities. Commitment to and belief in student excellence is one of the cornerstones
of CRP and the embodiment of being a CRP educator. Teacher beliefs therefore are integral in informing instructional practices that positively impact student learning (p.9).

Researchers attribute teacher decision making to a variety of factors such as individual conceptions of history (Wineburg & Wilson 1991), epistemic stances towards history (Braten, Stromoso & Rouet) and content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). However, the predominant factors mentioned in the research ignore the reality that teachers are too cultural beings who have been impacted by their own lived experiences which consequently influence their belief systems. CRP is about what ideas and instructional practices teachers are committed to engaging to make sure that students achieve in their classes. Examining teacher beliefs is important because CRP is not about what teachers do, but who they are (Ladson-Billings, 2008).

Research from critical historians (Salinas 2012; Salinas, Franquiz & Rodriguez 2016) suggested other factors influence teacher decision making. Salinas (2012) in her study of a Latino male teacher affirmed that teachers of color often took on a social justice orientation because of their own personal experiences with racism. Teachers of color have also been cited to have higher expectations for their students of color (Pace 2015). Such findings suggest that teachers’ lived experiences and their interpretation of those experiences affect their perception of students. Salinas suggested teachers’ understandings of educational ends, purposes, and values are entwined and inextricable from their ideological stances (Apple, 1992) and historical positionality (VanSledright, 2002). Teachers’ positionalities as cultural beings, affects their interpretations of history, as well as their beliefs about students and curricular/pedagogical decisions. This study will therefore posits teachers as cultural beings who have developed beliefs through their situated positionality. The study will examine how teachers lived experiences have impacted their perception and enactment of historical literacy and culturally
relevant instruction.

Chapter Summary

When situated within critical sociocultural theory, categories of disciplinary literacy need to be problematized in order to shift from (1) history being viewed as a strictly cognitive interpretive—or relativist--discipline rather than a cultural resource moving continually within and among participants as they define the future; (2) framing solutions to the literacy crisis independent of material forces to one that does not sidestep the social and economic conditions of literacy acquisition in urban contexts; (3) behavioral and cognitive analysis of thinking and writing to one that incorporates context as integral to literacy acquisition; (4) positivist views of literacy as objective skills that students aspire to, instead of understanding the ways in which students always bring funds of knowledge to historical thinking and writing.

Based on the review of the literature, empirical research of culturally relevant practices in urban contexts is needed, specifically research tied to student outcomes. Furthermore, research within extant schooling structures with schools committed to doing this work is also needed. This research study attempts to fill this void.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Proponents of disciplinary literacy instruction (Moje, 2008; Shanahan, 2012; Wineburg, 1991b, 2008; Reisman, 2012a, 2015) believe disciplinary literacy strengthens student readiness for college and careers in the future, although one can argue that emphasis on future benefits neglect the ways disciplinary literacy practices affect student engagement with the world today. In this age of information overload, students are constantly asked to comprehend multiple texts from digital and written sources, affording them opportunities to exercise rudimentary historical literacy practices such as sourcing and synthesizing texts. Much literature on disciplinary literacy identifies the best practices for teaching and assessing historical literacy, with very few addressing how forms of historical literacy are currently being practiced by students and teachers in urban contexts. Although educational research has proven that effective instruction builds upon the background knowledge and skills that students possess as a foundation for learning new content and mastering skills (Moje, 2008; Wineburg, 1991a), research on historical literacy has yet to examine ways that teachers may incorporate these strategies into CRP as a means of helping students in urban contexts think and write historically.

This study explored how three social studies teachers in a public under-resourced New York City high school with a diverse student population incorporated into their instruction historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy. My research examined how teachers’ beliefs influenced their perception and enactment of historical literacy instruction within a CRP framework and its effect on student outcomes. CRP, as a pedagogical framework, utilizes an asset-based approach to pedagogy, potentially excavating hidden disciplinary knowledge and practices of students. This in turn may inform teacher development of effective instruction and
enhance student academic performance, especially among students whose cultural knowledge or skills may be marginalized. By exploring historical literacy practices within a CRP framework, findings of this study will not only have implications for the history teachers in diverse urban schools, social studies teachers with diverse populations and other teachers who are interested on using student background experiences so that they learn history. It also will further futurist goals of preparing students for college and careers.

New York has adopted CCLS, which promotes disciplinary ways of thinking, speaking and writing about history. Teachers schooled before the advent of CCLS have varying levels of preparation for teaching historical literacy and competing beliefs about its utility today. At this juncture, history teachers in New York are not only expected to adopt disciplinary literacy instructional practices but are also required to prepare students for the New York Regents exams in U. S. and global history. The experiences of New York City teachers, challenged with managing these two different accountability structures for teaching and assessing historical knowledge and skills is a phenomenon not reflected in any current research in CRP and pedagogy related to historical literacy. As a result, this study revealed unique potential and challenges of history teachers in under-resourced urban settings.

To examine these issues, my research questions included:

1. How do teachers’ lived experiences impact how they conceptualize and implement instruction?

2. What, if any, tensions emerge when teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy with historical literacy?

3. What are the implications for history/social studies research, policy and practice?

4. [link](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/06/teachers-what-are-your-thoughts-on-the-common-core-standards/?_r=0)
Such questions are best explored through qualitative research because this type of inquiry seeks to “grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and describe what those meanings are” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 43). Understanding how teachers who enact CRP perceive and/or practice instruction to support historical literacy, their levels of preparation and the combined impact on students presents a unique opportunity to develop effective approaches on how to best help students engage with history. This research sought do what Sleeter (2014) identified as the goal of research which is to provide researchers and practitioners with practical and conceptual understandings that can be implemented in classrooms.

**Case Study Method**

Research on instructional best practices of historical literacy (Shanahan, 2008; Wineburg, 1994; Reisman & Fogo, 2014) abounds while the experiences of inner city teachers who use CRP as a framework for teaching social studies and students of color are limited. A case study method (Yin, 2014; Stake, 1995) was adopted to explore the experiences of inner-city teachers as they aimed to cultivate student skills of historical thinking and writing while also adhering to CRP’s commitment of using culture and critical literacy to engage and empower students of color. As Yin (2014) stated, “You would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p. 13). Methodological choices were guided by Yin’s (2014) case study framework, which defines a case study as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 3). Yin (2009) recommends case study as a preferred research method in situations when (1) the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over
behavioral events, and (3) the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon. This study meets all of Yin’s criteria for using case study as an investigative method.

**Setting and Participants**

This study sought to understand how history teachers of students of color in urban schools make sense of and prepare to teach historical literacy using CRP amidst structural challenges such as high poverty, limited resources, testing culture, Regents exams, and varying levels of students’ academic readiness. Collegiate High School was purposefully selected (Weiss, 1994) as the primary site because it is representative of a typical New York City school with a range of student abilities and teacher readiness for teaching and learning literacy. The school also has a strong commitment to teacher development as a means for raising student achievement and teachers have gone through a variety of professional development experiences related to promoting literacy, making them ideal candidates to reflect on its implementation in classrooms. The school also represented a best case for exploring the effects of CRP on the teaching of historical literacy because CRP is part of the schoolwide instructional focus. Finally, convenience sampling also played a role in the selection of Collegiate (Merriam, 1998). As the school’s Instructional Coach in social studies I had a close rapport with teachers and staff.

**Context of the school**

Located in Brooklyn, Collegiate High School is a small urban school within a larger school campus building. The majority of students live in the neighborhood of the school; 74% of students are Hispanic, 23% are Black and less than 1% are categorized as Asian and White students. There are 20 teachers in the school, of which 75% are white, 5 % are Hispanic, 5% are African American and 15% are labelled as “other ethnicity” (School Quality Snapshot, 2015)
A large number of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds attend the school. It is a Title I school, which means it gets additional funds to assist with instructional and related services for students. As a high poverty school with 95% of students qualifying for free lunch, Collegiate students enter high school with a wide array of academic needs and are educated by teachers who possess varying levels of pedagogical readiness to address their needs. Collegiate has a high population of English Language Learner students who make up 29% of the student population, as well as another 29% categorized as special needs students.

In terms of school culture, climate and safety, the school has a higher than city daily average attendance rate of 86%. In the 2015-2016 Learning Environment Survey, 82% of students reported that they felt safe at the school. Furthermore, 83% of students felt that their school offered a wide variety of programs, classes and activities to keep them interested in school.

Two years prior to this study Collegiate was designated as a “renewal school”, i.e., those on the brink of closing because of poor graduation rates and lackluster student performance. Collegiate needed to make yearly academic progress in order to stay open. Under such pressures, the leadership team and teachers continually sought innovative and productive ways to develop professionally and support student achievement. One way was to develop partnerships with local organizations that promoted CRP and opportunities for students to learn outside of school. The table below provides examples of the 2014-2015 school partnerships and its relationship to CRP:

**Table 1: School Partnerships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</th>
<th>Actions/Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>Center for Urban Pedagogy: urban problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College Now at Medgar Evers College: students earn college course credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Culture</td>
<td>Tribeca Film Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism</td>
<td>Generation Citizen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow: career readiness and college access
Georgetown University Model UN: participation in weekend conference

Such partnerships provided students with opportunities to develop academically while applying these academic skills in a real-world context.

As a response to rising academic expectations ensuing from statewide adoption of CCLS, the school has bolstered its commitment to enhance instructional effectiveness by providing teachers over the last two years with a variety of professional development services related to historical literacy aimed at raising student achievement. In addition, since 2014, the school administration required that CRP become a major focus of each teacher’s instructional program. To prepare teachers to implement CRP, the administration between 2013 and 2015 provided teachers with several CRP professional development opportunities. Given the school’s emphases and professional development efforts, it represents a suitable context for exploring how teachers balance teaching historical literacy in culturally responsive ways.

At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, Collegiate developed the following instructional goal for the 2015-2016 school year: “Collegiate is dedicated to providing culturally relevant autonomous learning opportunities for students to succeed” (Comprehensive Educational Plan, 2015). The process of devising this statement allowed school personnel to realize that many of the school’s partnerships and best instructional practices actually aligned with the tenets of CRP.

Even though the school had a lot of challenges germane to urban teaching such as a variety of student academic needs, a lower than average number of teachers with extensive teaching experience and a lower than city average performance on exams, the school did not feel like this when one walked through the hallways. The culture of the school was one that emphasized improvement, but not failure. Growth mindset quotes were posted throughout the
hallways. Pictures of students doing activities inside and outside of the school were posted on every bulletin board. The administration sought to celebrate students and create a nurturing environment for them.

I selected the school primarily because of the schools’ commitment to students and their ability to achieve results. Under the leadership of the new principal who started in September 2016, Collegiate High School went from a 50% to a 70% four year graduation rate. Although higher graduation rates are commendable, the citywide average for graduation is 77%; Collegiate, like many schools in its district, needed to improve its instruction. The school’s increase in graduation rates overall suggested that instructional leadership’s goal to incorporate CRP, in combination with professional development targeted towards literacy had a positive influence on student achievement.

Participants

Teachers: I examined three teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about historical literacy, their implementation of disciplinary literacy through a culturally relevant framework and its impact on bolstering student achievement. Collegiate had four social studies teachers in its department. After conducting preliminary observations of the four teachers I selected the three teachers based on the following criteria: (1) the teacher organized several lessons around historical literacy; 2) the teacher self-identified as using CRP methods and, 3) the teacher had received an overall effective evaluation by the principal. During the 2014-2015 school year, I worked closely as an instructional coach with two out of the three teachers who participated in the study. Each used historical literacy and CRP continually throughout the year.

In this section, I will briefly describe each participant. Below is a table of the participants with a brief description of their background.
Table 2: Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic Identification</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Vargas</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Ecuadorian American</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>U.S. History Advanced Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Lorrens</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Global History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Rosenberg</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Jewish American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Global History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Vargas is an Ecuadorian-American who was raised in the Long Island. He graduated from a college in upstate New York with a degree in liberal studies. Prior to becoming a teacher, Mr. Vargas worked as college admissions officer. He has been a teacher at Collegiate for all of his teaching career. Mr. Vargas believed in the mission of Collegiate High School to provide the necessary resources and skills students need to succeed in the world.

Ms. Lorrens is an African-American Global History teacher. Raised in Washington D.C., Ms. Lorrens came to New York City with dreams of pursuing her career as a dancer. She is the only female in the history department. Like Mr. Vargas, Ms. Lorrens has spent the majority of her teaching career at Collegiate High School. In addition to teaching Global History, Ms. Lorrens also runs a dance and acting class for interested students. She values the attempts at community that Collegiate is now fostering amongst students and staff.

Mr. Rosenberg is a Jewish American teacher who has entered his second year teaching at Collegiate High School. He was a special education teacher for three years prior to coming to
teach at Collegiate. He conveyed sincere admiration for the administration who he felt, “was supportive, and had a clear vision for the students” (Interview, January 2016). Mr. Rosenberg expressed his commitment to giving students all they needed to succeed.

Data Collection

Yin (2009) suggested quality case studies use multiple sources of evidence. From January to June 2016, I collected data from three sources. Data collection methods in this study included teacher and student interviews, classroom observations, and classroom documents (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2005; Stakes, 1995). I observed each teacher’s classroom between 15 and 20 times, using an observation protocol to identify instructional practices related to historical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy (See Appendix A). I also collected lesson plans, readings, class handouts and student work from each of the lessons. I used interview protocols to interview each teacher at the beginning, middle and end of the semester and collected data from informal teacher interviews of pre- and post- classroom observations. All interviews were transcribed. Below I describe each source of data collected more in depth.

Teacher Interviews. I conducted semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013) individually with each teacher. All interviews included open ended questions and were audiotaped and later transcribed. Teachers were interviewed formally at the beginning, middle and end of the school year. These interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes. The first interview invited participants to describe their journey to becoming teachers, their levels of preparation, implementation of instructional strategies and overall understanding of historical literacy within a cultural relevant framework. I also asked teachers to gauge student readiness of historical thinking and writing skills (Appendix A). End of the year interviews engaged the teachers in a series of questions about their instruction and how well students were developing historical
literacy skills (Appendix C).

Additionally, before I observed each classroom, I invited teachers to describe their anticipated classroom practice in a short informal interview (See Appendix D). I then conducted an after-class interview based on my notes to learn teachers’ views of the effectiveness of the lessons and to allow us to co-construct meaning of classroom events together (Merriam, 1998). Post observational interviews allowed teachers to verbally assess whether they met their learning objectives and discuss changes to the lesson that would enhance their teaching.

Observations. Each teacher was observed at least 3-4 times a month from January through June, 2016 to give me a clear sense of teacher practice. For each teacher, I chose one class to do the majority of my observations to gauge consistency of teacher practice and showcase evidence of student learning. I showed all teachers my observation protocols (Appendix E & F) and the observation notes for transparency. First I did observations of the cultural contexts of the classroom by focusing on actions and physical settings (Rios, 1996). I recorded classroom routines, student and teacher behaviors and non-verbal cues to identify the cultural context of the classroom. I took notice of how the classroom was organized to facilitate learning and the evidence of student work that was presented or posted in the classroom.

I also observed teachers primarily using an observation protocol that focused on their implementation of historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy (Appendix E). I used thick description (Geertz, 1973) to capture teachers’ instructional moves and students responses. I also took detailed notes on my computer. I documented teacher and student in-class responses. I took pictures of teacher and students’ writings on the board. I also did targeted observations of best practices. For example, I observed teachers for two to five days in a row around topics/lessons that they identified as representing their best practices related to historical literacy.
and/or culturally relevant pedagogy. In all of the settings, I took on the role of an interactive observer/researcher. I showed my notes to students in the class and asked them questions for clarification. I also participated in class discussion when prompted by the teacher and students.

**Course Materials.** During the semester, I collected all resources for instruction and assessments created by each teacher. These include text readings, PowerPoints, materials dispersed in class, videos etc., I also collected all of the teachers’ curriculum maps and lesson plans for the whole year to do a theme analysis of the historical reading and writing skills the teacher sough to emphasize. In addition, I collected lesson plans selected by each teacher that included evidence of historical literacy instruction.

**Student Work.** To gain a sense of what or how students learned, I collected teacher selected beginning-, middle- and end-of-year assessment data on three students in each classroom. Since Ladson- Billings (1995) stated that the CRP tenet of academic achievement should actually focus on student learning, meaning what the students learned as a result of teaching, I asked teachers themselves to identify what assignments best exemplified student representations of historical literacy. Two out of the three teachers picked essays that required students to demonstrate historical literacy skills (Appendix F), while one teacher decided to track student development of in-class annotations. Data also included teacher- and district-generated assessments that measure students’ historical reading and historical writing.

**Student Focus Groups.** I also facilitated focus groups with students to provide another type of evidence for this study. I distributed flyers asking for student volunteers to describe their experiences in each teachers class. We met afterschool for 90 minutes. Each focus group had at least 5 students. I asked students questions about their engagement with the content and their interpretation of the teachers’ instruction.
Data Analysis

I used concepts related to historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy as codes for interpreting the data qualitatively to create a case study about each teacher’s beliefs and practices (Yin, 2014). I organized data according to my research questions. I first did a single case analysis for each teacher using descriptive coding (Saldana, 2012) and then I did a cross-case analysis that focused on patterns emergent from the data and findings on all three teachers. Throughout the process, I also wrote analytic memos (Yin, 2014).

For each interview, I ascribed codes using descriptive coding, which emphasizes picking a single word to describe a phenomena (Saldanda, 2012). I also drew upon concepts from culturally relevant pedagogy and historical literacy to ascribe descriptive codes. For culturally responsive pedagogy, the codes included holding high expectations for academic achievement, connecting historical events/lessons to students’ ethnic cultures, providing counter-narrative texts and promoting critical discourses around historical and contemporary issues (Salinas, Blevins & Sullivan, 2012; Salinas, Franquiz & Rodriguez, 2016). Codes for historical literacy included annotating and interpreting historical sources, synthesizing evidence from two or more sources, recognition of historical perspective taking and making historical claims supported by evidence from texts (Reisman, 2015, Monte-Sano, 2011). Data from individual classroom observations, curriculum materials and assessments also were analyzed thematically. Again, coding and themes were derived from the literature on historical literacy and CRP. In addition, I conducted thematic analyses across each case to see if or how the teacher integrated CRP and instruction on historical literacy.

Since this study sought to examine the cultural contexts of CRP and historical literacy instruction, I also utilized aspects of Gee’s (2014) approach to discourse analysis to help me
better understand the context of the discourse. After coding the interviews and classroom data, I used Gee’s (2014) recommended guiding questions below to further analyze the data:

“What is the context of the speaking? How is the speaking creating/recreating the context? Is what the speaker is saying, and how he or she is saying it, just more or less replicating (repeating) contexts like this one or, in any respect, transforming or chanting them?” (p. 9)

The goal of such questions is to develop a situated viewpoint of meaning (Gee, 2001).

According to Gee (2014), “Speaking reflects context and context reflects (is shaped by) speaking (what was said)” (p. 55) This type of discourse analysis allowed emerging themes from the data that would have not otherwise been generated if I had just utilized a descriptive coding system based on the concepts of CRP and historical literacy.

**Table 3: Data Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Historical Literacy Codes</th>
<th>Cultural Relevant Codes</th>
<th>Situated Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Let me teach you how by showing you what others have done and that’s what I think is the basis of teaching history in public schools. Show them exactly what others have done and what can you learn from them. So, you know, some people may find Unions boring, you know, Union history boring. I’m like, I find it so invigorating</em></td>
<td>Bias</td>
<td>Socio-political consciousness</td>
<td>Context: Schooling/History Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Transforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>History education:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be more engaging;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Triangulation: To minimize systematic biases and data limitation, triangulation was used (Maxwell, 2005). Triangulation is a process of comparing/contrasting findings from all data sources. I triangulated data to develop findings (Patton, 2002). I compared and contrasted my analyses of the multiple sources. For example, to verify that a historical literacy practice was evident, I compared and contrasted pre-interview observation data, with lesson observations and lesson plans, to corroborate (or not) the findings across the interview and observational data. In addition to triangulation, I employed other validation strategies to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2007) such as:
1. Pro-longed engagement with the site. I worked at the school for the past two years at the start of my research so I was very familiar with the culture and instructional practices at the school. In addition, I observed each teacher at least 15 times, and therefore had collected a large amount of data on each teacher.

2. Member checking is the most crucial step in fostering credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the study. I shared findings and interpretations with teachers to afford them opportunities to confirm or offer interpretations of findings as they evolved. I included two analysis feedback sessions where the teachers provided input on the process, development of the research and comments on the findings as they developed.

3. Thick description: The study utilized a narrative framework with a thick description that paints a thorough picture of participants, processes and overall findings.

**Role as Researcher**

In order to help support the mission and goals of the school, the Collegiate High School leadership team hired me in 2014 as an instructional coach to work with teachers on their instruction and build their co-teaching capacity. As the school’s instructional coach, I had worked with eight social studies and English teachers. I visited their classrooms, provided them with targeted feedback on how to deliver skill-based instruction and craft CCLS curriculum, which supports historical literacy. Over the course of the year, I developed close professional relationships with the school’s leadership team, and many of the history teachers. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, I worked with school’s leadership team to develop the school’s annual instructional goal for the 2016-2017 year.
Since I had originally worked as a coach, I had to shift into being a researcher who was simply an observer and not there to change but rather to capture practice. This shift was initially difficult for me and for the two participants who had previously been my mentees. For example, while I collected data in their classrooms, teachers asked me for suggestions in altering an activity that they felt was not going well. I realized that those requests were not a violation of my role as researcher since it showed teachers’ willingness to be flexible in learning for the sake of their students. My willingness to help also confirmed Mattesen and Lincoln’s (2009) argument that the educational researcher often transmutes into a form of teacher by caring for the well-being of students.

The presence of the researcher inevitably changes the dynamics of research setting (Yin, 2014). I was mindful that teachers may feel more pressure to teach in ways that impress the observer. However, since I’ve worked with two of the participant teachers in previous years, we have developed a strong level of trust that allowed them to be themselves.

Since the researcher is an instrument in data collection (Merriam, 2009), I understand that my personal biases will affect results. One bias is the need to find evidence of historical literacy practices in the classroom, since this is the purpose of the research and I have a polite relationship with the teacher participants. I regularly reflected on my research beliefs before interpreting the data, being careful not to over-emphasize the effectiveness of the teachers. Furthermore, I looked for negative or de-confirming evidence to strengthen validity of the study (Yin, 2014). In addition, I used teacher checks of my analysis of their classroom instruction and samples of student work (their essays) for increasing the validity of study.
Limitations

*Generalizability:* Generalizability is not a focus of this case study because non-probability sampling was not used. Findings from the case study on three teachers are therefore not applicable to all history teachers in urban areas. However, critics of generalizability, Kincheloe and Tobin (2006) maintain that at the core, findings from one study can never be generalizable, because for that to occur, participants would have to be identical from one study to the next with all the same exact variables. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that is up to the reader, rather than the original investigator, to determine if the findings can be transferred or applied to another setting. One goal of this research study is the transferability of findings, inviting practitioners and researchers to make connections between findings and their experience to inform better teaching and learning.
Chapter 4

Mr. Vargas

Teacher Background: “Being the first is never easy.”

Although being the school assistant principal pulls him in many different directions, Mr. Vargas has been committed to teaching one class per year in order to “keep it real,” his way of staying grounded to teacher practice and maintaining close connections to the students. Teaching one class in addition to his administrative duties felt like an overwhelming task to Vargas. However, every year, Vargas taught AP United States History, a class he initiated at the underperforming school as a way of inculcating students into college-ready ways of thinking and being, with hopes of helping students develop the necessary skills and tools to “navigate the system,” a skill-set he suggested they wouldn’t otherwise gain in their regular classes. Vargas’ resolve that all students should take an AP class, (particularly his United States History class) despite the reality that many enrolled students lack the pre-requisite academic skills, speaks volumes to how Vargas’ life and professional experiences have informed his world of teaching and learning in history.

As the first-born of a first-generation Ecuadorian immigrant family, Vargas spoke of his early childhood experiences of having to figure things out himself; he lacked the ideal guidance of an adult-figure who could help him “navigate” the Western world of school. This unmet need for clarity concerning the purpose and role of school in his life influenced a propensity for “questioning the world” in order to make sense of it:

“I think for me I’ve always wanted to know the history of my culture, of my family. In high school, I started early on trying to figure out why we’re not learning a lot [about] anyone of color, at least for my country Ecuador, where my parents are from, but I was
born here. So it’s always intriguing to me, you know, trying to figure out, and “Okay. Why aren’t we studying, you know, people from other countries?” (Interview, January 2016).

Trying to figure out why the why’s of the world, specifically his intention of understanding why his “being,” i.e. cultural traditions and histories—were not represented in his schooling experiences drove Vargas at an early age to find answers himself. For Vargas, school although imperfect in its emphasis on perpetuation of Eurocentric ways of being and culture, represented a site of suppression and exploration; school negated his cultural identity as an Ecuadorian American and yet provided him with a catalyst and literacy skills to explore his own history. By the time Vargas reached college, he began to look into Latin American Studies early on and developed a penchant for Simon Bolivar, a Latin American revolutionary “who was mentioned in class, but never in depth.” Vargas took it upon himself to educate himself on what he considered to be the truth. This doing for oneself, or navigating the world for oneself, became a dominant trait he valued and celebrated within his class.

Vargas’ early experiences of schooling were heavily shaped by his struggle for racial/ethnic recognition and validation as an Ecuadorian American. He spoke of how teachers often made assumptions about his academic capabilities solely based on his physical characteristics and perceived ethnicity. “My primary and secondary school teachers looked at me and always assumed that I didn’t speak English even though I was born here.” He spoke of this experience from a point of pain but found pride in having transmuted it into a personal philosophy or way of being evident in classroom observations, as evidenced in the following comments to his students: “You can’t let people play you. They will doubt you, so you gotta know your shit.” Vargas’ early recognition that people’s race and ethnicity impacts how they are
treated became a strong working schema for how he understood and constructed learning experiences for his students. Vargas’ perception of classroom instruction was guided in part by notions of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995); he recognized the perceived stereotypes of his group and then used them accordingly in framing his identity and subsequent behaviors. He projected a future reality similar to his experiences onto his students of color. For him, there was no doubt that his students will encounter one or more experiences where someone from a dominant group will doubt their intellectual capabilities based on their ethnicities. Students therefore needed to develop a keen awareness of these stereotypes and develop an arsenal of thinking tools to deal with these threats. “Do you know what people will say about you if you don’t know your stuff?” he proclaimed during one class that I observed (Observation, February 2016). Vargas viewed his classroom as a place where students built their academic skill sets to prove those people wrong.

As the result of opportunity programs geared towards “inner-city” kids, Vargas entered a state college, a place for which he felt not academically prepared for college-ready rigorous work. He had to take remedial classes in reading and writing, but credited the experience as helping him become a better reader and writer. College also is where Vargas sharpened his revolutionary gaze on the world. He joined a Latino male fraternity founded upon the tenants/philosophies of Simon Bolivar and other Latin American poets. He became engrossed in resistance literature that made him “feel proud about who I am and how I look and where my ancestors are from.” College gave Vargas the cultural recognition that his secondary experiences had not, but not without consequence.

Vargas spoke highly of Professor Duval, a professor from another university who introduced him to Che Guevara. Duval eventually become Vargas’ faculty advisor. The two
worked together to organize a campus wide first-ever workshop on Che Guevara. Excited at the possibility to educate the masses and other college students on Che’s teachings, the organization-disseminated flyers all over the school. However, it was here that Vargas learned that not all forms of education or literacy practices are created equal. Since literacy is embedded within societal power structures (Gee, 2003, 2014), certain literacy practices are deemed dangerous to the stability of that power. “Once the school realized that the speaker we invited was a revolutionary, all of a sudden, the school started to misplace our paperwork. We had to change the location and time of the workshop multiple times.” In sharing this story, Vargas revealed that eventually the school gave the students a basement in which to hold the talk. “Let me tell you it was packed; and an amazing discussion.” Despite attempts to thwart the young group’s actions of advocating the teachings of Che, the overwhelming number of participants spoke to the workshop’s success, and Vargas learned that showing up is in itself a success. He looked favorably at students’ attendance in class, noting, “Showing up despite what’s going on at home is a big deal for a lot of these kids” (Interview, January, 2016).

Vargas’ engagement with content in college and interactions with adult mentors contributed to his valuing his college experience. However, these experiences of recognition of identity did not translate into higher academic outcomes. Vargas struggled academically and upon matriculation was unable to get into graduate schools of his choosing because of his performance on the GRE. He began his early career working for organizations that supported minority student emotional success in school. After many years of working for the non-profit organization, Vargas reached a pivotal point that solidified his desire to teach:

I was helping this kid prepare his college application and I ended up reading a recommendation from a teacher in a New York City school. It was just so lousy, like the
student didn’t need that recommendation. It was critical, it was half done, it was basically – this person should never have written a recommendation. It was putting the student down. And I thought that was just such a disservice. And I said, “What is going on in this school? What’s going on?” Reading a lot of those lousy recommendations drove me to say time I go back to the classroom and finish what I started” (Interview, January 2016).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), teachers dedicated to CRP often have had a transformative experience that strengthens their desire to work in marginalized communities. For Vargas, a teacher writing a lousy recommendation was equivalent to solidifying an unsuccessful academic trajectory for students who looked like Vargas. He felt his presence in school could perhaps circumvent future literacy acts of violence that didn’t give students a chance to navigate the system. Vargas worked his way from substitute teacher to a full-time teacher to becoming assistant principal. Now a man in his early 40s with 13 years of teaching experience, he believed teaching kids in “this community” is more important than ever.

**Vargas’ Conception of Schooling: Historical Literacy as Providing A Seat at the Table**

Vargas’ conception schooling was wrought with contradictions. On the one hand school/college/higher education enabled him to build/develop literacy practices in order to investigate issues of cultural neglect innate to dominant historical narratives and find evidence of significant contributions that Latinos had made to global and national history and culture, therefore enabling him to re-write his cultural identity as one that had merit and value. His college experiences as a fraternity member and his adult mentors provided “academic” ways for him to validate himself as worthy. On the other hand, his skill or use of investigation into narratives of history or contemporary society didn’t provide him with membership into all circles
such as highly competitive graduate institutions or prevent future attacks on his personhood based on his ethnic origins. Essentially, ability to question the world wasn’t enough to escape the realities of stereotypes imposed by the institution of schooling, which holds lower academic expectations around identities such as the Latino male (Noguera and Hurtado, 2012). For Vargas, the acquisition of literacy skills such as investigation or research were cultural artifacts of previous schooling experiences, tools required by the dominant sphere to legitimize academic capability. However, these tools for Vargas became an arsenal in opposition to a world in which people of color are consistently positioned as “less than,” and for which they can one day prove “people” wrong by acquiring the knowledge and literacy skill sets of the dominant sphere.

Vargas authored himself as an academic, teacher, and revolutionary ready to respond to these negative cultural associations imposed by the outside world. He framed his world of teaching historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy as preparing students to encounter a cold world wrought with instances of racism that students would combat with literacy tools. Vargas saw these literacy tools—investigation/research—as something that he and his students could use to situate themselves as active historical and contemporary agents, potentially capable of speaking back to stereotyping and other types of micro-agressions as necessary for students of color.

**Conception and Enactment of CRP: Opportunity not Achievement Gap**

Vargas’ understanding and enactment of culturally relevant pedagogy was informed by the educational “opportunities” he received during his schooling experiences. As a product of opportunity programs geared towards students of color with lower than average grades, Vargas’ AP class was comprised of similar types of students. The class consisted of 12 students of different grade levels: there were 3 tenth graders, 6 eleventh graders and 5 twelfth graders. All
twelfth graders satisfied their New York state Regents graduation requirement of passing the United States and Global history exams. However, the majority of remaining students had yet to fulfill the Regents requirements but were given the opportunity to take AP classes because they exhibited a willingness to learn. Vargas’ approach is in line with what Ladson-Billings (2006a) perceived as a needed reframing of the achievement gap, which focuses on students’ deficiencies, to an opportunity gap, which focuses on providing equitable structures and an ideal context for students to learn. Vargas deliberately created the class for a mixture of grade levels and academic proficiencies because, as he stated, “it doesn’t matter if my students achieve a 3 or 4 final score on the AP exam; the class is more about engaging students in a journey that allowed them to grow.” Vargas’ view, then, was in line with CRP educators who tend to have a broader view of student assessment than is measured on state exams, often viewing teaching as a journey rather than a destination (Gay, 2010). However, his altruistic concern for creating a meaningful and engaging educational journey for his students rather than focus solely on academic outcomes would be a consistent point of tension in Vargas’ class as he struggled to be culturally accommodating while helping students achieve academic results suggested by the research on historical literacy.

Vargas’ awareness of the trials and achievements incumbent on students as a result of their ethnicities influenced his views that students are capable of both achieving it all because of their ethnicity, and doomed because of it. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2006b) asserted that for teachers cultural awareness serves as both “the problem and the solution” in effectively teaching students. Culture is a problem in that many teachers work with implicit bias towards students of color; however the solution in helping students of color lies in a cultural awareness that comes from an asset-based mindset towards students of color. For Vargas, an essential part of enacting
culturally relevant pedagogy necessitated giving students class time to explore and possibly change the injustices that existed in their lives. Vargas insisted that because many of his students had experienced the effects of poverty, racism and overall institutional neglect in their short lives, they had developed a natural sense of cynicism that he would use as an asset in understanding the world and historical events:

Our students question everything. Successful teaching entails leveraging students’ ability to question into doing actual historical inquiry work. They have anger. Their father is not in their lives, their mother is not in their lives. They live in a shelter. You can use that anger to like, understand why these things happen and try to come up with solutions for them, give them some examples to give them hopes and have dreams (Interview, March 2016).

Interestingly, Vargas also saw this anger as an asset for teaching history, for it can be transmuted into “why” questions. “They need to understand why they are angry,” Vargas asserted. He believed that instead of just accepting the socio-economic injustices and ancillary familial problems, students could, by questioning reality, create a space between themselves and the problem, and therefore occupy a new space where they can take action or seek help. In this sense, Vargas’ beliefs and practices related to seeing students’ backgrounds as academic assets rather than deficits is what Ladson-Billings, Gay and others have conceptualized as an important tenet of CRP, although these educators have yet to theorize the role of anger as an asset for learning in urban communities.

Conceptions of Historical Literacy: Removal of Shame

Historical literacy is, being a historian. You have to be able to not only to have fundamentals but you need to be able to put yourself in that time period when you read,
you know, um. I think we are at a point in my class where kids are no longer saying, “That’s unfair,” you know, and I'm just like, “Yeah, but at that time, you know …people grew up with slavery. I mean, can we really judge them? Do you want to judge them? How do you feel about that?” They're just like, “They should be killed.” And I'm just like, “Okay, hold on. But it's a different time, you know. What if you grow up with a servant all your life, you know, and are you wrong? Are you, you know…” -- and that’s a big debate. The kids were just like, “Huh?” I'm like, “Think about it though. If you are white, you know, in the South and you grow up, you know, having a friend who's a slave and as your buddy for the rest of your life and then you grow up, you know, like, “Who's to blame here?” (Interview, February 2016).

Vargas’ statement aligned with conceptions of historical literacy that posit that students, like historians, understand historical actors from within the time period in which they lived (Reisman, 2012a, 2012b). Even though he valued students’ abilities to develop historical perspective and view history as a power struggle. Using slavery as an example, Vargas also suggested that it is important for students of color to develop an understanding of why Whites acted in morally inadequate ways. Recognizing that students might have justifiable anger for events that have historically marginalized/oppressed people of the period and themselves was not enough. As a teacher, Vargas believed that he could use historical literacy and specifically the concept of contextualization (Wineburg, 2008) to challenge students’ justifiable anger by responding to their comments about unfairness with questions that directed them back to the historical perspectives of the dominant group. For Vargas, the development of historical thinking and literacy skills went beyond the technical aspects of thinking like an historian and putting those skills to use. Instead, Vargas believed that historical literacy involved not so much judging
as contextualizing the actions of historical actors so students would become better people by building their understanding of others. He said he implored students to go beyond their positionalities as victims or blamers. Instead, he asked students to value historical contexts in executing moral judgments about perceived oppressors, and thereby decentered the neoliberal tendency of isolating personhood from social and historical contexts (Dumas, 2016). For Vargas, the role of the history teacher is not just merely retelling events that are historically accurate, but also retelling a story that allows students to live in a kinder, more forgiving world.

In addition to developing the skills of a historian, Vargas believed that having students know the traditional historical narrative can enable others to see his students as valued, despite and/or because of their race and ethnicity. Vargas revealed a painful experience that he encountered at a National Council for the Social Studies conference:

So kids always ask, “why do I need to know this history?” So I say, “two things: one, we need to know so it won’t happen again”; that’s always the cliché, right? But then the other one is, “you need to know because you don’t want to be in a conversation with someone and they’re talking about John Brown, and you’re like, ‘Who the hell is John Brown?’ Why? Why? Because I tell them my story. I was in DC, had a social studies convention, the national convention. And two of my colleagues were talking about John Brown and I have no freaking idea who John Brown was. And when he asked me what I thought about John Brown, I gave him the side step. I tried to make inferences on who he was based on the tidbits I heard. “Yes, he’s a little radical, crazy, you know?” I had no opinion. And it was so embarrassing and so like…I felt like shrinking” (Interview, January 2016)

Like a parent who doesn’t want to expose his or her child to pain, Vargas too didn’t want
students to experience rejection for not possessing access to what he considered privileged knowledge. For Vargas it was important to provide students access to privileged spaces and knowledge, as well as tools to combat interactions that Leila decenter students’ positionalities in privileged spaces. Interestingly, instead of ascribing his lack of knowledge of John Brown to early schooling experiences that had not exposed him to this knowledge, he unconsciously decontextualized himself and took full responsibility for not knowing about John Brown. In studying the effects of schooling of African American students, John Ogbu (1978) wrote that individuals who are relegated to marginalized social positions consistently experience a lack of privilege and power and therefore internalize this oppression. Vargas’ rendering of events confirmed this negative internalization as he did not consider how his historical knowledge base was framed by the Eurocentric academic curriculum, a curriculum that did not expose him in any depth to John Brown. Given that he blamed himself rather than the educational structures for his lack of knowledge, it is not surprising that he believed his students should assume responsibility in educating themselves about historical content and literacy skills they would need so that they and others would see them as “intelligent” or “academic.” Essentially Vargas expected students to develop what Du Bois (1989) described as “double consciousness”: students must see themselves as culturally empowered, yet also see themselves through the lens of the white gaze that seeks to disempower them.

**CRP and Historical Literacy Working Together**

Vargas’ conceptions and enactments of CRP and historical literacy were mediated by his lived experiences and ability to work through particular cultural, historical, political and social contexts. According to Vargas, not only did students need to learn traditional Eurocentric history; they also needed to learn history in culturally relevant ways in part because his schooling
experiences were colored with acts of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991), where his social value was denigrated because of his ethnicity and lack of knowledge of Eurocentric content in predominantly white spaces. As a result of these negative schooling experiences, Vargas believed that low-income students of color carried with them a sense of justifiable anger that could be used to assist them in developing historical inquiry and literacy skills. He also thought that becoming historically literate might protect students against painful experiences related to being underestimated, while at the same time they could become empathetic towards their oppressors. Yet inherent within Vargas’ conceptions of CRP and historical literacy were a set of contradictions. For example, Ladson-Billings (1995a) posited that the goal of culturally relevant teaching is not to have students simply achieve and acquire the norms of the dominant culture, but develop the consciousness and academic skill set to transform the culture. Vargas however wanted students to achieve by mastering the skills of the dominant culture, but he did not necessarily promote the transformation of the dominant culture. The next section will explore further particular themes and tensions that evolved in Vargas’ world of teaching.

**Changing the Official and Hidden Curriculum**

Vargas modified the official AP curriculum in distinctive ways that aimed to attend to his perception of what students needed for both their present and future lives. For the present, he recognized students needed concrete literacy skills to prepare for an official AP exam. He also imagined the skills cultivated in class would prepare students for an imagined future where their social identities would be negated as a result of their culture. The curriculum he created attempted to present and prepare students with academic skills for the present and the future.

Both CRP and proponents of historical literacy instruction agree that social studies educators must adapt the official curriculum for it to be engaging for students. The official New
York Social Studies Learning Standards (NYSED, 2014) included state mandated scope and sequence topics culminating in a high stakes assessment that students are required to pass for graduation. Whether one is a CRP educator or a teacher interested only in implementing the historical literacy instruction that New York Social Studies Learning Standards advocates, both approaches require teachers to make significant modifications to the existing curriculum, thereby rendering them instructional gatekeepers (Thorton, 1991). Ladson-Billings (2008) however complicated this task of curriculum modification by affirming CRP teachers are not just modifying curricula, but instead required to “reconstruct, construct and deconstruct” curriculum that has systematically served to disengage students. She wrote:

“I agree that teachers engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy must be able to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct (Shujaa, 1994) the curriculum. Deconstruction refers to the ability to take apart the “official knowledge” (Apple, 2000) to expose its weaknesses, myths, distortions and omissions. Construction refers to the ability to build curriculum. Similar to the work that John Dewey (1997) advocated, construction relies on the experiences and knowledge that teachers and their students bring to the classroom. Reconstruction requires the work of rebuilding the curriculum that was previously taken apart and examined” (p. 32).

The statement above highlights a distinct process educators can use to reconfigure the official curriculum, but ignores the fact that CRP educators must also consciously apply this process to the hidden curriculum that articulates social locations and social meanings for students or that traditionally situates negatively the social locations of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2008). For example, Vargas’ task is not only to reconfigure historical topics and texts to reflect the cultural understandings/ experiences of his students; it is also to reposition their identities as
empowered cultural beings, despite schooling experiences that seek to subjugate their cultural identities and thus ontological existence. The need to reconfigure the traditional history curriculum, as well as repositioning students’ ethnic identities is essentially double the work. Vargas’ attempt to tackle both the official and hidden curriculum to educate and empower students involved a deliberate engagement with building student academic readiness and positive sense of identity in order to help students confront a difficult world.

**Access to Privileged Counter-Narratives**

Vargas’ choice of texts aligned with his personal philosophy towards history and a principled engagement with CRP tenets. He took a CRP or critical literacy stance (Collin & Reich, 2015) in teaching by purposely selecting to use Howard Zinn and Arnove book *Voices* (2004) as the primary text in the classroom, instead of the official AP textbook. Students were assigned homework from the official AP textbook, which he rarely checked for completion. For him, the AP textbook represented the official knowledge expounded in schools and served as a silencing tool for his and his students’ cultural positions. *Voices* is a compilation text that presents primary source documents from the perspective of the marginalized. Each chapter of Zinn’s textbook begins with a critique of the dominant narrative regarding an historical event and incorporates primary sources that promote a revisionist perspective. Paxton (2002) found that historical texts with “visible authors” (primary documents or historians’ monographs in which an authorial voice was clearly present) increased the chances that students would interact with the texts as they read.

Vargas’ critical stance towards dominant history aligned with his philosophy and with research that found that teachers’ knowledge and familiarity of texts, as well as their personal taste, heavily influenced the texts they chose (Applebee, 1993; Jipson & Paley, 1991). Vargas’
personal choice affirmed his disengagement with history told from a dominant perspective and overall penchant to identify with causes that sought to dismantle hegemonic perspectives that silence the voices of marginalized groups. Bain (2005) has written that teachers who find an affinity with Zinn tend to be politically savvy and more experienced. In selecting counter-narrative texts, Vargas engaged in CRP that encourages teachers to be curriculum gatekeepers who make deliberate curricula choices based on a social justice framework.

In addition to wanting students to learn Zinn’s counter narrative of national history, Vargas believed this narrative would help them understand their contemporary contexts:

Nothing is by accident. There are things – there are situations put out there, laws created, all purposeful. And in this country, it is purposeful to keep people poor, it is to keep less people rich. And I teach that to my students because they see it everyday. So it’s not that I could lie to them and say, “Oh, no, this is great ideals -- we have great ideals in our Constitution, we have great protection.” No. This is the reality and you need to understand the system in order to navigate it. And if you want to be part of it, great, that’s on you. You want to try to change it, that’s on you too (Interview, January 2016).

Vargas’ desire to provide students with access to counter narratives made reading in this classroom more than a technical or cognitive event, transforming it to what Freire refers to reading as a political act in which students are not just reading texts but also reading the world and in that process re-writing texts and the world (Freire, 1985). Access to Zinn’s Voices meant students might see the world differently and consequently have the opportunity to rewrite themselves positively into a world and engage in changing that world if they desired. His decision to use Zinn’s text reflected a principled engagement with the CRP stance that official knowledge in schools does not serve nor enhance the cultural competence of students.
Ideology of Resistance

Vargas selected historical texts around topics where students could make connections to in their own past and present lives. In this way, the concept of “contextualization” for Vargas took on a different meaning than the one espoused by historical literacy. He strategically used texts so students could contextualize their own lives, not just the lives of historical actors.

The texts Vargas chose covertly positioned students into seeing the world and historical narratives as a field of struggle, consequently ordering their sense-making of texts and future texts within this ideological perspective. Although Vargas insisted that his role was to teach students how to think, not what to think, throughout the interview data, he continuously mentioned he wanted students to know and think about the purposeful nature of the system:

“Everything in the system is purposeful. Nothing is by accident. There are things – there are situations put out there, laws created, all purposeful. And in this country, it is purposeful to keep people poor, it is to keep less people rich and I teach that to my students because they see it every day” (Interview, March 2016).

According to Vargas, if students understand that the system has a purpose, then they won’t internalize the negative identities cultivated by the system. It is not that you are a poor person, Vargas would say, but it is the system that created this poverty. Vargas’ insistence that students need to understand the system also suggests that he actually sought to have students master the skill of contextualization. Contextualization as a historical literacy skill usually refers to the ability to contextualize historical figures by understanding the historical circumstances that guided their actions (Wineburg, 2008; Wineburg & Reisman, 2015). In addition to expecting students to contextualize historical figures, Vargas required students also to contextualize their own realities. “It’s the system,” he often said in response to students’ comments about
unfairness or inequality.

Understanding the injustices of the system would give students the context to reconstruct a counter identity, one that went beyond the stereotypes of “urban” or “inner city” kids. In his classroom, Vargas often asked students to make connections with the historical struggles in the texts so they would be empowered to struggle and achieve beyond what their circumstances often allowed. He also posed questions about contemporary injustices to help students see themselves as historical actors and/or products of historical events. For example, Vargas would ask students why they live in the poor parts of Bushwick or why certain services weren’t available to them in their schools. Students would speculate on causes to describe their circumstances and Vargas would encourage them to research. Researchers have noted that contextualization is a particularly hard concept for secondary students (Reisman, 2012b; Reisman & Wineburg, 2008). However, Vargas’ approach to contextualization demonstrated that it is achievable when skills and instruction are couched in the context of students’ lives/ experiences. He used culturally relevant texts and topics to help with this process. Ultimately he wanted students to use the texts to critically analyze and have an awareness of their own lived reality.

Vargas broadened interpretation of texts and the skill of contextualization affirms Billings’ affirmation that CRP teachers have a “broader view of assessments.” By helping students to contextualize their own lives and their oppression, Mr. Vargas was cultivating students’ socio-political consciousness while simultaneously violating the historian’s principle to eschew presentism. One level Mr. Vargas did use racism as a motivating factor to interpretation the actions of historical actors. However, racism as a central institutional fabric of U.S. history has often been ignored in the production of U.S. history. Furthermore, Mr. Vargas’ resolve that
students needed to engage in discussion and analysis of contemporary issues addresses the civic empowerment gap which suggests students of color from marginalized communities or urban areas are less likely to engage in discussion about contemporary civic issues (Rubin, 2011; Pace, 2015). A rigid adherence of what constitutes contextualization may inadvertently contribute to this civic empowerment gap and affirm findings from Anyon’s (1980) study, which suggested that students from a lower socio-economic level are asked to discuss contemporary issues less than those students from affluent areas.

**Positive Identity as Historical Thinkers**

Vargas used culturally relevant texts to achieve his multiple goals of building students’ confidence as historical thinkers and cultural beings. He not only was concerned with increasing the volume of reading in his classroom but also that students would engage in texts in ways that bolstered their identity in positive ways. Vargas goal to build student identity aligned with Moje, Dillon, and O’Brien (2000) findings that personal identity influences a student’s reading experiences in the classroom. He therefore drew upon the CRP strategies of cooperative learning and setting high expectations to help students achieve mastery of particular historical literacy skills and to enhance students’ sense of self as academic learners. However, achievement of these goals took a significant amount of in-class time, compromising the pacing calendar of historical topics taught and this led to an uneven development of student mastery of historical thinking skills evidenced through analysis of student end of the year work products.

It was Vargas’ intention to use culturally relevant texts to bolster student engagement with historical content; at the same time, his insistence that students read “a lot” would increase their identification as scholarly readers. Vargas’ students read an average of about three primary- and secondary-source pages per day. In order to promote student engagement and
ability to read difficult texts, Vargas provided students with a text annotation protocol for reading texts; students were never given just a text to read independently and apply literacy strategies. He also designated class time to have students share their notes in class while he commented on their abilities to annotate the text. Text annotation was his primary way he helped bolster the frequency and depth of students’ reading.

Vargas had students engage with texts in ways that reinforced his desire to develop students’ positive identities as readers. Vargas’ insistence that students use protocols reflected his deep desire of alleviating student anxiety in interacting with complex texts. The complexity of the text and how students engaged with these texts were of equal importance to Vargas. Because he believed that students were fearful of complex texts because many had received low grades in prior history classes, he believed part of historical literacy instruction was doing repair work for damaged student identities as poor readers (Gee, 2003). Student comments during focus groups revealed that as a result of Vargas’ instruction, students did feel more confident as readers. One student commented, “Before I came into this class, I would see all these words and not want to do it. Now I don’t mind it as much. I can do it and I like it.” The vignette below illustrates how Vargas used protocols and collaboration to help shift student self-identities as readers:

Vargas: What protocol should we use today?

Elizabeth: Let’s do the silent discussion.

Vargas surveys the room to look for consensus. After no objection, he continues:

What are some things that we can write in our annotations?

Joel: Connections, questions, and agreements.

Vargas: Ok, let’s get started. Take five minutes to read and annotate and then we will go
into the first round.

Eleven out of 12 students instantly began reading and annotating without hesitation what was indeed a complex primary source excerpt, contrary to claims that students don’t read in most history classrooms (Nokes, 2013). Providing students with choices for how they wanted to engage with the text was one consistent instructional method Vargas used throughout the semester for in-class and homework annotation assignments. Vargas also encouraged students to collaborate on their annotations. According to Monte-Sano (2011) annotation is an effective method to help students develop close reading or historical thinking skills. However, Vargas’ method deviated from the literature on historical literacy in his emphasis on community or collaborative annotation. Researchers of historical literacy have overlooked the necessity of student engagement as a precursor to student mastery; they deal mostly with outlining the skills needed to master historical thinking/literacy (Reisman, 2014; Wineburg, Martin & Monte-Sano, 2011; Monte-Sano 2011). Vargas, on the other hand, emphasized student collaboration to achieve different aspects of historical literacy, thereby providing an additional instructional means to assist students in achieving historical literacy. Mr. Vargas built student engagement and confidence in reading texts, by allowing students to share their thoughts with their peers and co-construct historical interpretation collaboratively. Vargas’ insistence that students feel confident aligns with the CRP notion that students need to feel success; he believed allowing students to work together cultivated more confidence for students individually and collectively as groups. As Vargas noted, “Success begets more success (Interview, April 2016).” Ladson Billings (1994) in Dream Keepers identifies cooperative learning as one of the key teacher methods used by educators to improve academic achievement.

In addition to cooperative learning strategies, Vargas consistently conveyed high
expectations to his students, even if this meant incorporating elements of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In one example during class, students began reading. After two minutes, Vargas interjected: “You know some teachers believe that you can’t do this reading.” No one verbally responded to Vargas’ use of stereotype threat as a motivating tool, suggesting students were used to this particular method of encouragement. Vargas used stereotype threat to establish among his students a sense of belonging as members of an ethnic group who experience the effects of negative stereotypes of the urban student who can’t or doesn’t like to read. Vargas’ use of stereotype threat challenged the conventional view that it further perpetuates negative student identity (Aronson 1990).

Throughout the semester, Vargas conveniently used students’ reading time to publicly reinforce the ideal academic behaviors he wanted students to internalize. Often Vargas would make comments such as “Great connection Amanda.” Or, “You have to know your evidence” to emphasize the type of reading behaviors he wanted to instill within students. Vargas comments reinforced Lave & Wenger (1991) notion that it is not the act of reading or writing that is objectively right but the culturally appropriate ways of thinking that is most important in the development of literacy. For Vargas, the acts of making connections, or quickly citing evidence to develop a verbal argument were the culturally appropriate historical literacy skills he valued in his classroom.

Students were continuing their reading and annotations of Zinn’s article on Mother Jones. Vargas asked: “Ok are we ready to begin?” Most students said no, they needed more time to respond to their partner’s comments. He gave students another five minutes. “Write your name on the top of your paper. You have Mother Jones, Sinclair and Emma. Tie it all together.” On the top of your paper, put a check if you had a good conversation. Check plus if it was great.”
Vargas often had students engage in the best practice of meta-cognitive reflection (Newmann, 1990) of the content and the process of learning. Below is a sample response from a pair of students. They wrote a check plus at the top of their paper.

Janelle: What is the dictionary definition of patriotism? In her term and definition she sees patriotism as a form of a lie, an excuse to boost the egos of the citizens so that the elite could benefit and that the U.S. could make the appearance that they were superior. Dominique: I completely agree with her definition, patriotism is an excuse to harm other countries or nations, just to make them believe that they are better. For example, big countries try to imperialize smaller countries, which is like a little game, whoever has more is the best. This is just a way to compete with other nations. However, do you believe that patriotism can benefit a country? (Classroom Observation Notes, March, 2016)

This particular writing sample showed how Vargas successfully used texts to acculturate students into reading historically (and “critically”) in an engaging and collaborative way while allowing them to practice historical thinking skills of close reading. By allowing students to work together in a written and verbal sharing structure, student responses overall showed both a clear understanding of the concept of patriotism and a critique of its implementation. He was able to effectively teach the historical literacy skill of close reading and questioning through a collaborative approach to reading texts.

Janelle paraphrased Emma’s concept of patriotism but sought to corroborate the definition with what she believed is an official source, the dictionary. Dominique didn’t attend to Tina’s query about the dictionary’s definition, and instead found points of Emma’s concept of patriotism to make a connection to imperialism, a theme Vargas had students identify at the
beginning of class. Although from the perspective of the primary source author, patriotism is negative, Dominque didn’t fully accept the author’s claim and wants to find alternative information in which patriotism was good for a country. Both students wrote questions as part of their responses suggesting students had internalized questioning as a strategy of comprehending historical texts.

Vargas used cooperative learning as an engagement strategy to build students confidence in close reading complex texts. He engaged students in daily reading, writing and discussion activities that were based on collective rather than individual interpretations of historical events. His use of cooperative learning aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy and the sociocultural aspect of historical literacy.

**General Literacy as a Foundation**

Towards the end of the first semester and beginning of second semester, Vargas carved out ample time to teach students general literacy strategies to aid in comprehension, strategies such as chunking huge texts into smaller sections, paraphrasing key words and phrases and making a text connection. He provided feedback on students’ annotations and there was growth in the volume of student writing responses to text and in students’ ability to show evidence of historical thinking skills such as asking questions, taking perspective and citing evidence to support claims. Vargas’ focus on general literacy skills attended to the CRP stance that teachers should adequately scaffold learning for students based on their zone of proximal development, but this contradicted the historical literacy stance that general reading comprehension would be improved by teacher focus on historical thinking skills.

The figure below is one student’s annotations of various texts throughout the second semester suggesting that students did grow in their capacity as close readers. In the beginning of
the semester, Vargas presented students with scaffolds for close reading and annotations and gradually released them to read independently to work on annotations. See Leila’s example below:

**Table 4: Leila’s Annotations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Scaffold</th>
<th>Excerpt from Leila</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Bacon’s Rebellion (Week 2 of Second Semester) | Chunking and Sentence Starters: The main idea here is… | Bacon’s Rebellion  
People want to make money  
After attack, England sent troops to attack  
Nathaniel Bacon—tall, slender, black hair  
Servants and slaves rebel  
Leaders and associates hanged  
England didn’t allow |
| American Revolution (Week 4)        | Chunking and Sentence Starters: One thing we should notice is…. What’s important here is… | Local leadership saw the possibility of directing rebellious energy against England.  
British turned to the colony to pay for war.  
Upper class used the lower class energy to their advantage. They used their grievances to their advantage as well.  
The Stamp Act led to people vandalizing the homes of the rich. |
| Andrew Jackson and Trail            | None                            | Our government continually makes |
promises it can’t keep. Cherokees were promised land, but this promise was not kept.

What impact will the Cherokee newspaper have on the people?

How effective was this assimilation?

Indian Removal was because of the greed of business men.

Cherokee’s face a tough predicament.

Profit= money; Loss=lives

Small group of individuals know the real intention of war.

This is the authors proof, (she underlines, “At least 21,000 new millionaires and billionaires were made in the United States during the World War). This is the evidence for his whole argument.

How many millionaires now really understand what it means to be a solider?

In week one, Leila wrote in phrases where she was simply paraphrasing excerpts from the text.

After Vargas introduced the two general literacy strategies of chunking and sentence starters,

Leila synthesized key ideas from the text and explained causal relationships between events. By
week 8, Leila was writing her own opinions about Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears, with strong claims such as, “Our government continually makes promises it can’t keep.” She also seemed more engaged with the text as evidenced by her questions. She interpreted Zinn’s description of “Southern Indians and the whites had settled down, often very close to one another, and were living in peace in a natural environment” as an act of assimilation and questioned the “closeness” between the whites and Southern Indians. In the next paragraph of Zinn’s text, he confirmed her suspicion when he wrote that the Indian Removal act was a consequence of “….the greed of businessmen” (Zinn & Arnove, p.75). Leila reaffirmed Zinn’s point in her notes, demonstrating her judgment about important human matters. By week 12, Leila not only synthesized key evidence from the text; she also showed evidence of analyzing the structure of the author’s argument, noting specifically the evidence used to support “his” claim. Although Leila had been exposed to primary source texts since the beginning of the year, week 12 was the first time she made a reference to the author. Leila’s noting of the authorship evident in this text suggested an epistemic shift, where she takes on one of the faculties of a historian who view texts as extensions of individuals instead of texts as a collection of individual facts (Wineburg 1991a).

Leila’s annotation growth is indicative of the type of historical thinking growth that accrued for most students over the course of the semester. Students read texts with a critical eye towards the government or business, thereby enacting Vargas’ hidden or “critical” curriculum, while they also developed inquiry skills and general literacy skills of paraphrasing, summarizing and contextualization. However, I began my research at the beginning of the second semester and students didn’t begin to show some semblance of independent historical thinking through annotation until the tenth week of the second semester. According to Vargas, he spent the first
semester teaching students general literacy strategies and gradually increased their reading load to get them to the growth they had exhibited in the second semester.

Furthermore, the choice to attend to the hidden curriculum more directly through engagement with Zinn’s *Voices* and eschewing the textbook helped strengthened students’ critical stance towards dominant narratives. However, Vargas succumbed to what VanSledright has described as a perennial dilemma: "For well over a century, social studies teachers have faced a dilemma of two competing values—seeking to inculcate a deep attachment to the nation's heritage and teaching children how to think historically" (VanSledright, 2002, p. vii) In this case, students were inculcated into the heritage of the subaltern through counter-narratives texts but not necessarily taught how to interpret historical events from the multiple perspectives of contemporary historians. In reading Zinn, rarely did students question the author’s purpose, for example, or how the author’s positionality or ideology influenced his narrative. VanSledright (2004) and others have noted that novice readers assume texts’ meanings are unmediated by the author. Vargas’ choice of presenting Zinn’s historical texts uncritically undermined the historical literacy skill of examining the author’s biases/perspectives or comparing sources. Essentially, by only reading texts written from the perspectives of marginalized groups, Vargas did not educate students in resolving differences in authors’ or texts’ perspectives.

**Historical Literacy versus Historical Inquiry: The Problem of Historical Production**

Vargas used instruction to help strengthen what he believed was students’ tendencies to question the world as a result of their experiences as members of an oppressed group. He did this by trying to cultivate student use of historical inquiry, which for Vargas meant allowing students to first develop their own questions before analyzing sources. Historical inquiry is a process that involves helping students examining problems by developing guiding questions
(Wilhelm, 2008). Although historical inquiry is identified as a best practice within historical literacy research (Bain, 2012; Monte-Sano, 2008; VanSledright, 2004; Wineburg, 2001), there is not a clear outline or set of strategies for teachers on how to implement this process within the confines of a state-mandated curriculum. Vargas therefore had to deal with the novelty of having students develop their own questions versus traditional historical teaching approaches of having students answer teacher or state mandated questions. Instead of merely responding to predetermined questions before analyzing texts, Vargas pushed students to develop their own guiding questions. Vargas struggled to give clear instructions on the types of questions students might pose as a starting point for historical investigation.

Scholars agree that providing students with more opportunities to engage in the work of historical inquiry, which is the ability to create an authentic question that allows one to critically analyze evidence to present a historical argument, is an important skills. Bain (2005) suggested that one approach to incorporating historical inquiry is to allow educators to restructure familiar curricular objectives into historiographic problems that engage students in using historical inquiry to foster historical thinking skills. Once broad historical questions are asked of students, then they can use inquiry skills to answer these questions. According to Bain, formulating historical events as historical problems is a critical first step in effective history inquiry teaching. Although ideal, historical inquiry it is replete with challenges within an urban context, especially when teachers like Vargas try the novel approach of helping students generate their own questions.

First, the cognitive task of teaching students to ask questions and engage in disciplinary concepts and research methods involves critical thinking which necessitates that teachers are able to scaffold high-order thinking skills and strategies according to the diverse academic needs of
their students. As Pace (2015) noted, high-level academic work requires greater capability on the part of both teachers and students. Second, the nature of inquiry means that new authentic questions emerge from original inquiry questions and inevitably new content pivots will arise; teachers must possess the historical knowledge to address these pivots and the pedagogical skills to adequately help students.

Despite these challenges, at the core of Vargas’ instruction was this desire to provide students with the opportunity to both tap into their strength to question the world and formulate their own questions, not as historical problems in the way that Bain suggests in order to increase student engagement, but rather as a way to challenge dominant historical narratives and problematize not just the historical past but also their own lives. From his own perspective, in order to assist students in asking significant historical questions, Vargas first needed to help students see their lives and the dominant historical narrative as problematic. Students’ lives and experiences, in addition to written texts, became sources for developing historical inquiry and questions. Vargas cultivated student inquiry in two distinctive ways: by constantly questioning students’ opinions of their lived realities and by asking them to develop their own historical or contemporary questions before evaluating evidence.

By the time I began observing Vargas’ classroom in January 2016, he had finished only a quarter of the curriculum. He mentioned that he needed more time to finish “covering” the curriculum. He lagged behind the official New York history curriculum pacing because he had reconstructed the official curriculum to include Zinn’s and others’ counter-narratives as the primary focal texts. He did this to problematize the current contexts in which his students existed, as well as focus on student generated historical and contemporary inquiry.

Vargas use of student generated historical question posing also took ample time to
cultivate within students. In every single class period, Mr. Vargas asked students to develop questions to frame their interactions with historical texts/ content. Mr. Vargas therefore was torn: on the one hand, he wanted to create learning opportunities where students generated their own historical questions and pursued the answers through research and collaboration with other students. On the other hand, he also wanted to provide students with historical questions and the requisite evidence to answer them. His concerns were both curricular and instructional. The following vignette, taken from my March 2016 field notes, illustrates the particular successes and tensions that existed between allowing students to guide their own inquiry versus the commonplace practice of giving students questions to consider.

There are 12 students present today in Vargas’ fourth period class. Students are seated in the usual rectangular formation with Vargas seated in the middle of the classroom. As soon as the bell rang, Vargas began: “Ok, let’s get started, what should our aim be for today’s lesson based on last night’s reading?” Students were asked to read and annotate Chapter 13 from Zinn’s *Voices*. Seven out of 12 hands shoot up in the air. It seems by this time in the semester, students are used to creating questions. Vargas called on students one by one and they answered:

Tina: How is corruption affecting the United States?

Louis: Why is there still corruption in the United States?

Bryan: How did corruption start in the United States?

Although students’ questions reflected the theme of corruption evident in the text, Vargas didn’t seem satisfied with student responses. “That’s still broad. Why am I saying that is too broad? It’s a good a good discussion question, but too broad. What have we been talking about? What have we been reading?” He called on Finesse, one of the students who didn’t raise his hand. “Ah man,” says Finesse. Vargas next cold called on Jeffrey, another male student who didn’t
raise his hand. At this point it seems unclear to students the question Vargas wanted the class to generate. Sensing confusion, he asked another question:

Vargas: Jeffrey, what should be our aim? We had homework. We had to read Upton Sinclair and Mother Jones. Who is Mother Jones?

Jeffrey: She was an anarchist. News reporter. African-American

Vargas: I’ve heard anarchist 3 times. What’s an anarchist?

Kathy: Someone who doesn’t believe in government.

Vargas: Can you have no government?

Reynaldo: Yes and no.

Vargas: Really? I want to hear more. What’s our thesis if we are looking at anarchy, government, imperialism, activism and corruption? Now paint me a picture by forming a question.

Students’ confusion with regards to Vargas’ instructional aims represented a problem with his historical inquiry methods in that the steps to crafting a good question are not particularly clear. Researchers agree that this level of historical inquiry is useful but can entail the arduous task of crafting historical problems, which Bain (2005) described as “transportable across scales of instructional time—activities, lessons, units, and courses—while capturing the factual, conceptual, and cognitive processes central to generating historical understanding” (p. 184).

Nevertheless, without a clear approach to having students develop what he considered to be a legitimate or useful historical question, Vargas asked students to revisit the text and use their close reading skills to elicit more themes in order to develop an essential question and eventually, a thesis statement. He wanted students to think about the underlying historical themes that connected the historical figures of Mother Jones, Upton Sinclair and Emma
Goldman. Although students originally identified corruption as a theme, he pushed students to identify other unifying themes in order to develop a stronger question.

Twenty minutes had elapsed at this point when Tina raised her hand and said, “How have the beliefs of anarchists influenced a change in government? Or, have anarchists influenced a change in government?” Vargas nodded his head with approval and other students nodded their heads in agreement that Tina hit the nail on the head. Vargas’ rationale for accepting Tina’s answer is unclear. It is a more specific question, but it doesn’t lend itself to a clear process that helps students determine the characteristics of a good question. What is evident is Vargas’ resolve in getting students to ask more questions took a lot of class time and relentless scaffolding of reviewing the text. Vargas continuously scaffolded close reading activities to get students to develop a stronger more contextualized question that reflected specific themes from the documents. However, such scaffolding to promote developing essential questions was usually an improvised pedagogical move in response to student confusion or inability to produce the work he expected from his instructed tasks. These deviations compromised Vargas pacing curriculum and contributed to the inability to cover or complete the curriculum before the official AP exam.

Vargas continues:

Vargas: Do we have a thesis?
Kathy: If we answer the question we do.

Vargas: Great. (Writes on the board): How have the beliefs of anarchists influenced a change in government? We will answer this question by the end of class.

A feeling of ease dominated the classroom after a clear question had been selected. Tina’s and other students’ questions reflected how Vargas had really cultivated this questioning skill to help
Vargas’ use of historical inquiry presented a novel approach to facilitating students to self-directed and collaborative historical inquiry, beginning with developing a historical question to guide subsequent inquiry. Whereas scholars such as Paz (2014) have suggested teachers present investigative questions to help students view history as inquiry oriented, Vargas instead had students create investigative questions themselves and thereby utilized the CRP method of helping students to question the events and the world.

Throughout the semester, Vargas asked various students, after a class discussion on a topic, to provide essay questions related to the discussion, which he would formalize into a writing prompt with directions. Below is an example of the student generated questions and writing prompts used throughout the semester:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Questions Developed by Students</th>
<th>Directions Developed by Vargas and Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What has been done in the name of progress?</td>
<td>What do you believe about progress? Use evidence from what we’ve learned so far to write a response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was life like for Native Americans during the Trail of Tears?</td>
<td>Imagine yourself as a Native American during the Trail of Tears. Write a firsthand account that includes historical evidence to transport us back into time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is Jefferson similar to Obama? Jefferson is similar to Obama because…. Jefferson is similar to Obama but… Jefferson is similar to Obama so…</td>
<td>Complete the sentence frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is violence justified in the mist of unjust laws?</td>
<td>Write a personal response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are riots considered an act of terrorism?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has mass hysteria affected people in history?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much violence can a country tolerate for change?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why was lynching allowed in the U.S?</td>
<td>Write a long essay in response to the question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if slavery was never abolished in the United States?</td>
<td>Write an essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is America an empire?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the above questions posed by students were questions that prompted historical inquiry because they “represented key ideas in the field” (NCCS C3 Framework, p. 24). They also promoted critical historical inquiry in that they often evolved from student experience, creating a dialogue between students and teacher, utilizing student experience, and introducing subjugated narratives into the curriculum” (Salinas & Blevins, 2014, p. 38). For example, question 3 evolved from students’ authentic curiosity about “if Obama was a good president?” Since students were reading about Thomas Jefferson, a student suggested that comparing Obama to Jefferson might reveal some positive and negative characteristics concerning Obama as a leader. Students themselves used their observation of contemporary issues to develop authentic questions. Vargas was successful in engaging students in generating questions to engage in authentic assessments through questioning. Assessments become authentic when students construct knowledge through disciplined inquiry that has value beyond the school setting (Newman, 2004).

**What Counts as Evidence?**

Gillis (1994) maintained that the past serves as something we “think with,” as well as something we think about. Gillis’ statement suggests that students’ and teachers’ lived experiences undoubtedly contribute to their interpretations of historical events. Scholars of historical literacy however advocate that historical inquiry requires students to be able to take their subjective selves out of the historical reasoning process for the purpose of working towards an objective or at least evidentiary argument (Monte-Sano, 2011). Wineburg’s heuristics of
sourcing, corroborating and close reading serve to prevent students of history from committing presentism, which is a mode of historical thought in which present-day ideas and attitudes are anachronistically introduced into depictions of the past or are used to evaluate or judge what happened in the past (Fendler, 2008). Historical literacy advocates have written that students who learn how to use evidence in the pursuit of truth and objectivity are “better able to cope with the world than if [they] had not learned it” (p. 13). By using this approach to historical literacy, teachers discourage students from using their present experiences to interpret the past. However, this notion is problematic from a sociocultural standpoint, which contends that historical learning or interpretation can never be divorced from the socio-historical context in which one learns (Epstein & Peck, 2017; Seixas, 1998). By focusing on the quest for an objective historical truth, historical literacy researchers ignore the ways that historical interpretation is a communal decision making between learners about what is considered acceptable knowledge (VanSledright, 2002). Furthermore, the quest to avoid presentism negates the tenets of CRP and historical literacy research which advocates teachers’ use of students’ background knowledge as a necessary step in implementing sound historical literacy instruction (Nokes, 2013). The issue of what counts as ‘background knowledge” remains a huge question within the urban school context and to what extent teachers should use it as an asset in instruction is a tension.

Vargas’ past experiences with racism heavily contributed to his sensitivity towards understanding and preparing students for the potential obstacles they would face as people of color in the real world. He knew students needed to be able to argue well using evidence from texts, but he also wanted students to use their own personal experiences in making historical arguments. Mr. Vargas encouraged students to voice their experiences as people of color and use them as evidence about how the past affected people of color in contemporary life.
For Vargas, the concept of evidence was more aligned with that advocated for by theories of culturally responsive pedagogy and critical race theory than those promoted by historical literacy. Vargas continually presented students with primary and secondary historical texts—i.e., “evidence” as defined by approaches to historical literacy—for interpretation and synthesis into a historical argument. But he also believed that students’ own experiences were a source of evidence, especially about the effects of the past on the present, and therefore, had standing as “evidence” in the history classroom. The following snippet from a lesson illustrates how Vargas used questioning to elicit background knowledge that posited students’ lived experiences as evidence of or testimony to the effects of historical oppression. As soon as the bell rang, Vargas stated the aim: “Is America an empire?” There was silence. “Ok,” Vargas said, “you don’t want to talk. Everyone is going to talk. Let’s do a whip around: State your name, where you are from and answer the aim question. Go.”

Janice: I’m Dominican. I think America is an empire because its 50 states ruled by one person.
Melissa: I’m Mexican. I agree with Tina, that basically the president could be considered an emperor.
Raymond: As far as I know I’m black. I agree with Tina. I think America is an empire because it’s been around for a long time. It’s not a monarchy like she defined it, but we oppress other people. We’ve been in wars. There’s nobody that can mess with America. We’re not going anyway for a long time.
Leila: I’m Filipino. I agree with Finesse. We do have this influence over other countries and this reputation and power.
Vargas wasn’t able to garner student participation until he asked students to state their ethnicity
and then answer the aim question, showcasing the power of using student’s experiences as a tool of engagement. More students answered the question following Vargas’ improvised discussion format. After everyone in the class had spoken, Vargas posed a metacognitive question: “Why did I ask you about your ethnicity?” Tina said, “To see our diversity.” Vargas responded, “Let me ask you something, why aren’t you in your own countries?” Most students looked at Vargas with utterly confused looks stamped on their faces. Fatima took the bold step in answering the question, “Because America has more opportunities?” Here Vargas sensed that students haven’t made the connection between imperialism and their own realities as immigrants. He sought to problematize students’ unquestioned acceptance of their ethnicities and American imperialism. Vargas then raised his voice slightly to suggest he was unnerved by Tina’s response. “Why aren’t there opportunities in your own country?” Janice: “Because they, I mean we, have been exploited.” Vargas is satisfied with Janice’s response; her understanding provided him with the acknowledgement to move onto the next activity. Vargas’ satisfaction with Janice’s response revealed much about the process and outcome of historical interpretation valued in his class. First, students’ abilities to problematize their lived realities by making connections with the past has to be provoked and cultivated by Vargas. He also encouraged students to research their own contemporary oppression. His acknowledgement of Janice’s subjectivity and identification as an oppressed person suggested that for Vargas, what counts as historical evidence is anything in opposition with the hegemonic narrative that the U.S. is simply a land of opportunity and students’ cultural origins inherently are not places of opportunity.

Vargas then stated: “I want us to think about this question, Why aren’t there opportunities in your own country? And is America an empire as we read in Howard Zinn? Take 10 minutes to read and annotate the text. …Go.” After 10 minutes, Vargas states, “We’re
going to do a Socratic seminar, which means I’m not speaking at all.”

Stephanie: I picked the first line, I think the U.S was and is an empire. They were starting to become one. “According to the text, the taste of empire is in the mouth of the people. So like, they rely on the people in the empire to make them more powerful.” Is she quoting this from another source?

Ludwig: That makes me think, Isn’t it the people that make the empire? Because if you didn’t have the people, then you couldn’t have an empire? The empire only exists because we allow it.

Both Stephanie’s and Ludwig’s responses reflect a rudimentary but critical understanding of how empires work. Empires are contingent on the complicity, silence or at least inactivity of the people, which insinuates students also have a role in the proliferation of US imperialistic tendencies. Jeffrey took it a step further when he expressed an understanding of the role of human complicity in the system of subjection. The discussion continued as more students responded to Vargas’ first question, and continued to ask their own questions. Students continued to share their favorite lines from the text until the conversation became heated between Raymond, an African American student, and Jeffrey, a Puerto Rican student.

Raymond: Where are you from?

Jeffrey: I’m from here.

Raymond: Specifically?

Jeffrey: Puerto Rico

Raymond: In 1898, Puerto Rico became a protectorate of the United States. Do you know what that means? You are under our jurisdiction.

Jeffrey (screaming), What they don’t tell you is that the U.S. actually did more harm to
Puerto Rico. That’s why we are all here.

Raymond: How did America do that?

Jeffrey: They took all of our goods.

Raymond: You wouldn’t be sitting in this room right now if it wasn’t for America. You could’ve been colonized by somebody else and never be here with us.

Jeffrey: We were by Spain.

Raymond: The only thing U.S promised you was freedom. Are you not free?

In retrospect, Raymond was the only African American young man in the class, the only one who couldn’t connect the colonial form of oppression that all of the immigrant students were able to speak to. Raymond tried to present a counterargument to the seemingly unanimous decision that America was indeed an empire and because of this stance, morally wrong in its acquisition of territories. He selected key points from the text to support his stance that America should be absolved from this indictment because of Puerto Rico’s political standing with the United States. Both students exhibit historical reasoning in that they engaged in an “active process of asking good questions about the past, finding and analyzing sources, and drawing conclusions supported by the evidence” (Mandell & Malone, 2007, p. 3).

There is a long pause by Jeffrey before Vargas decides to interject:

Wow, we could go so many places with this, and this is college level stuff. I learned about this in college. This is why you need to read. If you’re going to jump into these conversations, you really need to read. Cuz, Jeffrey, are you really read up on the politics of Puerto Rico right now?

Jeffrey sensing that this a trick question, answered with a sheepish yes. Vargas then lowered his tone to ask, “Well could you be better?” Jeffrey said “yes, but why?” Vargas said “because he
deflated you right now. You really need to read. Or, else you’re going to get shut down. I’m assigning you the Calispco statement.” Vargas’ response to Jeffrey represented a pyrrhic victory: he used it as a teachable moment to emphasize the need to have textual evidence to support your claim, but he didn’t present Jeffrey with a process other than to read more on how to develop a stronger counter claim in response to Finesse’s attempt to “deflate him.” Vargas’ response also strongly revealed his emphasis that historical literacy and the knowledge gained from it has the potential to uplift or deflate one’s social standing. The interaction between both young men also reaffirmed Gilyard’s (1991) notion that communication is not only a social act, but also a social process that invites the culture, history, and politics of the individual and the group into the communicative event. This event of using personal experience as evidence in class garnered not only a deeper engagement with historical content on the part of the students but also made them vulnerable to the consequences of social standing within the classroom. In this instance, Vargas both uplifted Jeffrey’s identity by allowing him to speak from his positionality as a Puerto Rican American while simultaneously negating his positionality by criticizing him for not having enough textual evidence or knowledge to support his lived experience.

This vignette also illustrates another way that Vargas entered tricky terrain when inviting students to use personal experiences as texts to be analyzed for the purpose of historical understanding. Nokes (2011) defined texts as “any representational resource or object that historians, history teachers, or students intentionally imbue with meaning for purposes of constructing historical understanding” (p. 382). Vargas turned students’ lived experiences into texts to be interpreted and valued. However the idea of using student experiences as evidence to support arguments about the effects of the past on the present is not supported by researchers of
historical literacy. In fact, many have argued that students need to step outside their own beliefs and experiences in order to understand the past on its own terms (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008, 2012). In short, Vargas’ views and practices related to “evidence” have satisfied pedagogical approaches related to culturally responsive teaching while at the same time violate approaches to historical literacy that consider students’ life experiences as an impediment to, rather than an asset for, historical understanding.

**Chapter Summary:**

Vargas’ lived history as a LatinX man of color influenced his perception of what he and his students needed to overcome in order to achieve success in the world. Because Vargas personally experienced how schooling can negate one’s cultural identity he became motivated to construct learning experiences for his students that would achieve the opposite, essentially helping students instead to develop an empowered sense of self. His understanding of the world positioned him to constantly view himself and his students through the lens of a white gaze. For him, consistent reference to how “the system” works implied an internalization of the institutionalized forces of racism that constantly seek to keep students of color marginalized. A clear understanding of this system ultimately meant that students would have to “arm themselves” with knowledge and skills to have both a positive sense of self and understanding of how they might be perceived by whites. His conception of historical literacy within a culturally relevant framework aimed to make students aware and informed of the context in which they existed through the investigation of historical topics.

Critics have suggested Wineburg’s historical literacy framework ignores the ways disciplinary literacy shapes and is shaped by the political context in which it is embedded. According to Collins and Reich (2015), what counts as historical literacy is bound up with moral
questions of who has the right to tell which histories. For Vargas access to the dominant narrative was not nearly as important as access to counter-narratives which represented another type of privileged knowledge that the masses did not have access to. Vargas believed that access to narratives about the marginalized, in conjunction with student ability to interpret the meaning and engage in discussion around these narratives text, would prepare them to navigate a hostile system and strengthen their abilities to question perceived injustice. If this awareness wasn’t cultivated, Vargas believed that the consequences led to student complacency in a system that doesn’t serve them, as well as embarrassment and rejection. Knowledge accrued from these texts would allow students to be ready to read the word and the world. For Vargas, CRP and historical literacy were necessary components of history education for the oppressed.

At the same time, Vargas’ implementation of historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy revealed tensions to consider for history teachers interested in this work. On one hand, Vargas wanted students to be aware of the system that marginalized their existence, but he didn’t necessarily engage them on how to transform or critique this reality with actionable steps. His focus on culturally relevant texts and issues germane to students did increase student engagement but compromised mandated curricular content, putting students at a disadvantage for the official AP exam ok. There was also growth in students’ abilities to closely read historical texts and engage in an evidenced based discussion and question texts. However these skills were often cultivated through engagement with one source. Students developed a stronger understanding of revisionist perspectives but not necessarily dominant perspectives on the same historical topics. Ladson-Billings (1995) has encouraged a cultural competence that affords students an opportunity to access the dominant world in competitive ways. Vargas taught to enhance students’ identities as knowledgeable historically literate students of the nation’s past, but ending
up disarming them by not teaching them the official narrative alongside counter-narratives.
Chapter 5:  
Ms. Lorrens  
Teacher Background

“Ago: May I have your respect and attention?

Emet: You have my respect and attention”

Instead of employing the typical strategy of waiting patiently for a class to quiet down or using aggressive gestures to demand attention from a group of chatty ninth grade adolescents, Ms. Lorrens prefers to use a traditional African chant to arrest her students’ attention. Like a chorus call, Lorrens declared, “Ago” and like clockwork all 27 of her LatinX and African-American ninth graders respond in unison with “Emet.” Embedded within this simple chant is one of the core values of respect Ms. Lorrens purposely sought to cultivate within her students and classroom culture. “I want my students to feel respected in this space. Out there, they don’t” (Interview, February, 2016). As the only African American teacher and also the only female in the school’s social studies department, Ms. Lorrens was all too familiar with feeling disrespected as a result of her race and gender. Respect for Ms. Lorrens represented an ontological desire to be seen and to be heard, essentially to be able to be recognized as a valued member of any space for which she and her students entered. Having had rich personal and professional experiences where her ethnicity and gender was both valorized and unfortunately negated as woman of color, Ms. Lorrens sought to create a classroom environment where everyone felt “at home.”

Home for Ms. Lorrens started in the urban Washington D.C. in a multigenerational household filled with educators. “My mother was an educator, her mother and her mothers’ mother. My father and uncles were educators. I came from a family who knew the value of
education. It was never a question of if you were going to college, but when” (Interview, January 2016). Academic success was a clear expectation early on in her own life; she carried this expectation for each and every student in her class despite the formidable academic challenges each student faced. The class of 28 students was comprised of mostly newcomer emergent bilinguals from Spanish speaking countries, special need students and traditional students both from Latin and African American backgrounds. All of the students in her class scored 1s and 2’s on their eighth grade ELA exam, meaning that from the perspective of the state test, they performed below grade level. Part of Ms. Lorrens’ belief that students could be successful came from her experience of watching her mother “nurture the whole block” (Interview, January 2016):

I grew up with all the women in my family always figuring out how to teach young people. Everybody from the block learned to read from my mom. My mother taught you how to read. It was her house. All the mommies sent the babies to Karen Marie. Whatever students lacked academically, Ms. Lorrens’ mom provided the context and skills necessary to get students to read. It was at “home” that Ms. Lorrens witnessed firsthand the power of socio-cultural context in helping teachers and students reach success in literacy.

From childhood, Ms. Lorrens was drawn to the arts as a performer and dancer. During my classroom observations, her voice and tone seemed to resound throughout the room without her lifting the sound of her voice. It was not uncommon to find her dancing in class or humming as she passed around papers. The arts for Ms. Lorrens represented an unrestricted sense of self-expression and consequently an alternative method to engage her students. Ms. Lorrens continued to study dance throughout her undergraduate years as an education major. In graduate
school, Ms. Lorrens majored in Africana studies and wrote a thesis focused on dancing resistance in the biosphere. It was through this medium that she learned about the commonalities of cultures and histories that black peoples around the globe shared. She felt it was therefore important to share this unity of histories with her students, even when many, particularly the LatinX students, didn’t identify themselves as black. Despite the fact that many of her students were LatinX, Ms. Lorrens still underscored the need to teach black history in her global history class in order to prove that as people of color, “we” are descendants of kings and queens. “Our students have to know that their history didn’t just start with slavery” (Interview, January 2016).

Ms. Lorrens entered the teaching profession with a commitment to teaching in urban schools and educating students about the African diaspora. “As a history teacher, either you’re part of the solution or part of the problem. There is no in-between.” Ms. Lorrens’ educational experiences had proven to her that if teachers don’t teach students of color about marginalized history, teachers perpetuate the culture of disrespect and negation of who students are as human beings. Although the school has touted culturally relevant pedagogy as an effective way to engage students, Ms. Lorrens didn’t necessarily feel that the social studies department was in uniform agreement about enacting culturally relevant pedagogy in systematic ways. As the only woman of color in the social studies department, Ms. Lorrens admitted she was often the only voice to raise problems with the dominant historical narrative presented in the New York State Social Studies scope and sequence. “I don’t blame the men in the department, they’re just teaching history the way they learned it. But you can’t be teaching black and Latino kids this one history, like it’s the only thing that is true” (Interview, February 2016). After problematizing the dominant historical narrative several times within department meetings, Ms. Lorrens admitted she didn’t always want to be the voice of discontent. Ms. Lorrens therefore decided to use her
classroom as her kingdom of autonomy, where she could create the ideal classroom environment for students she felt they needed.

Ms. Lorrens spoke of an unnerving event in which she felt compelled to speak up after a while of self-monitored silence. The department was asked to grade samples of student work in order to norm the grading system. The assignment was from a white history teacher who had students write an essay in which they were asked to write an argument justifying slavery. “I was in shock. Every single introductory paragraph started off with ‘Slavery was justified because…” At that point, I couldn’t keep quiet. I had to express how I felt, not that it changed anything.” When asked what ensued after she voiced her frustration, she remarked, “They tried to understand where I was coming from, but it was short lived. The realities of everyday work minimize the need to take action on ensuring we were doing the right thing.” These experiences reaffirmed Ms. Lorrens’ decision to make her classroom the space “where she would make things right” and students would be at home.

Ms. Lorrens’ World of Schooling

Ms. Lorrens’ world of schooling was informed by her desire to create a true “home” for students. Home for Ms. Lorrens represented a place where one can be free from outside constraints and positionalities based on race and gender. It was at home where Ms. Lorrens’ early literacy skills and artistic talents were cultivated, and where her faculties as an educator of children of color was also nourished. These early experiences inculcated within Ms. Lorrens a keen understanding and reframing of variance in student academic ability as an expectation rather than as a problem of teaching in urban schools. She sought to combat what Urrieta and Quach (2000) referred to as consistent framing of these students as problems or labeled “at risk” if they exhibited any reading deficiency. By expecting students to have strong literacy skills in
some areas and weaker skills in other areas, Ms. Lorrens emulated instead the value system of respect and meeting students where they are that she learned from her mother. Accepting students “where they are” with respect to literacy skills was one key characteristic of Ms. Lorrens’ classroom as a place like “home.”

Home also became the foundation from which Ms. Lorrens would interpret her schooling/professional experiences and inform the instructional experiences of her students. Home therefore was both an ideal classroom aspiration where respect was cultivated while also serving as her measuring stick used to recognize racism and sexism as acts of deviation from home as a normalized space where she was seen and heard. Instead of viewing acts of racism and sexism as a normalized part of life in which students would enter, these acts were considered aberrations from how the world should actually work. Ms. Lorrens would ensure that students learned respect, specifically self-respect and respect for others in order to address these aberrations (acts of racism and sexism) in society. Students would not accept racism and sexism as normalized ways of being, but see them as deviations from how the world should be and act accordingly by way of having inner self-respect.

**Conception and Enactment of CRP: Nurturing the mind and not the self; Black as the new normal.**

Ms. Lorrens’ personal and professional experiences in urban school settings provided her with a rich understanding of the context from which her students entered, a valued characteristic of a CRP educator (Ladson-Billings, 1995). She understood that students entered with a variety of academic needs and developed her instruction to differentiate learning for her students. Ms. Lorrens aligned with the CRP stance when it came to the importance of recognizing the cultural context in which her students lived by acknowledging that many of the students came from
homes with issues associated with poverty. But she contradicted a central tenet of CRP by
vehemently deciding not to attend to students’ particular home issues. Essentially, she decided
not to draw upon students experiences with poverty as funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll &
Amanti, 2006); this deliberate disengagement with students’ familial or socioeconomic issues
presented a boundary in fostering a stronger student to teacher relationship. Although many of
the students spoke positively about her instruction during the focus group interview, Ms.
Lorrens’ deliberate disengagement with students’ home life was corroborated from student focus
group data, as none of the students mentioned any activities /experiences outside of the
classroom to suggest a personal connection or relationship with Ms. Lorrens. She spoke of a
deliberate disengagement with students’ personal lives or family issues:

And, I have kind of gotten to a point in my career where, where, I don't dig into students'
home issues as much, just because, one, I can't carry (at) home anymore. I used to carry a
lot of stuff home. And it used to be when I first started teaching students would open up
about things, and you know, kind of a teacher, kind of a counselor, a kind of this. I kind
of pulled back that counseling role. Or, just that ear. I pulled it back a little bit because I
was carrying that” (Interview, January 2016).

As an eleventh year veteran teacher, Ms. Lorrens felt that she could no longer carry the
emotional weight of attending to students’ personal lives because of the lasting effect it had on
her ability to attend to her role as a mother and educator. Her stance sheds light on the difficult
balance teachers in urban schools face when they use students’ lived experiences as a foundation
for learning. Ladson-Billings (2008) has suggested that teachers move from a position of
sympathy (“you poor dear”) to one of informed empathy which requires the teacher “to feel with
the students rather than feel for them” (p. 30). Ms. Lorrens no longer wanted to take on the
“mothering, that kind of counseling, nurturing role” instead preferring to “nurture the way you [students] think” (Interview, January 2016). Ms. Lorrens’ resolve to nurture students’ minds rather than their personal or emotional challenged the CRP tenet of attending to students’ socio-emotional needs (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It also raises the question of what constitutes an ideal student-teacher relationship when a teacher decides not to be emotionally available for students’ problems. Ms. Lorrens pushed the boundary of not making students feel good but making them academically ready by de-emphasizing the need for an outside or personal student-teacher relationship for academic success to occur. In *Dreamkeepers* (1994), Ladson-Billings claimed successful CRP educators act as conductors, being able to make connections between students and their home lives. While Ms. Lorrens believed it was important to see students as capable beings and offer instructional support, she also believed in emotional boundaries. Ms. Lorrens’ belief and instructional approach contradicted the culturally relevant idea that “dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 467) must exist for student academic success in the classroom. In the case of Ms. Lorrens, she instead decided to draw upon students’ funds of knowledge and culture, aspects of students’ lives that she felt she could handle.

Nurturing students’ minds meant that Ms. Lorrens sought to capitalize on students’ strengths rather than their weaknesses. She believed her students possessed a unique asset, which was their burgeoning understanding that “They know something is not quite right with their place in society. They can’t quite make the connection, (but) they already have that sense that people are unfair, or their position in society is not just” (Interview, March 2016). Ms. Lorrens felt it was her duty to help students make the historical connections between their lived oppression and its historical roots. She also believed that students of color in urban areas had
high inferential skills of always having to “read between the lines” as a way of surviving in “the hood”: “The kids can feel if you are being genuine or not. Often what people say in their lives doesn’t always match up with what they actually do” (Interview, March, 2016). She thereby perceived her students as critical thinkers, “They have learned to find out quickly what to believe and what not to believe. And my classroom instruction can help strengthen that skill set” (Interview, March, 2016).

Ms. Lorrens’ affirmation that her students were natural cynics also coincided with her belief that the historical master narrative presented in schools did not motivate her students. Throughout the interviews she reaffirmed her commitment to challenging the dominant narrative within the school, while also mentioning such commitment had consequences within the current structures of school accountability. For example, she believed she was given freshmen to teach this school year instead of tenth grade Global History Regents classes because she consistently deviated from the official curriculum to teach black history. The school, like the majority of New York City public schools, had a long history of dismal passing rates for the Global History exam. Ms. Lorrens’ interpretation of the events suggests that her CRP commitment to garnering a black cultural competence within students by making amendments to the curriculum had consequences for her positionality as a teacher in the school.

**Historical Literacy**

Ms. Lorrens’ conception of historical literacy was mediated by her experiences as a woman of color growing up and teaching in an urban environment. Contrary to the deficit-thinking paradigm paramount in many urban schools, she believed students already acquired historical thinking skills and historical knowledge because of their life experiences. Ms. Lorrens sought to enhance both of those skills in her students. For Ms. Lorrens, cultivating historical
literacy in students was not about a banking style teaching method where she would impose new skills upon students. Rather it was about cultivating what she felt was aspects of the historical inquiry skills her students already possessed. “Students already know that the history they are being told is problematic. I only need to bridge the gaps” (Interview, January 2016). According to her, she needed only to bridge the gaps for students of color by strengthening their already-existing abilities to question and corroborate inferences by understanding the source of their information:

I think students really have to be willing to ask why. And really, go to that first. Why do things occur? What cause and effect, always asking why? That inquiry based are really strong tools for being able to understand and know history. I think "why" the key is. And, that's kind of, how I start my school year on. The most important thing you can ever ask in this class is "why.” (Interview, February 2016)

Ms. Lorrens believed historical inquiry was the starting point for historical literacy instruction. She sought to teach students to not only recognize bias but investigate how it was constructed (Reddy & VanSledright, 2010). In one classroom observation, Ms. Lorrens guided students to identify in a written text the bias an author exhibited in denying the blackness of ancient Egyptians. In subsequent lessons she provided sources in which students investigated the role of historians in contributing to this racist viewpoint. Essentially Ms. Lorrens believed that in teaching students of color, historical literacy entailed teaching students to continue to follow their hunches by problematizing the traditional historical narrative and also understanding history as knowledge production. “I always ask them, ‘Why will someone say that? Because, there's bias when you deal with history. There's bias, there's opinions, and... So, everything can't be taken at face value. And how did they have the power to say that? (Interview, March 2016).
Her belief aligned nicely with the historical literacy skill of recognizing bias, but would prove to be a challenge as many of her students struggled with general comprehension of texts.

As a disciplinary community, historians communicate with other historians most often through written texts which present claims supported by evidence (Seixas, 1998). Ms. Lorrens supported this idea and wanted students to produce historical texts in order to engage in dialogue with others. However, she also felt that classroom discussions of historical content and evidence was more important than actually writing for an esoteric audience. Oral discussions of historical topics would allow students to build their historical literacy skill set and also prepare them to feel comfortable having opinions and a voice in the world. As students whose voices had been silenced, Ms. Lorrens believed that being able to discuss history critically was evidence of a historical mindset. She recognized that her emphasis on discussion was a formidable challenge for all her students. “I force my students to listen to each other and struggle. One, who takes that ownership, and then two, to be wrong, like, I kind of let them be wrong, sometimes” (Interview, March 2016). Sharing ideas and being comfortable discussing content was more important than having the “right” or “text-based answer.” Her emphasis on discussion rather than on writing countered the aim of historical literacy to be able to argue well orally and in writing, i.e. the form that historians use to demonstrate their thinking.

**CRP and Historical Literacy Working Together**

Ms. Lorrens’ appreciation for and building upon students’ current academic readiness and their perceived strengths contributed to her determination that students could sharpen their historical literacy skills with the right support. In building a culture of respect within the classroom she sought to create a classroom environment where all her students, especially newcomer Bilinguals, would embrace productive academic struggles without experiencing
feelings of shame. However, her insistence to neglect what she considered the “damaged identities” of students emanating from what she saw as dysfunctional home environments or neighborhoods possibly contributed to missed opportunities to use students’ home or lived experiences as funds of knowledge in designing instruction that would increase student engagement with historical content. Her guarded engagement with students’ lived experiences presented a rupture from the archetypal CRP educator who incorporates rather than ignores young people’s family/community experiences.

From a CRP standpoint she would attempt to give students the right level of historical literacy instruction they needed by first focusing on building students’ foundational literacy skills to comprehend texts while gradually scaffolding activities that enabled them to practice historical literacy as an advanced literacy. She started with basic literacy skills in order to build up their historical literacy skills. The tension of determining the right levels of foundational versus advanced literacy skills would contribute to students’ practicing some skills more frequently than others. The next sections below examine how Ms. Lorrens artfully incorporated historical literacy within the framework of culturally relevant pedagogy despite her not incorporating young people’s family/community experiences that she considered damaging.

Second-hand historical literacy

As noted earlier, Ms. Lorrens’ class consisted of mostly newcomer LatinX students, students with special needs (emotional and cognitive) and students who scored between 1 and 2’s on the standardized ELA exam. Given her population of students, it was not feasible for her to use the textbook as the primary text to help students deepen their content knowledge. In addition, many primary sources were written at levels beyond what her students could comprehend. Therefore, she couldn’t immediately dive into teaching disciplinary literacy skills
such as asking students to engage with primary source texts to find claims or develop historical arguments. Instead, she primarily used the following strategies to help students gain foundational literacy skills interlaced with some disciplinary literacy skills: 1) she differentiated her lessons according to process and interest; 2) she employed research-based general literacy strategies such as frontloading vocabulary concepts; and 3) she engaged students in repetitious reads with scaffolded higher thinking tasks. These methods were successful in deepening student comprehension but attenuated time spent on practicing discipline specific skills.

To help students achieve academic success, Ms. Lorrens had to constantly differentiate her tasks and create new content to increase background knowledge (or conceptual understanding) of historical topics. Although the New York global history scope and sequence necessitated that Ms. Lorrens begin the school year on the ancient civilizations of Rome and Greece, she instead created a unit called “forms of government” that preceded instruction on the ancient civilizations. During our pre-observation conference, Ms. Lorrens mentioned that students would spend the first week exploring different forms of government from various civilizations before eventually developing a critical lens towards the governments of ancient Greece and Rome. To begin the unit, students were asked to read a secondary source entitled, “Who Rules?” (written on a fourth grade reading level) to gain basic conceptual understanding of oligarchy, autocracy, democracy, and theocracy. The text was written in explanatory form. For example in the section entitled, “Me, Myself and I,” the text reads: “An autocracy is a government in which one person has all the power. There are two main types of autocracy: a monarchy and dictatorship” (Field notes, 3/8/16). Ms. Lorrens asked students to annotate the
text in to identify the main characteristics of each form of government and apply the characteristics of each government system by completing a Frayer vocabulary model⁵:

Figure 2: Student Work Samples of Frayer Model

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⁵ The Frayer model is a reading comprehension strategy often presented in a graphic organizer format that teachers use when students are introduced to new terms. For each vocabulary word, students complete an exercise in each of the four quadrants that include tasks such as 1. Provide a formal definition, 2. Provide facts; 3. Provide examples and provide non-examples.
On a surface level, annotating definitions from a text written on a fourth grade reading level seems like a lower thinking order task, but with a large number of Emergent Bilingual students this proved quite a difficult activity, as Ms. Lorrens spent two days having students work on the task in pairs. She differentiated the task by using Google translator to translate the text into Spanish for Emergent Bilingual students. Students then read the English version to strengthen their mastery of the English language. Even though Spanish-speaking students appreciated the opportunity to use their native language to understand historical content, these students mentioned during focus group interviews that not all English-to-Spanish translations were completely comprehensible. Pacheco (2010) contended that translation supports may help with decoding, but doesn’t necessarily mean readers comprehend the overall main idea of texts. To
combat misinterpretation emanating from translations, Ms. Lorrens recruited the help of native English speakers to also translate texts for her Emergent Bilingual students. The activity seemed to help the native speaker become better at synthesizing texts and learn more content as well. However, the exercise did not expand Emergent Bilingual students’ comprehension to include “sophisticated, deep and critical reading practices” associated with “higher academic learning,” (p. 38). Differentiating tasks for students to aid with comprehension was a timely task that supported general or foundational literacy but not the pursuit of historical literacy skill. As Gerwin (2014b) had written, the “goal of historical literacy is not straight comprehension,” but rather reading of texts for reasons quite different from the ones intended when it was created” (p. 4).

**Building Bridges to Understand Historical Concepts or Ethical Dilemmas**

Ms. Lorrens used her arts background to present historical content in ways that engaged students and oriented them towards the ways in which historical concepts are applicable in today’s world. She would present simulations to students and have them debate the pros and cons of past actions. Essentially, Ms. Lorrens used simulations and Spanish language to explore the “ethical dimensions of history” (Seixas & Morton, 2013) by building bridges between concepts students could easily understand and actual historical content. This method proved successful in engaging all students in developing a conceptual understanding of historical topics, despite their lower-level language proficiency. The following lesson vignette occurred on the third day of the forms of government unit. After the bell rang, Ms. Lorrens started her class by saying:

I have a new rule and new process. I found myself as I was watching you take the exams last week. I myself was getting bored. I thank you for being quiet. I’m going to try to do
something new anytime we take an assessment so we can keep our energy up. I want to try to play some music. What do you think?

Class: Yes

S: Hell yes (ha).

N: With anything new in a classroom, I have to figure out what to choose what to listen to? The way I see it, there should be one person chooses what we listen to. I know this person. They come from a good family. She’s special and has great taste. I think Kaitlin should be the sole person who decides what we should listen to. Kaitlin, you’re that special.

Like all of the students in the classroom, I was so confused and befuddled by Ms. Lorrens’ declaration that she was picking someone based on her perception of the student’s genealogy. She heightened the feeling of confusion and slight disrespect by asking a Spanish student to then translate for her. As I surveyed the room, even more students looked astonished after they gained clarity on what Ms. Lorrens’ English-to-Spanish translation had just revealed. Ms. Lorrens consistently embedded students’ home language to ensure engagement. She then asked students what they thought about Kaitlin’s new-found power. One student remarked, “I like Kaitlin, but I don’t think that’s fair Ms.” Other students nodded their heads in agreement while the whispers got louder. Ms. Lorrens gently said, “Argo” to get students attention and the whole class replied, “Emet.” Ms. Nelson continued, “Hmm, ok, maybe I’ll try it another way. Melissa, Perry, and John, raise your hand.” All three students sheepishly raised their hand with surprise. Ms. Lorrens then said:
Ok, I have a better and fairer way of helping us choose the music. These students that have their hands raised have the best grades in the class. I chose them because they have the top grades. They are the elite (they represented a mixture of Emergent Bilingual and general education students). Why do you think it’s not fair? I’m empowering them to make the decision. No, trying to entice them. We can only listen to one thing. Y’all ok with that? Felix, please translate for me.

There was even a louder uproar after Ms. Nelson proposed this new solution to students. One student boldly stated, “No, Ms. they all like different things. That’s not cool.” Ms. Lorrens strategically allowed students to chatter among themselves as they shared grievances. She then stated, “Argot.” After ten minutes into witnessing the introduction of this lesson, it became clear to me that Ms. Lorrens was doing a simulation with students to get them to understand the concepts of autocracy and oligarchy. In the lesson she continued to present other hypothetical scenarios based on the principles of democracy, theocracy and anarchy. She acted and embedded the principles of government into this modern day scenario so well that students had no idea they were debating the pros and cons of each system of government. Finally, she revealed, “Believe or not, I do this as a way. I did this not because I wanted to play music. I showed you four different ways to make a decision. What types of government does each one show?” The class looked even more confused. One student stated, “What, Ms.? You tricked us!” Playful laughter and banter filled the room after this realization. Students then began naming the type of government each decision represented. After collecting responses on how each scenario connected to a form of government, students were instructed to revise their Frayer model charts to add more details based on the day’s simulation.
The lesson vignette above illustrated how Ms. Lorrens was able to embed a simulation as a CRP engagement strategy to engage students and build background knowledge while allowing students to apply a critical lens towards government concepts. By asking students to debate the utility and fairness of each decision, students practiced the historical thinking skill of exploring the ethical dimensions of government rule (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Despite the success from a CRP standpoint of engagement, the three-day lesson did not reflect the instructional objectives outlined by the New York State Social Studies Scope and Sequence, but it was exactly what students needed in order to develop a conceptual understanding. The vignette shows how a tension can emerge between providing students with ample time for conceptual understanding and analysis versus the historical content they are expected to know for the New York Regents exam. Ladson-Billings (2006) explained that CRP must simultaneously instill cultural competence and high expectation in conjunction with the dominant culture’s version of success i.e. mastery of historical content knowledge and thinking skills as evidenced by success on the Regents exam. When describing the class, Ms. Lorrens remarked, “This class has had huge, huge growth.” Growth, however, in this case was according to her own standards of success rather than those intended by New York’s Regents exam or the research on historical literacy.

Secondary as the Primary Source

After multiple days of learning about the different forms of government that existed in the past and continue today, Ms. Lorrens introduced students to Roman civilization as the next historical topic. Her standard of introducing new content involved presenting students with secondary sources that were mostly “narrative and explanatory texts” (Coffin, 2004) instead of interpretive or primary source texts. She used secondary sources to build conceptual understanding through collaborative comprehension activities that emphasized explaining ideas.
from the text rather than critiquing them. However, embedded within these activities were
moments when students were able to engage with historical reasoning on a rudimentary level.

In this unit, Ms. Lorrens asked students to use the annotation guide below to engage with
a graphic cartoon that recorded the history of Rome:

**Figure 3: Lorrens’ Annotation Guide/Anchor Chart**

Identifying familiar words and paraphrasing are general comprehension strategies. However, the
guides prompted students to ask specific questions about the text and provide reactions. Both the
act of questioning and reacting to a text held potential to become an opportunity for students to
practice historical literacy skills of inquiry by generating questions.

Students were grouped heterogeneously with a mixture of Emergent Bilinguals, special
needs and general education students. Ms. Lorrens asked students to collaboratively annotate the
cartoon below using the annotation guide above.
Ms. Lorrens reminded students to “lean on each other.” Below is a sample of one group’s analysis:
Each group was responsible for annotating all four pages of the secondary source cartoon.

Although the source is written at a third grade level, students’ questions on the poster suggest they were able to pose some higher order questions, such as “What do the Romans mean about
overthrowing their king? Why did they do it? How did they do it? X and Y.” As students were working on their projects, Ms. Lorrens circulated the room, asking clarifying questions to support general literacy comprehension such as, “Alexander, could you paraphrase this part for me?” Or, “What was most interesting for you?” She also used the group and one-and-one check-in’s to prompt students to think historically by asking “Why do you think this occurred?” Or, “do you think this is all there is to the story?” Both questions illustrated her desire to ensure students understood the content while also scaffolding student thinking so they eventually they might begin to think historically. Even when students were involved in foundational literacy tasks, Ms. Lorrens asked questions to promote historical thinking. She consistently tried to scaffold foundational literacy skills into historical literacy skills.

A key hallmark of historical literacy is providing opportunities for students to interpret events by examining multiple sources and perspectives on the topic. Ms. Lorrens recognized this need when she declared, “I feel like there are a lot of successful things that work in my classroom, and part of me feels guilty that I don’t use enough sources” (Interview, April 2016). Her statement indicates her struggle to accommodate what she thinks counts as growth or success according to historical literacy standards and accountability standards rather than considering success as that which is measured by student growth from the beginning of the year. For example, the researcher Cummins (2001) noted that the time needed to develop bilingualism for newcomer students is five to seven years for academic proficiency. However bilingual education policies expect student mastery of the English language to occur after three years (NCLB, 2004). The tension Ms. Lorrens felt with regards to student academic growth speaks to the larger accountability structures that CRP educators must carefully disregard and embrace to achieve academic success for students.
Writing: One sentence at a time.

Historical literacy theorists (Seixas & Morton, 2013, Nokes, 2013) expect students to use primary and secondary sources in order to write historical arguments in the form of multi-paragraph essays. However, what should the expectation be for students who come into the classroom without a mastery of the English Language? Should a newcomer be expected to write a full essay in order to show mastery of historical literacy skills? And how long might such an accomplishment take? Ms. Lorrens’ method of engaging students with writing required that she scaffold the writing process at the sentence level. Students were able to practice argumentative writing on the sentence level and eventually were able to write paragraphs with confidence to show an understanding of historical topics. Progress for her students from a historical literacy standpoint meant that students were able to write clear sentences and paragraphs but not necessarily full multi-paragraph essays. Her method for getting students to write a paragraph offers a novel and gradual model for preparing students for historical writing.

During the spring semester, Ms. Lorrens volunteered to become part of district writing initiative called Writing Is Thinking Strategic Inquiry (WITSI) as a step towards learning about effective ways to get her students to write better in history. WITSI was founded upon the Hochman Writing method which advocates a granular approach to teaching writing. This means that instead of having secondary students start with writing essays, teachers start students with instruction centered on the art of writing a good sentence and eventually scaffold writing instruction towards essay writing activities. Ms. Lorrens spoke of the program with great admiration, remarking how it was “professional development that allowed her to see how writing could be taught in history” (Interview, March, 2016). The enthusiasm expressed during our exit
interview corroborated Franquiz and Salinas (2013) study that historical literacy mastery does not have to be divorced from language acquisition.

Scholars agree that disciplinary writing is distinctly different from general literacy writing, but do not offer ways to teach educators to teach the craft of historical writing when students struggle with foundational literacy skills. “Adolescent writers must adapt to a variety of tasks, rhetorical structures, and standards that vary from one discipline to the next” (Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012, p. 274). WITSI provided Ms. Lorrens with instructional strategies needed to teach the form and art of writing historically, albeit starting with one sentence at a time. She differentiated the writing process for her students by first teaching students how to write appositives, use conjunctions, produce clear topic sentences and create an outline for paragraphs in order to finally write an evidenced based paragraph.

During the writing lessons I observed, Ms. Lorrens used more cognitive modeling to provide clear direction on how to write clearly and incorporate historical content.

Lorrens: So check this out, this is an appositive. A government in which one government rules. That’s the definition. An appositive is a definition. Si or no?

Student: Si.

Lorrens: “What word is it defining? Please raise your hand. Which word is it defining? Yes, autocracy. And then the definition comes next. What did I put write before the definition?

Student: Comma.

Lorrens: What did I put right after the definition?
Student: Comma.

Lorrens: We’ve done this before. I just wanted to remind you. I need to see an appositive sentence that uses those two commas.

Lorrens: I want you to take a look at the board. Lisette gave a great example of how to use an appositive and it’s her first sentence. Which means it’s a really great claim. *Democracy, a government in which people rule, can truly allow all people to rule.* I saw you take a pause. What were you thinking? The only thing I can say is that you were thinking of changing the word rule. Just because you repeated it twice, let’s think about using a different word after the appositive.

Ms. Lorrens explicitly taught students to write an appositive, a noun or phrase that renames the noun that precedes it. Appositives show an understanding of the key term or concept. Students were asked to identify appositives as they read and were then asked to write appositives as the primary writing activity or exit ticket. Students mostly wrote appositives after reading the secondary sources. They were also given graphic organizers where they practiced writing and revising sentences with appositives. For example, after reading the secondary source on different forms of government, Ms. Lorrens provided students with quotes from different philosophers whose writings encapsulated the ideas of a particular form of government. In the example below, Ms. Lorrens first asked students to annotate the excerpt from Voltaire with words and phrases they were familiar with and paraphrase in their own words.
This student paraphrased the words obey and interpreted the phrases “fine line and two hundred,” from the source to showcase the historical literacy skill of close reading. Then students were asked to interpret the excerpt using an appositive. In this example, the student exhibited content knowledge of Voltaire. In his first attempt, the student provided an interpretation of Voltaire that did not show any connection to the texts students had read on different forms of government. Ms. Lorrens asked students to then reread their notes and sources to revise their writing. In the revised sentence the student inserts, “like a king or queen” to strengthen his idea that Voltaire prefers a monarchy.

By the end of the semester, students wrote appositives that forced them to reread texts to find evidence to support their primary nouns. By the end of the semester, all students were
writing appositives with confidence, allowing them to write more complex sentences. The art of writing a sentence proved to be effective in helping students closely read texts.

**Historical Writing Because, But, So:**

As a WITSI school, all teachers committed to using “Because, But, So” as a writing strategy to help students write complex sentences. In this sentence expansion activity, students were asked to use conjunctions to describe a content concept after engaging with a particular reading. Students expanded upon the independent clause using each three conjunctions, “because, but and so.” Hochman (2001) advocates using a range of “sentence expansion” exercises like this to build literacy and thinking skills. One of the benefits is that it causes students to think about different ways they might develop the same clause. For example, Ms. Lorrens provided students with the following clauses in which students extended it with specific conjunctions:

**Table 6: Student Excerpts on Using Conjunctions for Historical Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompts</th>
<th>Student responses:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Rome had a favorable geography because</td>
<td>• it was surrounded by water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Athens, Ancient Rome had a democracy but</td>
<td>• not all citizens were treated like equals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Romans sought to solve the problems of the government, so,</td>
<td>• they enlisted the help of Julius Caesar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the above writing samples, students were able to substantiate the historical claim (independent clause) with historical evidence garnered from readings. The writing exercise showed how historical thinking can be cultivated while also helping students gain language acquisition skills. These type of writing activities were the primary ways Ms. Lorrens helped students practice historical literacy. Although students’ abilities to write complex sentences were enhanced, these writing strategies weren’t always apparent when students wrote extended responses. Often Ms. Lorrens had to continually prompt students to use appositives and conjunctions in their writing.

**Focus on Black History:**

Ms. Lorrens assumed that her students had a natural inquisitiveness about their lives as students of color in the United States. She stated, “They know something is not quite right, but they don’t know what it is.” Even though the majority of students in the class were of LatinX origin, the missing “it” for Ms. Lorrens was students’ lack of knowledge of black history. Ms. Lorrens carved ample time within the curriculum to teach African American history. Essentially she assumed that in teaching black history, students would be able to better contextualize and explain their own oppression and feel more confident about themselves. For Ms. Lorrens, black history contributed to building the cultural competence students needed for academic success. However by focusing on black history, Ms. Lorrens potentially neglected the cultural assets of her LatinX students.

According to Ms. Lorrens, African Americans have a rich history that has been neglected through curriculums of schooling:

You don't see it; you don't see black history. You see people are black 50%, because you see Mandela. That's about it. You know, if you do see mention of blacks or black history,
it'll be more of like human rights violation. So, there's so much that's missing. So that, content-wise, I don't think the students could connect themselves to that history. They, kind of, have to skill and drill a lot of history that may not reflect who they are. Not that they can't connect to it, but they can't reflect who they are (Interview, April 2016).

The cultural neglect Ms. Lorrens spoke so adamantly about, however, may have been more relevant for the “the few” black students in her class than it was for her LatinX students. The result was that Ms. Lorrens’ version of fostering cultural competence was more about a reflection of her culture or her experiences as an African American woman than it was about incorporating the rich history of all her students’ ethnicities. However, students didn’t seem to mind her focus on black history specifically. For Ms. Lorrens the problem her instruction sought to solve was to address the lack of awareness of blackness innate to all communities of color. Ms. Lorrens thought that teaching black history was necessary for all communities of color even those who don’t consider themselves black because of their black diasporic roots. Her focus on blackness was an attempt to bring disparate communities together.

Ms. Lorrens incorporated black history in two distinctive ways. The first was by presenting black history as one filled with the richness of black contributions to U. S. history and their ancient civilizations and the second was by exposing students to the ways in which black history was purposefully undermined as an integral component of U.S. history. For example, while studying ancient Egypt, Ms. Lorrens restructured the curriculum to have students study Egyptian history with a critical eye by asking students, “To what extent has black history been misrepresented?” The question attempted to address contemporary arguments that Egyptians were not of black origin. Students were provided this argumentative writing prompt and engaged in reading both primary and secondary sources.
Similar to all of her units, prior to writing the essay, students first read secondary sources on Egyptian history and then annotated the text with questions and ideas. Afterwards, students read excerpts from multiple perspectives. For example, they read excerpts from historians who studied Egyptian history from the perspectives that Egyptians were actually black peoples and from scholars who downgraded “blackness” as a core component of Egyptian identity. Students were given the following sentence prompts.

**Figure 7: Ms. Lorrens’ Black History Writing Prompt**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write 2 Because, But, So sentences using 2 different nouns and appositives: Because/Since But/However So/Therefore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Imhotep, <strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong>contributed to civilization</strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong>___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ____________________, a famous British historian, shows racial bias in his historical arguments ______________________________.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first prompt presented students with the opportunity to acknowledge cultural contributions of blacks in Egyptian culture while the second prompt encouraged students to acknowledge how the construction of history was premised on the racial bias of historians. In this instance, Ms. Lorrens fostered students to think and write historically by focusing on the “historical narrative perspective” (Nokes, 2010) that showcases the rich history of Egyptians and the “historical process integration perspective” (Nokes, 2010) that emphasizes how history is constructed.

Students were then directed to answer questions in preparation for a Socratic Seminar: “To what extent has black history been misrepresented? What is your reaction to Arnold Toynbee’s quote? How would you respond to his quote? Do you think historians, like Arnold
Toynbee, have a responsibility to “get it right” (to find out the truth)? These questions required students to consider historical perspectives and examine the ethical decisions of historians to speak the truth by seeking out and including black history. Students were given two instructional days to prepare evidence to answer the questions. Finally Ms. Lorrens asked students to write a full paragraph response to the questions. She instructed them to write a claim, support it with evidence and reasoning, explain and elaborate, and end with a concluding sentence. Here is a sample student response:

**Figure 8: Lorrens’ Student Writing Response**

In this response, the student was able to develop a claim that black history has been misrepresented and provide evidence to support this claim. The student also was able to interpret...
the “racist historian’s” quote and provide a personal reaction. Here is one clear instance where students were asked to write a response that included a critical analysis of history and utilized the historical literacy skill of argumentation. This process entailed an entire two weeks of instruction and entailed a great detail of skilled scaffolding on the part of Ms. Lorrens.

Chapter Summary

Early in her life, Ms. Lorrens developed an understanding that children needed adults who accepted their learning capabilities and deficiencies in order to construct learning experiences that would enable them to become better readers. This experience helped Ms. Lorrens seek to construct a classroom environment that felt like “home” for students but only in regards to accepting their academic readiness as strengths to use in instructional development. She disregarded the idea of using students’ home lives and issues as assets to use in the classroom. The result was that Ms. Lorrens emphasized only what she could do for students in the classroom and not outside. “Home” therefore was a home with restrictions.

Ms. Lorrens valued historical content that dealt with the black diaspora. In recognizing that some of her students had negative experiences with schooling as a result of their membership in a minority group, Ms. Lorrens felt teaching the richness of black history would help students develop a better sense of self. In this she attempted to teach cultural competence but at the expense of recognizing the other ethnicities in her class. Students learned black history, but not necessarily the history of their own cultures.

As a result of understanding the needs of students, who were newcomers and mostly Emergent Bilinguals, Ms. Lorrens spent the majority of time teaching students foundational literacy skills while incorporating some historical thinking skills. Ultimately, her responsibility
was to help students master the English language, historical content and historical thinking skills. To address student mastery of the English Language, she employed cooperative learning strategies and the Hochman writing method to help students feel confident as readers and writers. Historical thinking skills became secondary concerns but students eventually were taught to write claims and evidenced based paragraphs. The results of this method was that students were able to write argumentative paragraphs by the end of the year. This method, however successful, compromised the time allotted for historical thinking skills and the content on the calendar.
Mr. Rosenberg

Teacher Background: It’s always game time

“This is not a game anymore. You need to take this class seriously,” stated Mr. Rosenberg. He was referring to the Global History Regents class. It was not uncommon for him to underscore the necessity of passing the Regents at least twice during each of my observation visits. Like many teachers in New York City urban schools, the need for students to pass the Regents with a 65 or higher grade not only represented an academic success for his students, but would establish his success and credibility as an effective teacher. As a result, Rosenberg’s instructional design and understanding of ideal students’ class behaviors were heavily influenced by his aspiration to have students receive high marks on the Regents exam. The Regents exam therefore presented both the problem and solution in helping students succeed as well as securing his future as an untenured teacher.

As the only tenth grade social studies teacher at Collegiate High School, Mr. Rosenberg considered student outcomes on the Global History Regents exam as a reflection of his teaching. Each of Rosenberg’s five classes were filled to the max with at least 30 or more students. Despite the reality of big classes and the pressures of the Regents exam, he was optimistic about overall student achievement. “As long as students do their job and I do mine, we will all be fine.” Mr. Rosenberg’s strict adherence to students doing the work as the primary means to students achieving academic success would overshadow the need to address students’ different levels of academic needs.

In recounting his early experiences with schooling, Rosenberg spoke about his high school experience with sincere admiration and nostalgia. He remarked, “High school was great.
I loved it. I learned to love history.” He decided to become a history teacher because of his personal affinity towards the discipline and his high regard for teachers:

“When I was in high school, I had these great teachers in tenth and eleventh grade. I liked their aura and the respect they got in school. I always liked social studies and history, so I figured I could combine them both and became a social studies teacher”

(Interview, January 2016)

Perhaps Rosenberg’s fondness of high school and learning of history was an experience afforded to him as a result of his positionality as a white Jewish American man. For him, the cultural relevancy of a Eurocentric curriculum enabled him to view history and schooling as unproblematic, a positionality he would uphold in framing the schooling experiences of his students.

Rosenberg matriculated into a graduate school social studies education program. He credited graduate school for helping him to deal with the technical aspects of teaching, specifically with how to write lessons. Graduate school also enabled him to learn a lot about content. Although he was mentored by a well-known social studies scholar whose work seeks to problematize the historical narrative with a critical lens and help teachers construct learning experiences for students that assist them with constructing evidenced based interpretations, Rosenberg did not mention any of these constructivist attributes. He spoke fondly of the professor’s personality, but not necessarily about his conceptual orientation towards history.

It was teaching, however, that actually prepared Rosenberg for teaching. He started as a special education teacher in a New York City high school, but did not enjoy this experience because “students had too many needs” for which he did not feel professionally equipped to address. When asked how and why he decided to teach specifically in an urban high school,
Rosenberg mentioned having had a friend who “hooked him up.” He spoke at length of his love for the school and appreciation for the administration in supporting him as a new teacher to the school. “I don’t want to let them down. I want to rock these results.” In his view, repaying this support meant providing administration with what they wanted: great Regents exam results.

**Rosenberg’s Conception of Schooling: Smooth Sailing except for the students**

Rosenberg’s framing of his schooling experience suggested he viewed high school as “easy if you put in the work.” In this viewpoint, action trumps context, meaning he ignored or was unaware of the cultural context that made it possible for him as a high school student to do the work and achieve academic success. As a student in a predominately white school, he was a product of Eurocentric curriculum that enabled him to readily connect his Jewish ethnicity to a European/global history curriculum. He was not able to see the invisible Eurocentric norm that may have contributed to his success, resulting in his valorization of personal effort, a value he subsequently tried to instill in his students. This emphasis on effort, specifically what he considered as his own stellar academic effort, framed how he viewed what students needed to do in order to excel in his class. He often told students that “You got to put in the work; you gotta take more responsibility.” Personal effort and hard work would become the dominant lens he used to interpret student behavior and guide the development of his instruction. The context of the actions was not necessarily as important to Rosenberg as the action itself.

On one level Rosenberg’s personal success made him have high expectations for his students to succeed. He often spent extra time outside of class to meet with students who needed extra support. On the other hand, his emphasis on personal effort exhibited a blindness to the contextual factors that might have impeded the abilities of students of color to be successful within a schooling context that systematically undermined their legitimacy as human beings.
Like many teachers who are pressured by the reality of achieving quantitatively measured academic success, he had little patience for students he felt weren’t trying hard enough in his classroom.

**Conception and Enactment of CRP**

For Rosenberg, CRP meant providing students with the opportunity to celebrate their own ethnic cultures. According to Rosenberg, students already possessed a strong sense of cultural identity. “They are very proud of where they came from. I try to incorporate their heritage into my lessons when I can.” When prodded to give a specific example, he mentioned allowing students to create nationalism posters to celebrate their heritage. “My two Puerto Rican students created posters highlighting the food and best of their cultures. It was great because they deepened their understanding of nationalism and got to show their ethnic identity.” For Rosenberg, building cultural competence meant providing students the opportunity to discuss and showcase their culture when the curriculum allowed it. Building cultural competence entailed giving students the ability to talk about their cultures rather than his doing the work of restructuring or tailoring the curriculum to embed student culture within the curriculum.

Rosenberg assumed that students’ abilities to identify the best of their cultures was an indication of cultural competence, a perceived strength that he consequently did not have to cultivate by restructuring the curriculum. His stance that students were “doing ok” is antithetical to one of Ladson-Billing’s central tenets of what constitutes a CRP educator, i.e., the ability to assume that an asymmetrical even antagonistic relationship exists between poor students of color and society (Ladson-Billings, 2008). Rosenberg’s view of the existing curriculum as unproblematic and presuming a cultural competence on the part of students in this case calls into
question what constitutes a CRP educator, as Rosenberg was able to adhere to some CRP principles more than others.

Fostering strong student teacher relationships was very important to Rosenberg for the sake of maintaining control and order in the classroom:

“I take a strong interest in my students’ personal lives. For example, I know who likes videogames. So I’ll say, “Oh, Carlos you’re not going to play videogames tonight, you need to study.” It was a joke. I know who they are on an individual basis and it helps for better management, and it definitely smooth transitions.” (Interview, January 2016).

Student remarks from the focus group affirmed that they really valued Rosenberg’s awareness of their personal likes and overall moods. “He knows me Ms. Like, he’ll notice if I’m in a bad mood and ask me what’s wrong.” From a CRP standpoint, Rosenberg engaged more with building relationships with students rather than with restructuring the curriculum to include student cultural heritages or present a critical perspective on the official historical narrative.

**Historical Literacy: Regents as the Source of all things good**

Rosenberg believed historical literacy entailed giving students the necessary skills to closely read primary source documents in order to increase students’ abilities to remember content. “Primary source documents is where the real work starts because reading history is reading what is written.” Rosenberg believed that exposing students to written texts, specifically primary sources, ensured that students would have the opportunity to practice the historical literacy skill of close reading. As a result of his personal experience with schooling, he viewed primary source texts as neutral, rather than seeing texts as having implicit bias that results in secondary historical narratives being produced in specific ways. Any texts, as long as they were primary sources, would enable him to do the work of historical literacy.
For Mr. Rosenberg, annotation was the vehicle to get students to closely read. “I force my students to closely read by picking out key terms and topics. I also teach them to reread the texts so they get key ideas because understanding history is knowing how different events build upon one another. This makes historical literacy easier.” Although he felt close reading was a necessary skill, he also admitted that students struggled with reading comprehension. “My students have low skills when it comes to reading.” His solution for struggling readers was to present them with more opportunities to read. However, increasing the volume of reading didn’t necessarily mean students would practice historical literacy skills.

Unlike the literature which questions the New York Regents exams as accurate measures of historical literacy (Grant, 2001), Rosenberg vehemently disagreed with this critique when he stated:

The Regents is a pretty fair assessment of historical literacy.” You have to know the content and execute certain historical literacy skills to pass the test. If you come to class, prepare, listen to your teachers, do the work, the Regents will come naturally (Interview, April 2016).

For Rosenberg, exposure to content and primary source reading equated with students’ eventual mastery of historical literacy skills and success on the Regents exam.

Essentially, for Mr. Rosenberg, historical literacy wasn’t about helping students use the tools of historians to develop interpretations based on evidence; rather doing historical literacy meant mastering the skills of the Regents exam. Mr. Rosenberg’s preoccupation with Regents exam skills, which in his mind equaled historical literacy skills, is aligned with historical literacy’s cognitive emphasis on students’ skill attainment.

CRP and Historical Literacy Working Together: Regents as Glass Ceiling
Rosenberg used CRP to teach historical literacy skills primarily by allowing students to showcase their own cultural awareness when it fit into a traditional Regents based history curriculum. Because of external pressures for students to succeed on the Regents exam, he didn’t necessarily feel he had latitude to restructure the curriculum that would allow for student engagement with historical thinking skills beyond those required by the Regents exam, nor did it afford opportunities to embed culturally relevance in a way that was teacher initiated and systematic. For Rosenberg, cultural relevance was the responsibility of the student rather than the teacher. The Regents exam was the glass ceiling and therefore his implementation of both culturally relevant pedagogy and historical literacy would be mediated by the standards and skills determined by the exam. His perception of good teaching and learning was therefore more aligned with what constitutes ideal learning for achieving quantitative academic success than it was about using culturally relevant pedagogy as an asset pedagogy to build upon students’ strengths so they could master historically literacy skills. His implementation therefore highlighted the tensions that result when urban teachers are encouraged to do this work of embedding cultural competence into teaching within current accountability structures that equate student success with test scores. In the next section, I explore the particular themes that emerged from Rosenberg’s implementation of historical literacy within a CRP framework.

**Resources Do Matter: Acting like versus Being a CRP Educator**

Even though Rosenberg had five years of special education teaching experience in a suburban school, he still was a first year teacher at Collegiate High School who was eager to do “A great job and stay on tenure track.” His expectations for success and what great instruction looked like was heavily influenced by the administration’s perception of good teaching and learning. He consequently did not deviate from the administration’s expectations. In fact,
throughout the research study, the administration frequently mandated a new initiative in response to an external review. For example, after a recent visit from the district superintendent who presented the school with feedback, the principal consequently informed teachers that all classes needed to have a written exit ticket. Without question, Rosenberg immediately incorporated written exit tickets into his lessons. The desire to succeed and eagerness to please prompted him to rise to the level of expectation imposed upon him. His implementation of CRP was therefore largely determined by the expectation set by the administration.

Administrators at Collegiate High School were determined to raise student achievement on standardized exams. They believed student achievement would result by helping teachers foster a culture of student-centered instruction, where students were engaged in cooperative learning. Teachers therefore were expected to incorporate group work on a daily basis. Both the principal and assistant principal also recognized students weren’t necessarily engaged in their teachers’ classrooms so they encouraged teachers to diversify student-centered activities. In recognizing that some teachers did not have a range of easily accessible activities to address the concerns of student engagement, the school partnered with AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap by preparing all students for college and other postsecondary opportunities. AVID was founded upon CRP principles and seeks to provide educators with tools and resources to help teachers create a non-traditional classroom setting while meeting the academic and emotional needs of individual students. Although Collegiate High School had emphasized CRP, their expectation was that teachers implemented the ideas and principles teachers learned from AVID training.

After attending a two-day AVID training on how to foster student engagement in an urban environment, Rosenberg eagerly implemented all of the strategies he learned.
provided participants with a resource book containing over 30 reading/writing strategies that promoted student-centered learning. Rosenberg greatly appreciated this resource tool and referred to it as his bible. “Whenever I’m planning a lesson and have to think of something engaging to do, I pick up the book and boom! I have it.” Rosenberg’s reliance on the AVID book suggests as a new teacher expected to do the work of culturally relevant pedagogy, he benefitted from having a tangible resource for instruction. His heavy reliance on the book, however, also serves as a cautionary tale when culturally relevant pedagogy is synthesized into a list of best practices irrespective of the student population and their needs. Ladson-Billings (2008) forewarned educators that teachers dedicated to CRP just don’t implement best practices for best practices sake, but instead consider the particular needs and wants of their students before implementation. Ladson-Billings (1995) admonished teachers who just act out culturally relevant pedagogy practices instead of embodying the attitudes and dispositions of an educator “who recognizes critiques current and social inequalities of students’ lived realities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p.476). Rosenberg, it seemed, enacted CRP as specific AVID associated actions, rather than as a way of being, i.e. a way of thinking about students’ needs as central to the development of instruction.

One of Rosenberg’s go-to AVID activities was the textbook tour, which involved students working in groups to preview a chapter in the textbook. In groups of four, students delineated tasks from the textbook tour and created posters. Below are Mr. Rosenberg’s directions for the textbook tour:
Rosenberg loved implementing this strategy because he felt it aligned with the administration’s expectations and it was an easy strategy to follow. Throughout the semester, students completed a textbook tour for every unit. See a group of students’ below:
In the example above, there is visible equity in participation (as evidenced by the different colored pens used by different students), meaning all students contributed to the poster. For Rosenberg, the textbook tour exemplified engagement because of the equity in participation and student ability to effectively complete the project within the allotted time. “I love the textbook
tour because it runs so smoothly.” Although engaging on one level and able to meet the CRP criteria of cooperative learning, the task doesn’t promote historical literacy skills. Instead, students read secondary sources and mainly summarized their ideas or made connections to other historical topics. Perhaps if Rosenberg had been presented with a tangible tool on how to do incorporate CRP in authentic ways, he would have risen to the task. Since the administration’s version of CRP was simply the implementation of AVID, Rosenberg succeeded in this regard, but this implementation didn’t lead to a deeper engagement with CRP or with historical literacy skills, either on the part of Rosenberg or his students.

**Regents trumps everything**

Scholars (Grant, 2001; Reich 2009) have argued that the New York Global Regents exam is not an ideal assessment to measure students’ historical literacy skills, suggesting that it actually prompts students more often to use their factual recall skills than historical literacy skills. Since the Regents exam was the apex of success, according to Rosenberg, only those skills emphasized on the Regents were the skills students had an opportunity to consistently master. In Rosenberg’s class, students’ academic successes were contingent on their abilities to recall factual content and practice the skill of text summary and synthesis. The structure of the Regents exam also limited any form of historical inquiry that would require students to interpret historical events and form their own opinions. On the Regents exam multiple-choice section, for example, there are right and wrong answers and similarly in Rosenberg’s classroom, he created discussion topics often ending with students needing to have the right answer. For Rosenberg, the Regents exam was the end-all and be-all for planning and implementing his pedagogy, and it led to his adopting a reductionist view of history education, important primarily for the sake of passing the exam.
Rather than focus on “right answers,” historical literacy is more about allowing students to engage in knowledge production by interpreting historical events through primary source analysis. Rosenberg was part of what Seixas (1993) identified as the tendency of many people to view history as a fixed story comprised of predetermined facts. Although primary sources were embedded throughout all of his lessons, Rosenberg believed that the real utility of primary source documents was not about cultivating historical interpretation skills to add complexity to historical narratives, but more about exposing students to the types of tasks and questions they would encounter on the Regents exam. Currently on the document based question section of the Regents, for example, students answer short-answer document based questions that ask them to summarize or synthesize a main idea from several documents. Then students develop an essay which usually requires them to again simply summarize and discuss key points from the documents. In order to get a passing grade on the essay, students are only required to understand the main idea of the source, and they can pass this section with a score of 3 simply by organizing their ideas about the meaning of the documents and summarizing key points (NYS World History Regents Rubric). In Rosenberg’s lessons, students summarized the main idea of each primary source document and then synthesized and summarized the main ideas. See below:
In this example, after answering a series of questions, students are asked to analyze the text by answering whether the source shows a historical figure in a positive or negative way. The student used fragments from the primary source documents to illustrate his point and in the case of the last question did not write in a complete sentence. However, the reader can ascertain that the student did have some understanding of the document that could be strengthened with more elaboration. In reviewing samples of student work, Rosenberg gave students credit for a correct answer, as long as students had the gist of the main idea related to the overall question even if the writing was grammatically incorrect. As egregious (or strange) as this may sound, this practice
of rewarding students for having the gist of an idea even though their writing may be grammatically incorrect emulated the same process teachers use to grade the official Regents exam. Rosenberg’s grading practice was in line with how the exam is officially graded, as students are never penalized for incoherent or incomplete ideas.

Rosenberg felt that students struggled with activities in which they encountered open ended or debatable questions and his pacing calendar didn’t allot too much time to that approach. Therefore, even when students were prompted to analyze or interpret an historical event (vs. simply summarizing it), Rosenberg had a clear idea of the type of answer he was looking for, which usually was one that would allow students to answer a question correctly on the exam. In the lesson vignette below Rosenberg prompted a student to answer a question but with a particular end in mind:

Rosenberg:  Aim:  What conclusions can we draw about Bloody Sunday?  When you’re done writing your aim I need someone to tell me what it means.  Everyone has their aim in their notebooks?  Stop talking.  Paraphrase for me.  Chavez

Chavez:  I don’t know what Bloody Sunday means.

Rosenberg:  You can’t say that.

Chavez:  Ok.  I don’t know what it means, but I think Bloody Sunday was about a Sunday that was bloody.  Ha!

H: Ok, but what is the overall aim, what are we even studying? Quiet

S:  Russian Revolution

Rosenberg:  We gonna be lookin’ at the event within the revolution.  We are going to read in your groups and read the annotation guide that gives you evidence to support the
idea of what Bloody Sunday is. You are going to write two paragraphs about the main
idea of Bloody Sunday. You’ll get it from the reading. Each group will share out the
main idea. I’ll give you 15 minutes to annotate. Yo, yo, yo, you acting like children
again. It’s not good to be a failure. It’s not cool.

In this example, Rosenberg sought to have students paraphrase the aim to set the purpose for the
class. Although he stated that he wanted students to paraphrase the meaning of Bloody Sunday,
Rosenberg was not satisfied with Chavez’ response. At first he insisted that Chavez can’t just
say he doesn’t know what Bloody Sunday means, but when Chavez provided an answer,
Rosenberg then wanted him to connect Bloody Sunday to the Russian Revolution. The
underlying purpose of the question was to center the students’ thinking around content about an
event related to the Russian Revolution.

For the remainder of the lesson Mr. Rosenberg asked students to annotate a secondary
source and answer document based questions to write two paragraphs about the causes and
effects of Bloody Sunday. Rosenberg’s reading and writing tasks were typical of most history
classrooms in that the focus involved basic reading comprehension and summary of information
(Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). Overall, he was more concerned about helping students
acquire factual knowledge than with their engaging in historical thinking/literacy processes that
would enable them to build higher level knowledge (Nokes, 2013).

**Control and Order**

In her research, Pace (2015) mentioned that teachers face a perennial tension of exerting
and relinquishing control over students. Often those higher order thinking tasks that teachers
want students to engage in mean that teachers have less control over student behavior. Mr.
Rosenberg often struggled between attending to the reality of the Regents exam and engaging
In Dreamkeepers (1994), Billings attributed cooperative learning with being a key strategy of African American and other teachers who worked successfully to raise student achievement. Because cooperative learning was a school-wide initiative, Rosenberg did implement cooperative learning activities that aimed to promote student development of claims based on analysis of documents. In these lessons however, there was a visible increase in the Rosenberg’s volume in speaking to students and levels of impatience with student chatter. He struggled with implementing activities that promoted student collaboration and inquiry for fear of losing control in contrast with chalk and talk activities that would allow students to recall historical topics on the Regents exam and give him greater control.

Mr. Rosenberg’s interpretation of student-centered instruction meant that “students would do most of the work in class.” Embedded within his conception of student centeredness was also an assumption that students would adhere to his strict behavior rules such as being quiet and staying on task. Part of relinquishing control necessitated that students would talk more in class. However, Rosenberg was not comfortable with a shift in student behavior as they aimed to do more student-centered work. In one class I observed, Rosenberg wanted students to peer-edit each other’s essays because the majority of the students had not passed the recent in class essay exam. He stated, “Listen up. You’re going to be grading someone’s essay. This is not a group assignment but pairs.” Students began to move around to find a partner. Immediately Rosenberg expressed his dissatisfaction with the level of noise in the classroom. “Whoa, whoa, whoa let’s go. If you wrote your essay in Spanish, you need to find someone who can read your essay.” Students significantly quieted down. After about three minutes as students settled into
their pairs, the noise level in the room rose again. Rosenberg used this as an opportunity to restate the task with behavioral expectations:

I’m going to hand out a rubric. Then you will going thru the rubric. You are going to be honest. I’m going to check. I want 5 things you thought were good and 5 you thought were bad. You guys got that? You can’t read and talk at the same time. I’m going to give you 12 minutes for this.

Students began reading each other’s essays and providing feedback. Rosenberg seemed to gauge their level of engagement based on the noise level in the classroom. Throughout the lesson he reiterated the requirements of the task without necessarily providing any feedback on student performance on the exam or feedback on their essays. Instead, his feedback aimed to control student behavior.

The lesson vignette above illustrated Rosenberg’s difficulty in relinquishing control so students could engage in cooperative learning activities, a core CRP strategy of engagement. Ladson-Billings (2008) has contended that educators have a tendency to label students as behavior problems when students fail to comply with teachers’ wishes and directives. These labels become self-fulfilling prophecies where “classes are no longer a place where students are taught and expected to learn. Rather classrooms become a place where bodies are managed, and maintaining order becomes the primary task” (p. 164). Although Ladson-Billings’ warning seemed to reflect the realities of Rosenberg’s instruction, it does little to address the direct tension between assessment policies that promote recall and summarizing texts and cooperative learning strategies aimed to promote student ownership and critical thinking. Mr. Rosenberg’s difficulty represented a perennial tension that teachers are often left to figure out on their own.
Cognitive Modeling: Be the expert

Rosenberg struggled with providing students with the cognitive modeling they needed to master the skills needed for the Regents exam. De La Paz and others (2014) suggested that one helpful model for instruction is cognitive apprenticeship (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) “where subject matter experts (teachers) make thinking and literacy practices visible to novices (students) through teacher modeling” (p. 233). Mr. Rosenberg’s emphasis on student personal effort as the primary tool for achieving academic success influenced his reasoning that students were disengaged with content or struggled with writing essays mainly because of their lack of effort not because any lack of understanding. In order to deal with the varying academic needs of his students, he would increase the frequency of the same type of tasks but not provide them with the scaffolding needed to acquire historical literacy skills.

As a formally trained social studies educator, Rosenberg also valorized the use of primary sources in his classrooms. Researchers suggest that the use of primary sources with visible authors increases the chances that students will interact with the texts that they read (Paxton, 2002). However, absent from this best practice is the CRP tenet that context matters, meaning that tasks should reflect the needs of students, most of whom need or would benefit greatly from scaffolded instruction. Mr. Rosenberg’s formal training had prepared him for the technical aspects of historical literacy instruction such as having a skills-aligned lesson plan with clear objectives and assessments, but had not prepared him to modify his instruction such as his lesson plans to reflect the needs or the context of his students. In fact, Mr. Rosenberg struggled with differentiation and deferred this task to the Special Education teacher who Mr. Rosenberg felt was “responsible for scaffolding lessons and tasks for students who struggled” (Interview, January, 2016)
When Mr. Rosenberg did attempt to model his thinking for students, he focused on outlining the characteristics of the task rather than on presenting students with metacognitive strategies to understand the process of successfully completing a task or assignment. In one classroom observation, I noticed that he was visibly unnerved by student performance on the last multiple-choice test. He decided to review the exam with students and called on one student to read the question. As the student began to read, he interrupted the student, “Don’t read. Wait for the respect you deserve.” He then proceeded to read the question himself and then stated, “This is a two-part question. First question is, what are the key terms of the question?” One student responded with, “Russo-Japanese War.” He then instructed students to put those key terms into their notebooks. “I don’t understand how I put these multiple choice questions on the board everyday and 95% of the time you get them wrong. How is that possible? You’re not paying attention. You are not being authentic about your learning.” The class was quiet. Mr. Rosenberg proceeded with: “I’m not giving you the answer. Go into your notes. Who won the war?” Some students in the class said, “the Japanese.” Rosenberg smiled and said, “Yes! Japan gained its power as a world power. What can you eliminate then? Hands up for [eliminating answer] 1? 2? 3? 4?” As students sheepishly raised their hands in response to his question, Mr. Rosenberg nodded in acknowledgement with the answers that needed to be eliminated. He then attempted to model the process. “I want us to think about the process we used. We thought about who won the war and then we were able to eliminate [other choices/selections].” He then instructed students to answer the rest of the multiple choice questions independently. (Field notes, 3/8/16)

In this vignette, Rosenberg emphasized the content necessary to answer the multiple choice question but did not explicitly show the students how to answer the question by
eliminating obviously incorrect answers. In his mind, reminding the students of the steps needed to answer the question equated with cognitive modeling. Students perhaps would have benefitted from a “think aloud” in which Rosenberg modeled the thinking process involved in eliminating certain potential answers and completing the task.

In our debrief session about the lesson, Mr. Rosenberg continued to express frustration with students’ lack of knowledge of historical concepts. “I show them everything. I don’t get it” (Field notes, 3/11/16). Based on the AVID and other professional development experiences with historical literacy, he truly believed he had provided students with the instruction they needed in order to succeed. His training had not provided him with the means for modeling the thinking and writing processes historians use to make meaning of historical content. Without this professional support, Mr. Rosenberg continued to attribute student mastery (or lack thereof) to their temperament rather than as reflective of their academic readiness.

**Fostering Student Relationships**

Findings from Mr. Rosenberg’s student focus groups suggest teacher engagement and level of interest in a historical topic may possibly affect student engagement with the same topic. All students from Mr. Rosenberg’s class who participated in the focus group mentioned genocide as one of the favorite historical topics explored in class. When prodded, students were able to define genocide as a mass killing, but when asked to provide specific examples of genocide throughout history, many students struggled to cite examples other than the Holocaust. They were able to recount in detail Hitler’s motivation, the number of Jews killed and the effects of the Holocaust. Perhaps Mr. Rosenberg’s pedagogy on the genocide unit shed light on why students were able to readily exhibit factual information and discuss the motivation for and effects of the Holocaust, based on what Mr. Rosenberg presented.
Mr. Rosenberg felt that his role as a history educator was to provide students with an unbiased and objective presentation of historical events. However, during my observation of his unit on genocide, Rosenberg stated in this class and in others his viewpoints on genocide and its historical origins:

Genocide is the killing of people for their identity. I was actually talking to Kayla and she was asking me how are we going to end genocide or why are we killing people? I said genocide is killing people by their first name. For example, today we’re going to kill people with the last name K. What I’m trying to make you understand is genocide is as stupid as killing someone with their name (Field notes, 3/8/16).

The class was quiet as Mr. Rosenberg spoke. He continued: “I want to ask you a question. Can we stop genocide? Raise your hands if yes.” A few students raised their hands and Mr. Rosenberg called on Virginia, who stated, “Yes. I think it is possible to stop genocide.” Mr. Rosenberg then challenged her, “Virginia, if I walked to ISIS and I said I’m a white dude from New York, you think they would listen to me? Who also said it can be prevented? There’s no right or wrong answer. It can’t be eliminated like that.” Since Mr. Rosenberg stated his belief that genocide can’t be eradicated, no student raised his hand to present a counter belief that it is possible to eliminate genocide. Mr. Rosenberg claimed to have an objective approach towards teaching history in order to allow students to formulate their own interpretations. Yet, in this instance when students offered their own interpretation that genocide could be eradicated, Mr. Rosenberg imported his subjective stance. Mr. Rosenberg’s cynicism about the possibility of eliminating genocide contradicted the CRP tenet that students need to learn about injustices for the purpose of improving societies (Billings, 1995).

Before calling on another student, Mr. Rosenberg continued to talk:
How do you become racist? Where do they come from? How do they get those feelings? Racism is taught. It’s passed on. It’s from experiences. Experiences shape who you are. If you grow up in a neighborhood where you were oppressed by white people and cops then you probably do not like white people or cops. My role as a teacher is to stop these ideas. Stop them completely.

There’s no difference between gender, culture or race. Everyone is equal. It doesn’t make sense to kill you because you’re darker than you/me? You have a duty as a citizen to fight racism. It’s your job to fight genocide, racism and fight for equality. You judge people by their character, by the way they speak, how they treat you. Twelve million people died? During the Holocaust in World War II. We see. That it opens again. History repeats itself” (Observation, March 2016)

Students were visibly quiet after Mr. Rosenberg’s speech. From all of my observation visits, it was the first time I noticed him speak with conviction and emotion. He attributed acts of genocide to the consequences of racism. Interestingly, instead of providing students with an example of how racism led to an act of genocide in the case of the Holocaust, he provided an example of how people of color can become racist towards cops because of their prior experiences. He then asserted that his role is to stop the spread of racism, but from the vignette, it seemed that his focus was to stop a particular manifestation of prejudice, i.e., his view of students’ (of color) perceptions of white people.

Mr. Rosenberg’s statement highlighted the dangers that teachers face by not examining their own beliefs or having the tools to deal with raced-based discussions. In this conversation, he expressed some controversial viewpoints such as students of color can be racist and that racism was more a personal issue than an institutional system that subjugates people of color. In
a prior interview, Mr. Rosenberg admitted that he “had no idea how to talk to students about racism” (Interview, February 2016). His stance therefore represented a statement by a teacher who hasn’t examined the system of racism.

Despite promoting his own beliefs in the instance above, Mr. Rosenberg believed history teachers need to take an objective stance in the presentation of historical content. This aligns with historical literacy’s quest for young people to learn how to use history in the pursuit of truth and objectivity (Lee, 1984). This quest towards objectivity represents a positivist view towards history by ignoring that everyone enters a rhetorical space with baggage—spatial, historical, racial and gendered perceptions (Code, 1995). The quest for objectivity and truth however ignores that the perceptions of those in power are able to control what counts as knowledge and truth (Fricker, 2007). Mr. Rosenberg proclaimed his belief in objectivity but exhibited none during conversations on race and in other instances as well. His understanding of racial origins as being attributed to personal perceptions of different groups reflects a privilege of a member of a dominant group not having to reflect on themselves as cultural beings who are the product of particular experiences that have placed them in privileged opinions. Objectivity, in essence, tends to be defined by those in power. Proponents of CRP like Geneva Gay (2010) encourage CRP educators to reflect on the baggage they have knowingly and unwittingly internalized.

**Dominant Cultural Competence versus Cultural Relevant Academic Achievement**

High-stakes testing is part of what Paris and Alim (2015) considers a “dominant cultural competence” because of its prominent role in influencing school culture and framing what constitutes a school’s success. Dominant cultural competence, which accepts the legitimacy of high stakes testing, in many ways contradicts the CRP tenet of cultural competence, which also presents a broader understanding of academic achievement. In fact, Ladson-Billings (2008)
regretted using the term academic achievement because many too educators equated it with test scores. She eventually decided to endorse the term “student learning” to highlight what it is that “students actually know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers” (p. 34). From the perspectives of the students in the study, students in focus groups spoke about their own growth with academic readiness and overall general fondness of Mr. Rosenberg and his instruction. However, students’ awareness of growth did not align with Rosenberg’s perception of student academic gains.

During the month of May, Mr. Rosenberg was visibly anxious as the Regents exam was one month away. His patience for normal student chatter became intolerable. His lessons were colored with “Shssh” or “quiet down” more frequently than usual. As he provided students with tests to measure their historical knowledge and skills, he realized that students were not actually as prepared for the exam as he assumed. In line with how he dealt with student readiness in the past, he continually gave students more tests and quizzes as an attempt to make student more accountable and he was hopeful for different results. The frequency of the tasks however did not yield greater student outcomes on classroom tests or the Regents exam they completed.

At our last meeting, Mr. Rosenberg revealed his dismal passing rates. Eighty percent of his students had not passed the exam, although the city-wide passing rate for the Global Regents exam however was only 20%. He attributed the low passing rates to a myriad of reasons, all of which placed students as the culprits: “They didn’t come to afterschool. They don’t pay attention. They did not take this exam as seriously as I did. I had high expectations.” Mr. Rosenberg’s reasoning reflected one of the more deleterious effects of high-stakes testing on teachers as they internalize pressure to yield greater and greater student outcomes. As the exam
became more and more imminent, Mr. Rosenberg continually shifted his focus on test results instead of the students as learners.

Students’ perceptions of their growth however painted a different picture. Students from the focus group were able to speak specifically about the ways they grew as learners:

Student 1: I used to hate writing essays. We did it so much, that I don’t mind it anymore. I can do it.

Student 2: I learned to use better vocabulary in the class.

Student 3: I think English and this class helped me with my writing. I used to be bad at it. Now I’m actually better.

Student 4: I learned to be a great debater because of discussions. I want to be a lawyer. I’m good at it now.

Students also revealed deep appreciation for Rosenberg’s caring nature. “If I was a teacher, I would be just like him. He always asks us how are we doing? Like he just cares. He always says, ‘if you need anyone to talk to, I’m here’” (Focus group notes, 6/8/16).

While students seemed to appreciate Mr. Rosenberg’s caring nature, Mr. Rosenberg was unable to recognize or appreciate his students’ efforts, growth in understanding or skills. On one level Rosenberg’s obsession with testing results suggested a linear view of the purpose of learning; his view was learning was equated to passing the test. On the other hand, one can consider Mr. Rosenberg’s determination to achieve high tests results as a means of equipping students with dominant cultural competence, which is needed in order to provide opportunities for the students to succeed in the world. Sleeter (2012) reminds us that of the prominent role tests plays in schooling:
In reality test results bring consequences, such as whether a student receives a diploma or what kind of publicity a school or its teachers receive. Schools with scores that do not rise, like businesses whose profits do not expand, are subject to closure (p. 563). In short, if students do not pass the Regents exam, then they will not graduate which puts them at a significant disadvantage in competing in the real world.

The inability of Mr. Rosenberg to recognize any student growth and mastery since the beginning of the year underscores how teachers operate under competing and contradictory schooling discourses. Ladson-Billings (2014) acknowledged that educators have “dual responsibility of external performance assessments as well as community and student driven learning” (p. 83). In this case, Mr. Rosenberg’s responsibility was not just choosing between two discourses, but multiple discourses that included teaching historical literacy skills, incorporating CRP, and educating students on general reading comprehension. These initiatives are seemingly complementary but in its implementation mutually constitutive.

**Chapter Summary**

Mr. Rosenberg’s positionality as a White Jewish American male contributed to his view of schooling as a functional institution with a working system of meritocracy. He believed that if students worked hard then they would attain academic success, as was his experience as a student. He therefore imbued this ideology by sharing his personal success stories with students and also sought to instill this viewpoint into his students. For him, the current school system works; when it didn’t work for his students, the individual student was to blame and not necessarily the institution. Although this belief and his de-contextualization of students’ lived realities didn’t align wholly with the tenets of being a CRP educator, he was however able to
successfully build strong teacher-student relationships, which is another central tenet of the CRP framework.

Even though research does not support the Regents as an accurate measure of historical literacy skills, Mr. Rosenberg equated the two and initially became disheartened with students outcome on the Regents. Despite dismal passing rates and his dismay for students’ abilities to “get it together,” Mr. Rosenberg remained steadfast to his commitment to serve the school in the best ways. For example, he volunteered to teach summer school so that more students would have the opportunity to retake and successfully pass the Global History Regents exam in August. His valorization of effort was not aimed only at students, but also reflected a personal value system he chose to abide by.

The extent, however, to which Mr. Rosenberg was able to attend to the CRP tenet of building students’ cultural competence through the restructuring of the curriculum was severely limited by the institutional context in which he had to prepare students for a high stakes exam. Student results on the Global Regents exam potentially served to solidify his image as an effective teacher if successful and also harm his evaluative standing with administration if students performed poorly. The Regents exam also potentially served to reaffirm his belief in “personal effort” as the driver of all things related to academic success. Ultimately when students didn’t receive the high grades he imagined, he fell back on his belief system cultivated from his own early successful schooling experiences to find flaws in student temperament, rather than in the educational system.

Because of this commitment to effort, Mr. Rosenberg exerted his best effort to ensure students would succeed. His instruction therefore focused on maximizing student exposure to Regents exam related tasks. Students only practiced the general literacy skills of comprehension
and summarizing because these were the skills required to pass Regents exam. When students didn’t do well, he continued to provide them with more and more tasks, with an expectation that increased frequency of Regents tasks would ultimately lead to better student results. But he never modeled the types of historical literacy skills that would have had the potential to teach students higher level skills. His approach for dealing with variance in student mastery of historical thinking skills reflected both the institutional effects of standardized testing on teachers and his skill readiness as a new teacher at the school.
Chapter 7

Findings across Case Studies

“Teaching is a struggle; but it's a struggle with purpose. It's like we know there's going to be a highlight at the end.” Mr. Vargas

In framing teaching as a struggle, Mr. Vargas highlighted the complexity and tensions innate to teaching. However, embedded within Mr. Vargas’ resolve that teaching is a struggle is a positive denial of the “struggle” as insurmountable and a determined certainty that something good will evolve from this struggle. The purpose of this study was to uncover the instructional purposes, successes and struggles of everyday secondary history teachers wanting to do right by their students with the hopes of some successes at the end. Results from this study however question whether a teaching journey filled with struggle guarantees positive results for students amidst the contexts of urban teaching.

In addition to preparing students to fulfill the New York Social Studies Learning Standards curricula requirements and Regents exams, social studies educators have been tasked with teaching students historical literacy skills with the advent of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Even prior to New York’s adoption of CCLS, New York curricula have been criticized for the overwhelming volume of content that forces teachers to cover rather than teach content (Grant, 2001). CCLS however requires that teachers adopt a depth-over-breadth approach to teaching history by presenting students with continuous opportunities to learn historical literacy skills. To date, there hasn’t been a clear approach for teachers on how to integrate content-heavy standards within current accountability structures that test students on content knowledge and rudimentary historical thinking skills. Teachers, therefore have been left
to their own faculties in determining the best approaches to integrate historical thinking skills into their teaching.

In addition to shifting curriculum initiatives, teaching in an urban school environment has other formidable challenges as well. Collegiate High School qualifies as a high needs school with a population of 80% of students qualifying for free lunch. Collegiate also had a high population of Emergent Bilinguals and newcomer students and about 60% of percentage of students had scored a 1 or 2 on 8th grade ELA exam indicating they were reading below grade level. Teaching students with varied academic and socio-emotional needs was a challenge teachers also had to figure out on their own.

Schools in urban contexts are also more susceptible than other types of schools to the negative effects of standardized testing (Milner, 2014; Noguera & Wells, 2011). Collegiate was no exception. As a Renewal school, they were expected to make academic yearly progress or face school closure. To address these challenges, administrators at Collegiate High School decided to that teachers should adopt some culturally relevant teaching principles into their teaching practices. This desire to use CRP came from a need to raise student achievement and recognition that students were more than their 8th grade ELA results. Administrators specifically wanted teachers to build key relationships with students, have high academic expectations and empower student confidence in themselves. In addition to teaching CCLS, teachers were expected now to incorporate the historical literacy and CRP principles into their teaching practices.

This study explored what ensues when teachers try their best to incorporate culturally relevant principles into their history instruction within an urban context. In this case study, three teachers at Collegiate High School were committed and willing to provide instruction that
integrated historical literacy skills into a CRP framework. While CRP and historical literacy are complementary in theory and a study by Salinas, Blevins and Sullivan (2012) demonstrated how a teacher successfully integrated the two approaches, results from this study question the ease or seamlessness of integration. This study explored how three teachers in an urban high school over the course of a semester managed the tensions of teaching historical literacy and CRP in U.S. and global history classes. Exploring the tensions that the teachers faced and the ways in which they resolved them provide knowledge about the obstacles that teachers may encounter in attempting to integrate the two approaches in urban schools.

Specifically, this study sought to examine these questions:

1. How do teachers’ lived experiences impact their abilities to teach historical literacy within a CRP framework?
2. How do teachers integrate historical literacy with CRP? What, if any, tensions emerge?
3. What are the implications of the study for teaching history in under-resources urban secondary schools?

**Finding 1: Teachers’ experiences as cultural beings affected their perception of students and their needs**

Teachers’ cultural identities affected their perceptions of their students and framed what they believed were students’ particular needs. Depending on each teacher’s own cultural awareness, they framed students as either having empowered or damaged identities impacting the type of instructional supports each teacher offered. All three teachers acknowledged the strengths of students based on an essentialist understanding of students’ ethnicities and used this to varying degrees to frame their instruction.
All three teachers identified culturally with an ethnic group. Mr. Vargas self-identified as an Ecuadorian-American with African roots. Ms. Lorrens self-identified as a Black-American woman. Rosenberg referred to himself as a “Jewish boy.” However, for the two teachers of color, their lived experiences in school and professional settings indicated an acute awareness of the “otherness” associated with their ethnicities. Both of them acknowledged instances of racism, and Ms. Lorrens shared personal examples of experiencing the effects of an intersectionality of racism and sexism. Because of their experiences as teachers of color, they assumed they had insider knowledge of the perceived struggles and strengths innate to their cultural groups and consequently to their students. Both Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens believed students had developed a cynicism about life that could to be leveraged into the historical thinking skill of questioning the validity of historical narratives and mainstream knowledge that purported white privilege. As teachers of color, they constantly had to question racist or sexist injustice. Both teachers understood and believed that students of color also had or would encounter these injustices as well and therefore needed to question the validity of such treatment.

For Mr. Vargas, his experience as a Latino male was colored by instances of feeling shame or less than worthy in privileged spaces. He developed a perception of the dominant sphere or whites as having the upper hand with their possession of critical thinking tools and the power to make people of color feel “deflated.” In reflecting on the pain from these experiences, Mr. Vargas assumed that students would also experience being perceived and treated as pariah because of their race/ethnicity. This feeling of otherness contributed to his sense that students would have a damaged identity and it was his duty to rebuild their confidence through strategic instructional experiences that pushed students to engage in discussion and affirm their identities.
Mr. Vargas dealt with a constant tension between affirming an empowered identity independent of the white gaze and being able to have a respected identity within the dominant sphere. He wanted students to feel proud because of their identities and believed they were empowered because people of color have a history of resilience and resistance. At the same time, he wanted students to be aware and/or careful about how others perceived their ethnic identity in white spaces. He tried to prepare students for both worlds. In his eyes, students were damaged with regards to their experiences as an ostracized other, yet should feel proud of who they are and empowered because they had a natural cynicism and innate skills of being able to question the world. Unfortunately, Mr. Vargas did not fully engage these students’ assets as cynics and questioners; these needed to be cultivated by teaching students to develop the critical thinking skills to compete in the white world to escape feelings of shame. Students therefore needed to know their cultural strengths, their history of oppression and vehemently defend these experiences with textual evidence through discussion. Students’ abilities to succeed in the future were largely dependent on their abilities to occupy these two contradictory spaces.

Like Mr. Vargas, Ms. Lorrens also assumed that because of their ethnic identities, students simultaneously possessed both the aspects of a damaged identity and the remnants of an empowered identity. According to her, the effects of poverty had a detrimental effect on students’ abilities to be fully present or attentive in class. Poverty also meant students lacked the emotional support needed to see value in themselves and in their educational experiences. She however, was not willing to fill in this perceived emotional support void but decided instead to create academic experiences where students of color could see themselves as part of a history of achievement and greatness. Her approach was a positive denial of students’ damaged sense of selves. She felt students needed awareness of their own cultural group’s contribution and access
to a classroom environment that emphasized community. Although Ms. Lorrens advocated for
cultural awareness, her implementation of this actually meant “awareness of one’s blackness”
regardless of their ethnic affiliation. Throughout the semester she deviated from the curriculum
to teach black history.

Both Ms. Lorrens and Mr. Vargas experiences as people of color influenced their desire
to be students’ cultural brokers (Delpit, 2016), where they would function as interpreters,
negotiators and advocates for the students and teach them how to navigate multiple cultural
systems and contexts. In knowing the potential otherness students would feel and have felt, they
tried to convey this reality to students and equip them with strategies. For example, Both Mr.
Vargas and Ms. Lorrens believed that since through schooling the dominant culture silenced the
history of people of color, students needed to have classroom experiences that helped them to
develop a voice. Both teachers placed extreme value on classroom discussions. They wanted to
create a learning environment where students’ voices and perspectives were cultivated so they
could participate in multiple discourses. For Mr. Vargas, student development of voice was
integral to participate and resist in white spaces.

Mr. Rosenberg however, did not share in this perception of students having a damaged
identity possibly because his privileged positionality had not enabled him to see students as
suffering on any level because of their race/ethnicity. However, he perceived that students had a
natural awareness of their own groups’ cultural contributions and therefore he did not have to
spend class time developing this empowered sense of self in class. As a white man, Mr.
Rosenberg’s idea of students and success aligned with the ideology of whiteness that attributes
success solely to one’s level of effort. Student success and failure was ultimately a result of each
student’s individual effort. Ultimately he believed students needed historical literacy instruction
that motivated them to achieve more through persistent practice with test-taking skills. Mr. Rosenberg’s main concern was preparing students to pass the Regents exam, while both Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens wanted to prepare students for academic success and the world.

**Finding 2: Teachers’ experiences with racism directly impacted their view of current curriculum and needs**

Historical literacy as a practice does not call for a reshaping of the history or social studies curriculum. All three teachers however, reshaped the curriculum by adding, removing or over-emphasizing particular content. For Ms. Lorrens and Mr. Vargas there was a need to augment the curriculum with culturally relevant content. Mr. Rosenberg’s Jewish identity resulted in his magnifying aspects of the curriculum that aligned with his cultural roots.

Ms. Lorrens decided that developing students’ cultural awareness actually meant instilling a sense of black cultural identity in her students. Her experience as being the only woman of color in the social studies department often meant being marginalized and the only source of knowledge of her gender and cultural group’s positionality. If students were going to learn about the positionality of their culture and people, she would have to create the content that consequently compromised pacing with the official curriculum.

According to the New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies (NYSED, 2014), global history high school students were supposed to study the contributions of ancient Egyptian civilizations. In addition to meeting these objectives, Ms. Lorrens stretched the topic into a two-week unit to include racist interpretations of Egyptian history. This unit allowed her students to delve into the origins of the African diaspora and reaffirm the idea that Egyptians were black peoples. She asked students to explore why a racist ideology that denies the blackness of Egyptians prevailed by evaluating the role of historians in this process. Ms. Lorrens’ pedagogy
suggested that curriculum augmentation meant student awareness of the achievements of blacks and the prevalence of blackness in all historical content. Ms. Lorrens believed that if students knew that they were indeed of black origin even though they might self-identify as LatinX, they would feel better about who they were as people.

Mr. Vargas augmented the curriculum by using Howard Zinn’s book at the primary text because it represented voices of those marginalized in history. His early experiences with racism made him believe that knowledge of the experiences of people of color as well as their resistance stories was what students needed to learn. Students practiced historical literacy skills from the primary sources in Zinn’s text and continually engaged in dialogue around the content and were expected to connect it to their own experiences. His goal was to instill a broader awareness that U. S. history was not a progressive one and that students could learn from historical actors who were agents of change. The consequence of Mr. Vargas’ augmentation of the curriculum was that he didn’t teach the entire traditional AP U.S. history curriculum, which possibly influenced the dismal student passing rate on the exam.

Mr. Rosenberg carved ample teaching time during the semester for students to delve into genocide. Although he didn’t explicitly say it was a result of his Jewish identity, his passion for the topic was expressed during his teaching. He presented students with strong opinions about the nature and consequences of genocide even though his goal was to provide “objective evidence” (Interview, April 2016) about historical topics for students to formulate their own opinions.

Social studies researches ascribe teachers’ stances towards history (Barton & Levstik, 2004) and teachers’ content and pedagogical content knowledge (Wineburg, 1991; Salinas, Blevins & Sullivan, 2012) as factors in how teachers make curriculum decisions. Findings in
this study however suggest that teachers’ historical positionality (VanSledright, 2002) as cultural beings with racial experiences influenced their curricula decisions as well. All three teachers emphasized historical topics that directly related to their experiences with racism in the United States.

**Finding 3: General Literacy skills took precedence**

Historical thinking skills are advanced literacy skills teachers should aspire students to master through consistent engagement with those skills. However teachers in this study struggled with exposing students to historical literacy skills when they considered the initial readiness of their students reading and writing skills. Since the majority of students struggled with general reading comprehension abilities, teachers constructed learning experiences to tend to this issue, thereby subsuming concentration on historical thinking skills. Teachers struggled with finding the right balance between attending to students’ needs to comprehend text and engaging them with developing claims, sourcing and corroborating evidence.

One study by Riesman (2012a) suggested that reading levels increase when teachers allow students to consistently practice historical thinking skills. In a pre- and post-test study, Reisman found that students made gains in their reading comprehension after teachers implemented the “Reading like a Historian⁶” curriculum framework as their primary curriculum. The teachers in this study however did not use this curriculum and used their own faculties to get students to comprehend texts in deeper ways.

Based on interview data, all teachers in this study were verbalized commitment to the CRP tenet of meeting students where they are, meaning they aimed to provide instruction based on their perceptions of students’ needs. These needs were determined largely by teacher observation of students’ abilities to comprehend primary source evidence and were

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⁶ [https://sheg.stanford.edu/rlh](https://sheg.stanford.edu/rlh)
corroborated by student data which affirmed that the majority of students matriculated into the school performing below grade level. Collegiate High School itself aimed to improve student reading and writing ability by mandating teachers to implement school-wide instructional strategies such as annotation. These contextual factors, coupled with the teachers’ lack of knowledge in strategically scaffolding advanced literacy skills, contributed to the prevalence of general literacy strategies being used in the classroom.

Paraphrasing was one skill all three teachers utilized to help students better comprehend texts. On one level paraphrasing can be deemed a general literacy strategy that does not necessitate student use of historical thinking skills at all. On the other hand, the ability to paraphrase a historical excerpt can be a cognitively taxing practice depending on student readiness. Ms. Lorrens’ students, for example, who were primarily Emergent Bilinguals and newcomers, were able to paraphrase parts of a text. The ability to paraphrase implies an understanding of a key idea from an excerpt and the ability to transpose one’s own words to maintain the integrity and meaning of the original author.

All three teachers also implemented annotation as the primary reading strategy to drive deeper student engagement with the text. Each teacher had some success with varying results based on the frequency of student practice with the strategy, as well as the teacher’s ability to cognitively model the skill. Both Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens required students to annotate the text anytime they presented a text. They asked students to identify key words, make connections and ask questions. While Mr. Rosenberg used annotation more infrequently, only requiring it for DBQ essays. Mr. Rosenberg often asked students to paraphrase or identify the key ideas of documents. At the end of the semester all three teachers claimed student reading comprehension had improved but student performance on the Regents exam at the end of the year belied their
claims. Other classroom assessments, however, do paint a different, more positive picture of student growth.

In evaluating student work products in Mr. Vargas’ class, I found that students were better able to paraphrase key ideas and make connections to other historical topics by the end of the second semester in June than they were in January. This may be attributed to Mr. Vargas’ ability to leverage annotation skills into historical thinking skills by his cognitively modeling (to varying degrees) of how to ask better questions. For example, as students paraphrased an idea, he would then push them to ask a question about the idea to implement an inquiry based approach to historical thinking. By the end of the semester, students were successfully drafting their own essential questions that would drive how they analyzed the document. Despite inquiry of this type being a method to foster historical thinking, the activity didn’t translate into a transferable skill that would help students on the official AP exam that asks students to respond to pre-determined questions rather than pose them.

Mr. Rosenberg always asked students to annotate the text, but struggled with modeling the rationale and purpose for annotation. He consistently and vehemently expressed the requirements for a proper annotation by stating, “make sure you underline the important parts of the document and put it into your own words.” Although Mr. Rosenberg said that his students did improve, student work products did not show evidence of paraphrasing at all. Mr. Rosenberg was actually enforcing the key skills necessary to pass the Global History Regents exam which requires students to paraphrase or summarize. However, without the proper scaffolding, student mastery was futile as evidenced by the quality of annotations produced by the end of the year student work. Unlike Ms. Lorrens and Mr. Vargas, Mr. Rosenberg had arguably a more high stakes teaching load. He taught all of the test taking classes in tenth grade and had the largest
group of students. Such contextual factors such as testing and class size indubitably had an impact on his ability to consistently provide students with the general and historical literacy skills they needed versus those emphasized on the exam.

Ms. Lorrens was the only teacher who was consistently able to have students practice general literacy skills while scaffolding instruction to have students practice historical thinking skills. She also practiced more consistent cognitive modeling to aid students with mastery. In essence, annotation was the first step, not the step to help students towards reading comprehension in social studies. When presented with a document, Ms. Lorrens asked students to annotate individually and then co-construct meaning with their peers. As students were determining key ideas of the text, Ms. Lorrens would circulate the room to assess student comprehension and then ask follow-up question to foster historical thinking. For example, she would ask, “Why would the author say that? Or, what’s his perspective to spark student understanding of bias?” She would also ask students to think about the time period in order to practice contextualization.

Data from the end of the semester showed tremendous gains in Ms. Lorrens’ students’ abilities to comprehend texts. Ms. Lorrens’ strategy to establish meaning first and then analyze the text was an effective strategy. However, it would have been beneficial for students if she named the historical thinking moves she was utilizing as she questioned students.

**Finding 4: Doing CRP meant a restructuring of the curriculum which compromised pacing**

Teachers really wanted to honor students’ academic needs and provide them with the educational experiences that would combat the negative consequences of dominant schooling experiences. They ultimately wanted students to feel empowered and have a better sense of self
as a result of being a student in their classes. However the tension between meeting schooling requirements such as covering the curriculum and preparing students for state exams while tending to the CRP requirements of giving students what they need had consequences. Teachers’ methods of trying to do both--develop dominant cultural competence that aligned with current schooling accountability or testing structures versus cultural competence and attending to students needs--meant they were continually compromising on some level with regards to meeting historical literacy or CRP requirements. Some teachers developed the understanding that the tools of schooling would not be enough to create a more empowered student identity. For them, it was not enough to dismantle the master’s house.

One primary way that Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens attempted to do CRP within the current structures of schooling was by providing students access to culturally relevant texts and/or texts that provided a counter narrative to dominant historical narratives. The teachers varied in the consistency of presentation of these texts depending on the need to fulfill curricular requirements. For example, although Mr. Vargas did teach an AP United States class which culminates in an exam, he wasn’t necessarily concerned with student passing rates. “If they enjoyed the class and learned something, then that is enough” (Interview, June 2016). He therefore believed he had leeway in determining the type of texts students would use in his class. Ms. Lorrens, on the other hand followed the NYSSLS more closely to shape curriculum; students had to master certain topics and develop particular skills. Although she supplemented aspects of the curriculum with texts and counter narratives, she ultimately did not feel she had as much latitude as Mr. Vargas believed he had.

Both teachers provided students with culturally relevant texts for the main purpose of contextualizing students’ internalization of an oppressed identity and give them the academic
tools to help them feel appreciation towards their own culture’s contribution. Mr. Vargas used Zinn’s text throughout the semester to have students critique the dominant narrative and develop a keen understanding of the history of resistance by marginalized groups. Ms. Lorrens, on the other hand, would deviate significantly from the curriculum such as creating a two-week unit to explore historical topics related to black history month. In both cases, teachers compromised student mastery of the official NYLSL curriculum. Students had not learned all of the topics that were included on the exam. However data from focus groups indicated that students felt like learners in both classes and had a positive sense of self as a result of their teacher’s instruction. Unfortunately, these gains did not translate into higher student outcomes on exams, therefore putting students at a disadvantage in fulfilling graduation requirements.

All of the teachers used cooperative learning strategies that allowed students to co-construct meaning, increase student engagement and address what they believed were students’ fears around reading and writing. In every class observation, I witnessed all three teachers requiring that students work together to complete a task and/or share ideas from a text. Collegiate High School had a school-wide mandate for all teachers to incorporate cooperative learning, but the mandate was vague on how or how much teachers should use cooperative learning. Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens however made it a central component of their instruction. It is unclear, however, the extent to which cooperative learning correlated with high passing rates on state exams.

Finally both Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens emphasized student discussions in the class. Although historical literacy advocates support in theory the role of discussion in deepening student learning, reading and writing activities are heralded as the primary way students master historical literacy skills. Yet both teachers of color instead prioritized student discussion over
providing students with consistent practice in historical writing. Perhaps because Ms. Lorrens and Mr. Vargas believed that students of color come from a history of being silenced, they sought to develop student voice. Both teachers asked students to develop their claims and support them in whole-class discussion more than they asked students to first write their claims and provide supporting evidence. Again teachers felt developing students’ speaking capacities was an important goal and mentioned student achievement in this regard. However, official curricular and assessment policies do not measure this skill. Speaking does not necessarily correlate with better writing skills unless teachers equally focus on writing.

The teachers’ emphasis on classroom discussion also was an attempt to address what they believed were students’ perennial fears of complex texts. Allowing students to read and engage in key discussion questions was a staple practice in both Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens classroom to help students overcome the fear of reading. In addition, although Mr. Rosenberg did not carve out ample class time for discussion, he did have students do a quick turn and talk about a long text before asking them to engage in text dependent questions. Teachers felt they couldn’t just give primary source documents for students to interpret before they had a chance to discuss them, as it would further validate student insecurity and disengagement with reading.

Finding 5: Teachers of color had a broadened view of student growth, historical literacy and evidence

Student Growth

Ladson-Billings (2008) expressed regret in using the term academic achievement as a central tent in CRP because many had incorrectly interpret it by equating achievement with test results. Instead, she referred to academic achievement as “what students have learned to do as a result of a teacher’s instruction” (p. 34). Each teacher in this study had a greater vision of
student academic achievement than test results. Although Collegiate High School was under extreme pressure to have students make academic yearly progress, the teachers of color didn’t necessarily internalize these pressures enough to proliferate a test prep culture in their classrooms. Even though Mr. Rosenberg was the only teacher whose class culminated in a Regents exam and he often referred to the Regents exam, he also had a grander vision for his students to develop historical thinking skills so that they could become critical thinkers and advocates for themselves. Each teacher tried to find a balance between testing culture and the culture of good pedagogical practices.

At the beginning of the semester, all three teachers conveyed a commitment to helping students become more confident readers. Historical literacy advocates want students to become better readers, in part by being able to analyze a text to explore author bias and then develop evidenced based claims. The teachers in this study did want students to develop those skills, but first they recognized that students had internalized a palpable fear in reading complex texts. Teachers interpreted student disengagement with reading as the result of not having the right scaffolds to understand complex texts. They therefore employed general reading strategies such as paraphrasing, summarizing and synthesizing to help with student comprehension. They also frequently chunked long texts to make it more manageable for students. By the end of the second semester, all three teachers mentioned that students approached reading with more confidence. Data from focus groups in all three classes corroborate the finding that students felt reading was easier and they didn’t dislike it as much.

Both teachers of color also expressed student ability to speak up confidently in class was a major indicator of student achievement. At some point during the semester, both Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens expressed the sentiment that students “have to be able to talk in front of their
peers” (Observation notes, ) Consequently, both teachers consistently employed discussion strategies such as think-pair-shares and Socratic seminars to help student master discussion skills. By the end of the semester in Mr. Vargas’ class, students were running their own classroom discussions with minimal teacher input. In Ms. Lorrens’ class, students reported not having a huge fear when reporting to their peers around classroom projects. Both teachers then achieved their goal of creating more confident students in regard to voice and discussion.

With regards to writing, all three teachers did succumb to meeting but not necessarily exceeding state mandated expectations for writing. In fact, as a result of their perceptions of students’ academic writing abilities, the teachers’ expectations for their students’ writing actually fell below state-level requirements. NYSLSS, which endorsed CCLS, required students to write clear argumentative essays at grade level. Teachers in this study consistently provided students with argumentative writing prompts that satisfied state writing standards, but some of the prompts required lower grade-level skills. For example, in Ms. Lorrens’ class, which consisted mostly of newcomers and Emergent Bilinguals, students read and produced writing that was between a 4th and 5th grade level. On the one hand having students read such texts is below the historical literacy standard of exposing students to primary source documents that help facilitate historical thinking. However, Ms. Lorrens’ strategy of providing comprehensible texts to students first to establish meaning and then eventually scaffolding students to examining primary source documents was exactly what Emergent Bilinguals and newcomers needed to excel according to the New York English Language Progression standards.

Evidence

In recognizing the history of silence that students of color had been subjugated to through their formal schooling experiences, both teachers of color had a broadened view of evidence.
They wanted students to make connections between historical topics and their own lives. Instead of eschewing students’ use of personal anecdotes and insights about historical topics, especially those that had to do with culture and race, both Ms. Lorrens and Mr. Vargas embraced and advocated for students to discuss their personal experiences in the classroom.

For Mr. Vargas, the concept of evidence was more aligned with that advocated for by theories of culturally responsive pedagogy and critical race theory than those promoted by historical literacy. Mr. Vargas continually presented students with primary and secondary historical texts—i.e., “evidence” as defined by approaches to historical literacy-- for interpretation and synthesis into a historical argument. But he also believed that students’ own experiences were a source of evidence, especially about the effects of the past on the present, and therefore, had standing as “evidence” in the history classroom. Mr. Vargas’ past experiences heavily contributed to his sensitivity towards understanding and preparing students for the potential obstacles they would face as people of color in the real world. He knew students needed to be able to argue well using evidence from texts but he also wanted students to use their own personal experiences. Mr. Vargas encouraged students to voice their experiences as people of color and use them as evidence about how the past affected people of color in contemporary life.

Although Ms. Lorrens did not consistently welcome student use of personal experiences, there were particular times during the semester that she had designated as opportunities to building students’ cultural competence. During the unit on Egyptian history for example, Ms. Lorrens asked students to write about their experiences with cultural bias; in this case, she allowed students to use their experiences in an argumentative prompt about the effects of racial bias in creating the Egyptian narrative. Like Mr. Vargas although not to the same extent, Ms.
Lorrens saw some value in incorporating students’ experiences related to race or culture into the history classroom.

The idea of using student experiences as evidence to support arguments about the effects of the past on the present is not supported by theories or researchers of historical literacy. In fact, many have argued that students need to step outside their own beliefs and experiences in order to understand the past on its own terms (Reisman & Wineburg, 2012; Wineburg, 2001). In short, Mr. Vargas’ views and practices related to “evidence” may have satisfied pedagogical approaches related to culturally responsive teaching while at the same time violate approaches to historical literacy that consider students’ life experiences as an impediment to, rather than an asset for, historical understanding.

**Contextualization**

Historical literacy scholars describe contextualization as the act of “situating a document in a concrete temporal and spatial context” (Wineburg, 1991b, p. 74). Contextualization as an important historical literacy heuristic is ultimately a quest towards objectivity to avoid presentism, i.e., the tendency to impose one’s own personal beliefs on historical knowledge production. Historical literacy scholars encourage educators to avoid instructional practices that lead students towards presentism. They also acknowledge that contextualization is a skill many students struggle to master. The teachers in the study however worked under a different schema of what it meant to contextualize. For them, contextualization meant providing students with skills needed to situate themselves in a concrete temporal and spatial context by promoting students to reflect on how their own lives had been affected by historical events or processes.

CRP educators assume there is an antagonistic relationship between students of color and the dominant society. They seek to develop in students a political consciousness, which allows
them to articulate oppressive systems. It was the teachers of color who took this aspect of CRP
seriously, probably because of their own experiences with oppression. They therefore sought to
inculcate within students that “oppression is real” for the purpose of pushing students to be
aware of structural limitations or obstacles in their lives. In other words, they wanted students to
contextualize historically their own oppression as a step in minimizing the damaging experiences
of being a member of an oppressed group.

Instead of having students only contextualize documents in terms of the period in which
they had been written, both teachers sought to have students contextualize the effects of
historical oppression on their own lives. For Mr. Vargas, he would often ask students about
injustices in their neighborhoods to prompt reflection and then relate contemporary
circumstances to historical phenomena. In the traditional sense, contextualization involves
having the reader question or contextualize the social and political circumstances surrounding a
text in order to gain greater insight into the historical period (Monte-Sano, 2010; Reisman &
Fogo, 2014; Reisman & Wineburg, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013). For Mr. Vargas, students
themselves were the texts to be read and interpreted. Although he would frequently incite
students with provocative questions to help them contextualize their lives, he actually carved out
time at the end of the year to engage students in an historical inquiry project that explored
stereotypes of their choosing. It was important to him that students were aware of the social and
political circumstances surrounding their lives so they would not take things so personally. “The
system will have you thinking that it’s all your fault,” he once said.

Ms. Lorrens used specific instruction to have students contextualize the effects of
oppression on their lives. The unit on ancient Egypt was a prime example of how she picked a
historical topic to allow greater conversation about the effects of racist production of historical
texts on how students may be perceived as a result of their ethnicity. Both teachers stretched the boundary of what contextualization actually meant based on their experiences as people of color.

**Finding 6: Student Resilience vs. Cognitive Modeling**

As CRP educators, there is an expectation that teachers will attend to the socio-emotional needs of their students, realizing that students come from backgrounds of injustice where they need more support to feel academically capable and successful (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006, 2017). CRP recognizes that teachers need to have high expectations for their students and also provide the necessary emotional and cognitive scaffolding necessary to reach those expectations. Strategies such as inquiring about students’ well-being and allowing them to talk about their personal experiences and develop positive relationships are touted as effective means to engage in CRP. Teachers in this study attended to students’ emotional needs either by engagement and/or positive denial.

Mr. Rosenberg, for example, believed that students needed a teacher who would push them to exert more effort towards academic success. In order to push students to the max, he felt he needed to also have a positive relationship with students. He therefore would ask each student about their well-being consistently in class and engage students in and outside of the classroom. Students reported that they felt that Mr. Rosenberg was there for them.

Mr. Vargas and Mr. Rosenberg were most aware of the day-to-day realities of their students’ lives and actively sought to develop and maintain positive relationships with their students. Ms. Lorrens, however, did not feel she needed to cultivate relationships with students outside of the classroom and sought instead to make her in-class instruction a supportive classroom environment. All three teachers were warm demanders (Kleinfeld, 1975); they set high expectations for their students by consistently and strongly conveying that students needed
to excel on in-class tasks. Mr. Rosenberg and Mr. Vargas, the two teachers who valued positive student relationships the most, struggled with their roles as warm demanders specifically in finding the right balance between expecting students to succeed based on their perceptions of students as being resilient and scaffolding learning through cognitive modeling for students to reach those high expectations.

Mr. Vargas was the epitome of a warm demander. He knew all of his students’ personal histories and general interests. A majority of students referred to him as “sorta like a dad,” “annoying at times” with regards to demanding achievement, but they also saw him as loving. His personal relationships with students gave him an awareness of their challenges outside of schools and garnered in him a true respect for “their ability to show up despite everything.” Even though he knew their personal struggles, this never stopped him from his focus of helping students to excel academically. Throughout the semester there were numerous examples of Mr. Vargas pushing students to think beyond surface level understanding of texts and historical events. He combined his stern commitment to students’ academic success with sensitivity to their vacillating emotional needs. It was common for him to say, “I love you guys” after admonishing the whole class for not completing a homework assignment. Mr. Vargas’ caring temperament contributed to students’ engagement and general attitude of liking him and social studies.

Focus group students from Mr. Rosenberg’s class all noted how much they appreciated his sincere interest in their lives. One student remarked, “He really cares about us Ms. If I’m having a bad day, he knows and will ask me what’s wrong” (Focus group notes, 6/7/16). Although Mr. Rosenberg ran a tight ship, with strict rules, students seemed to appreciate his rigidity in upholding a structured classroom environment. In one interview, Mr. Rosenberg said,
“Our kids need structure; they have been through a lot and I’m here for them” (Interview, January 2016).

Teachers who attend to the emotional well-being of their students aim to find the right balance between understanding each student’s circumstances while also pushing them to grow intellectually. Yet each side of this spectrum is wrought with unintended consequences. For example, according to Delpit (2012), even when learning issues arise due to the conditions of poverty, warm demanders help students find solutions rather than make excuses. However, what are the consequences when a warm demander is too solutions oriented? Mr. Vargas’ awareness of his students’ resilience in overcoming personal challenges often led him to project onto students a cognitive skill set of “knowing” and being able to “figure it out.”

To Mr. Vargas, students’ daily presence in his classroom meant they had a creative capacity to survive in a world that wasn’t welcoming. His belief that students had a “survivor skill set” or creative capacity to figure things out was a working schema he employed when designing student learning experiences in which students continually had to rely on their own understandings to achieve proficiency in history. Mr. Vargas often provided emotional support to his students, but not the cognitive supports or scaffolds students needed to improve their historical writing. Mr. Vargas expected students to write excellent essays, but he did not provide the scaffolding they needed. When students exhibited uncertainty with a concept or idea, Mr. Vargas directed them to “look it up.” Mr. Vargas’ belief in students’ resiliency prevented him from offering the cognitive modeling that students needed (Reisman, 2015).

Mr. Rosenberg also struggled with cognitively modeling tasks for his students and the absence of effective modeling possibly might have attributed to the lack of student growth on writing tasks. Because he assumed that students were strong willed as a result of their personal
experiences, Mr. Rosenberg inadvertently might have attributed student confusion or inability to complete tasks as the result of their lack of effort and not because of their cognitive abilities.

Finding 7: Teachers of color broadened the scope of historical literacy

Researchers have differed in their understanding of the role of historical literacy and the purposes of a history education. For example, Wineburg (2015) argues that the goal of disciplinary literacy is to inform the duties of a citizen. Moje (2015) contends that disciplinary literacy is a “social justice pedagogy in that it makes powerful forms of knowledge available to students from marginalized groups and involves these students in the construction and critique of knowledge of the past” (p. 44). Teachers of color in this study also offered an alternative conception of the role of historical literacy that was more oriented towards a social justice framework. They also extended the scope of the purposes of historical literacy as a tool to enhance students’ chances of upward social mobility and empowerment.

All three teachers believed historical literacy would help students succeed academically in their classrooms. The teachers of color in this study however were also concerned about arming students with historical literacy skills as a way of neutralizing or undoing the negative self-images students may have internalized as students of color because of their experiences with a Eurocentric curriculum. Both Ms. Lorrens and Mr. Vargas wanted to cultivated students’ abilities to pose questions as a historical thinking tool to interrogate the historical production of Eurocentric narratives and as a tool to question oppressive injustices students may have experienced in their own lives. This intent aligned with the CRP social justice orientation of having students developed a sociopolitical consciousness and racialized the purposes of historical literacy.
According to Kirkland (2014) “Literacy is more than the acquisition of reading and writing skills. It is also a social practice or social currency to social mobility and empowerment” (p.394). Both Mr. Vargas and Ms. Lorrens had envisioned the world students would enter; it was a world filled with instances of racisms where students would ultimately feel shame or otherness based on their ethnicity. However, for Vargas, students would have the opportunity to lessen the effects of experienced racism if they mastered oratory and argumentative skills. Ms. Lorrens’ focus on black history in her classroom served as an anti-racist tool to combat the negative stereotypes students may have internalized as well. Both teachers’ emphasis on discussion suggests an attempt to build up students’ voices as students of color history and voices have been marginalized throughout history.

The purpose of historical literacy for teachers of color was not for students to develop objective stances towards history nor was it to help students analyze multiple perspectives to develop an argument. Both teachers of color viewed historical literacy as method of building students’ positive academic identities and ability to “hold their own” in white spaces or social interactions teachers felt were conducive to students experiencing racism. Kirkland (2014) suggested that in urban spaces, “literacy learning is linked dialogically— as in a more focused social act— to efforts of both individuals and groups to redress social inequities” (p. 398). In this case, teachers of color expanded the role of historical literacy to include racial content knowledge and particular reading, speaking and writing skills.
Chapter 8

Summary and Implications

The Road Less Traveled

Although in theory culturally responsive pedagogy and historical literacy principles and practices can be conceptualized as complimentary and may map onto the same instructional program quite well, many tensions or contradictions arose for teachers in actual classrooms. This study aimed to capture the challenges and success of real teachers in urban contexts trying to do good for their students. The work and vision of these teachers to incorporate historical literacy skills and culturally relevant practices into their instruction represents a grander vision than current structures of schooling that valorize test prep cultures, teacher-centered instruction and rote memorization skills. The findings from this study can inform the pedagogical practices of social studies teachers in urban and perhaps other contexts who are committed to do the work of historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy. The findings may provide insight on instructional strategies aimed at ethnically and academically diverse students. In addition, the study has implications for researchers and policy makers interested in advancing the historical understandings or students of color who live in low-income communities.

The urban school context is unique and yet an understudied phenomenon in the realms of historical literacy research. Urban school presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for educators who teach there. In 2013, Milner and Lomotey offered a collection of essays to address what they believed was a “sporadic, disconnected, multidimensional knowledge base in urban education” with “an absence of a coherent assessment of needs, challenges, problems, and solutions in urban education” (p. 35). They affirmed that urban literacy research suggests that social context is central to human development. The social actors in this study dealt with
challenges particular to the diverse urban landscape and instructional implemented strategies with different degrees of success to address these challenges.

Finally this study expands on the literature of historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy in developing a theory towards urban historical literacy. By examining the perceptions and lived experiences of teachers in urban contexts, as well as their pedagogical practices and its effects on student learning, this study underscores the important role that context and culture play for students and teachers in social studies classrooms. A theory of urban historical literacy acknowledges that teaching historical literacy in an urban context presents unique opportunities and challenges for learning that should be situated as central to understanding in the planning of instruction for students of color. The study has expanded on historical literacy research by evaluating how teachers sought to teach those skills to students and conceptualize the meaning of these skills in light of the needs of their students. Studies on historical literacy in urban schools have focused mainly on the implementation of curriculum (Riesman, 2011; Monte-Sano, 2015; Gerwin, 2014a) and teachers’ pedagogical practices (Nokes, 2011) but not how teachers take students’ funds of knowledge and perceptions of contexts to create learning experiences for students. Urban historical literacy acknowledges that teachers and students in urban schools have unique challenges, funds of knowledge and approaches to social studies instruction.

Lastly, this study informs the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy by exposing what implementation looks like on the ground level in the context of teachers having to meet several pedagogical demands or requirements. It prioritizes challenges as a central phenomenon to be explored within these realms rather than aberrations to the theory. This study also provides empirical research on how teachers’ use of culturally relevant pedagogy can positively or
negatively affect student outcomes. In this case, certain pedagogical practices overall improved
general literacy skills and some historical literacy skills.

**Implications for Teacher Self-Reflection**

Teachers in the study did their best to provide what they perceived were the most needed
instructional experiences for their students. Their perceptions were undoubtedly influenced by
their existence as cultural beings who had undergone experiences as a result of their race and
gender identities. The teachers’ early schooling experiences also contributed to their
understanding of what students needed to excel. It is evident therefore that teachers would
benefit from reflecting on their unconscious and conscious beliefs about what constitutes proper
schooling for students.

According to Ladson Billings (1995a), the success of students is based on teachers’
conceptions of self and others, conceptions of students, and a critical conception of knowledge.
CRP calls for educators to have a solid conception of self; historical literacy does not. However
even within the CRP framework, there does not lie a compelling call for an examination of
beliefs or how lived experiences have impacted perceptions of students. For example, Ladson
Billings (1994) said that in conception of self, CRP educators “believe all students should
succeed, help students make connections between home, and life” (p. 55). These aspirational
beliefs showcase the hallmark of a CRP educator, but do not delineate how one can cultivate
these beliefs themselves. In this study, teachers’ concepts of self were largely determined by
previous lived experiences. Therefore, providing teachers with a process of reflection to have a
solid conception of self and students is needed to enhance their abilities to teach in culturally
relevant ways.
Teachers of color in this study also had a stronger social justice orientation and preference for enacting culturally relevant principles into their practice than did the white teacher. Interview data illustrated that teachers’ positionalities as members of a marginalized group heavily influenced how they imagined what their classrooms should look like. Although much of instructional practices came from an assets-based approach of seeing their students as resilient, two out of the three teachers assumed that students had remnants of a damaged identity as a result of their schooling experiences as students of color. These perceptions of students did not align with how students perceived themselves based on the focus group data. For example, no student said, “I feel bad or sad because of my previous schooling experiences.” Yet based on these perceptions, teachers employed methods such as using stereotype threat as a motivating tool to encourage academic success or decided not to draw upon students’ experiences with poverty as a fund of knowledge.

All teachers also struggled with their roles as warm demanders as they tried to balance having high expectations for students while simultaneously acknowledging that each young person came from unique circumstances and needed individualized instruction. External pressures from the school to make academic yearly progress contributed at times to teachers feeling pressured for their students to make quick academic progress and they often used assessments similar to those used in AP or Regents based exams. In other words, teachers reacted to external pressures by putting more pressure on the students. Acknowledging these pressures might have alleviated how teachers responded to them.
Implications for Instruction

According to the three teachers, students at Collegiate High School struggled with basic comprehension skills. The school-wide focus on annotation was an attempt to address students’ comprehension issues. And two of the teachers responded by teaching students general literacy strategies while incorporating the historical literacy skills of questioning and writing evidenced based responses. However, the result was that most of the instruction did not focus on historical literacy skills. Even with the emphasis on general literacy skills, teachers struggled with how to respond to the diverse needs of learners. A comprehensive approach to dealing with students’ particular literacy concerns is needed. As Ladson Billings (1994) noted, CRP educators “do not ignore the scientific principles of pedagogy” (p. 45). Two out of three teachers struggled with providing students with the cognitive modeling needed to address particular literacy rather than content issues. In order to do this work, teachers need to know how to embed literacy strategies in a way that enables their students to read, write and become critical thinkers (Perin et al., 2009). Historical literacy researchers would advocate for more professional development on historical thinking skills when teachers in urban contexts need professional development on foundational literacy skills as well.

Collegiate High School, like many schools, had the most altruistic intentions by setting many goals to improve student achievement but the school did not increase the time, resources and emotional energy for teachers to achieve these goals. Educators dedicated to teaching history literacy in culturally responsive ways must decide which instructional priorities to adhere to, how to resolve differences that may arise in the instructional aims or programs they adopt, and how to support teachers to best support their students’ learning.

Reeves (2010) used the phrase, “the law of initiative fatigue” to describe the plethora
of initiatives with which educators are bombarded:

The law of initiative fatigue states that when the number of initiatives increases while time, resources, and emotional energy are constant, then each new initiative—no matter how well conceived or well intentioned—will receive fewer minutes, dollars, and ounces of emotional energy than its predecessors (p. 27).

In this study, initiative fatigue was ever-present as evidenced in the ways that teachers responded to having to incorporate general literacy approaches combined with historical literacy skills and CRP goals. It was unrealistic for all teachers to incorporate all three approaches with fidelity and success. Schooling structures must allot time for teachers to prioritize skill goals for their students and have measurements for these skills. They would have benefitted from a clear delineation of the goals from each of these initiatives and ample time and support to set realistic goals.

Finally, with the exception of Ms. Lorrens, the teachers struggled with cognitively modeling tasks to help students master general and historical literacy skills. Sociocultural theory, which undergirds tenets of both CRP and historical literacy, suggest that learning is facilitated through communities of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1991) and that novices learn by observing experts (Wineburg, 1991a). Teachers intended to create supportive communities, but struggled with modeling their thinking around literacy skills. Students definitely would have benefitted from their teacher taking the time to model the thinking process or steps to complete historical tasks and master historical thinking skills. Without a clear exemplar of the thinking involved in these tasks, students struggled with mastery. It is therefore imperative that social studies teachers not only map out content objectives but make expert thinking and literacy

**Implications for Teacher Education**

Despite the contexts in which teachers teach, there is evidence to demonstrate that teachers’ instruction directly impacts student achievement. It is imperative that teachers are therefore aware of the context in which they teach and its impact on their abilities to improve or enhance instruction. In this study, all three teachers’ awareness of the urban context, along with the tendency of the law of initiative fatigue (Reeves, 2010), might have encouraged them to prioritize the initiatives they believed were most pertinent to student achievement. Otherwise, they fall victim to perpetuating the problem rather than proactively trying to deal with the issue.

Research shows that much of the professional development teachers experience does little to shift practice or improve student outcome (Borko, Jacobs & Koellner, 2010). One of the biggest reasons for this is that much of professional development tends to be a one-shot deal. Professional development topics offered to teachers often have little to do with the challenges they face in the classroom. Teachers in this study had multiple responsibilities and altruistic intentions to improve student learning but some of these were competing and contradictory in classroom implementation. One solution is to offer job-embedded professional development over a semester or year that address the “perennial tensions” of contemporary teaching. Instructional leaders must do their best to offer professional development that reflects the needs of teachers and doesn’t overwhelm them, given the many current challenges they already face.

All too often, efforts to reform education and teacher professional development are devoid of deep analysis of “the perennial tensions rooted in the very nature of classroom teaching and how they are intensified by contemporary conditions of schooling” (Pace, 2015, p.
Teachers in urban contexts need professional development that centers on how to manage perennial tensions that were evidenced in this case study, such as having high expectations (set by historical literacy standards) while teaching students who are struggling with basic reading and writing skills. Another prime force of tension involves the rising number of academically and ethnically diverse students for which research suggests the majority of teachers are not adequately prepared to teach (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Young, 2010). Addressing the needs of diverse learners is not an adaptive challenge but a perpetual one that teacher education programs have yet to significantly address. As Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler and Sonu (2012) suggested that teacher educators dedicated to social justice issues construct professional learning experiences that “elucidate the inevitable struggles” around teaching (p. 245). In this case, teachers within this study dealt with perennial and inevitable struggles of teaching ethnically diverse (even as teachers of color) and academically diverse student populations.

In addition to perennial tensions, teachers face adaptive challenges (Drago-Severson, 2009), issues for which a predetermined solution hasn’t been created. People often have to deal with a problem as they are trying to find the solution. How does one teach historical literacy for students who struggle to read and write, and need foundational literacy skills? How does one incorporate historical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy in ways that lead to student achievement and sociopolitical consciousness? These questions represent lofty goals for which no manual exists. Teachers themselves are the authors of these questions and are responsible for finding solutions while simultaneously being evaluated on the effectiveness of these solutions based on student outcomes. Pace (2015) advocates that teachers have time during professional development to deal with these adaptive challenges with support.
Finally, it was evident that each teacher did not have a rich grasp of the research on historical literacy or culturally relevant pedagogy. To their credit, none of them experienced substantive professional development on each topic; administrators counted 1-2 days of professional development workshops as enough learning for teachers to enact culturally relevant pedagogy. Furthermore, teachers attributed their understanding of historical literacy to skills learned in college. The school expected them to teach based on a two-day AVID training. Considering these limitations, all three teachers excelled in their attempts to do good work but unfortunately, their efforts did not lead to increased student achievement as measured by high stakes exams.

**Implications for Research**

More research is always needed in the urban educational context that does not contribute to a deficient minded paradigm towards teaching students of color. Each teacher in his or her own way built upon students’ funds of knowledge. The case studies show the creative and innovative ways that teachers in an urban context engaged students of color in learning. This study calls for further research on the diverse ways of teaching and learning historical literacy in urban contexts.

One of the most pressing implications of this research is related to teaching advanced literacy skills (historical literacy) to struggling readers and writers. There have been studies on how to teach foundational literacy skills to newcomers, but they are rarely linked to student outcomes (or outcomes on high stakes tests), nor do they explicitly take place in the urban context or the history classroom. Teachers in urban contexts face perennial challenges such as creating pedagogies that honor the diversity of students’ academic needs; research is needed on how teachers in this context address these needs.
This study suggests that research related to student outcomes on CRP also is needed. A few studies have documented positive shifts in student knowledge and engagement in history or humanities classes as a result of CRP (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette & Marx, 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Epstein, Mayorga & Nelson, 2011), but not necessarily how that learning relates to standardized assessments and improvement in reading and writing. Pre- and post-test quantitative studies would help bolster claims that teachers should adopt CRP in their work.

**Implications for Policy**

“Despite a plethora of school reform efforts over the past three decades—including standards-based education movements, legislative interventions (No Child Left Behind, the Every Student Succeeds Act), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a multitude of neoliberal reform efforts, increased standardized testing, the proliferation of charter schools across the country, and the unprecedented privatization of public education—one constant has remained: Students of color continue to underachieve in comparison to their counterparts from different racial and ethnic backgrounds” (Howard, 2010, p. 100).

Howard highlights the futility of reform movements that have yet to enhance overall the learning experiences of students of color. The study demonstrated how educational policies such as CCLS impact classroom practices and contradict efforts by schools and teachers to incorporate strengths-based approaches to raise student achievement. Although aspects of CCLS represent sound pedagogical practices, it still followed the trend of policies that have no effect on student improvement. Some argue such policies contribute and highlight the achievement gap rather than mitigate it. Scholars and educators must therefore not fall under the mistake of
believing that school curriculum mandates, such as a school’s adoption of historically literacy, will solve all of the problems of urban education.

Finally, the effects of neoliberal policies were manifested in some of the classrooms, specifically the tendency to equate personhood with performance. In expressing their frustrations with student performance, the teachers attributed it to students’ lack of effort rather than examining schooling practices and structures that have historically marginalized and disengaged communities of color form learning in general and in history.
References


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School Quality Snapshot, Department of Education, 2015


Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, C. (2012). What is disciplinary literacy and why does it


Appendix A: Teacher Interview Questions Beginning of the Year

1. Please tell me about your journey to become a history educator.
   a. What influenced you to be a history teacher?
   b. Why did you decide to teach here at Collegiate High School?
   c. Describe your schooling experiences. How, if at all did it influence you to become a history teacher?

2. What prepared you to become a history teacher?
   a. Describe your academic experiences
   b. Describe any professional development opportunities

3. What methods did you learn in your university experience with regards to:
   a. Historical Interpretation
   b. Historical Analysis
   c. Corroboration of Primary Sources
   d. Synthesizing Primary Sources

4. How do you define historical literacy? Is there a difference in your opinion, between historical literacy and general literacy?

5. How do you teach historical literacy? What are the common reading and writing strategies that you use in your classroom? What types of assignments do you administer to students?

6. What strengths, if any, do students already possess in terms of historical literacy?

7. Describe your students. What are their needs and wants?

8. What aspects, if any, of home and community life support historical literacy?

9. How do you use culturally relevant pedagogy in your teaching?

10. What types of data do you use to make instructional decisions?
Appendix B: Mid Year Interview Questions

1. What have you learned about teaching historical literacy from:
   a. Your students
   b. Professional development
   c. Classroom experience

2. What gains have you made in your instruction and student progress?

3. What challenges are you still facing in teaching historical literacy?

4. How do you teach historical literacy? What are the common reading and writing strategies that you use in your classroom? What strategies seem to be most effective?

5. What aspects, if any, of home and community life support historical literacy?

6. How do you use culturally relevant pedagogy in your teaching?

7. What types of data inform your instructional decisions?
Appendix C: End of Year Interview Questions

1. What are some successes you believe you achieved this year in terms of:
   a. Student academic gains
   b. Instructional Practices
   c. Culturally relevant pedagogical practices?

2. What have you learned about teaching historical literacy?

3. What are some challenges that you believe you overcame with regards to teaching historical literacy?

4. What strategies do you believe were most effective? Why?

5. Do you think that culturally relevant pedagogy impacts your ability to teach historical literacy? Why or why not?

6. What aspects, if any, of home and community life support historical literacy?

7. What type of data will you use to inform your instruction next year?

8. What will you change about your practice for next year?

9. What are some lessons learned that might be helpful for teachers dedicated to culturally relevant pedagogy and historical literacy?
Appendix D: Teacher Interview Pre and Post Observation Protocol:

Pre-Observation:
1. What is the learning targets/goals for today?
2. What strategies are you using to help students get there?
3. How will you know if they achieved the learning target?
4. What types of conversation and thinking are you hoping to see in your classroom?
5. What aspect of historical literacy are you hoping to address?

Post Observation:
1. To what extent do you believe you achieved your learning target today?
2. What parts of the lesson/strategies were most successful? Why?
3. What part of the lesson would you have liked to strengthen or change?
### Appendix E Historical Literacy/CRP Observational Protocol

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<td>Using evidence to construct/explain accounts of the past</td>
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## Appendix F: Rubric for Evaluating Student Writing

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