

Finding Their Voices: Asian American Pacific Islander Representation in Middle School Studies

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Abstract

Asian American history has been misrepresented or omitted from the overall narrative of American history in standards, textbooks, and curricula. The problem was that Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) perspectives were missing and underrepresented in the middle school social studies curriculum in Wisconsin. Framed by Ladson-Billings' culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how middle school social studies teachers integrated the voices of AAPI identities into the curriculum. The research questions probed how middle school teachers met state statutes on including multicultural voices and how they included AAPI perspectives in social studies. Twelve semistructured interviews with middle school social studies teachers were analyzed using descriptive, thematic coding. Applying the CRP framework, five themes emerged to explain how teachers integrated these perspectives. The inclusion of diverse voices was noted as a struggle due to obstacles within the dominant narrative including the influence on the enacted curriculum, the curation of materials, and the application of strategies and artistry. These results support positive social change by drawing attention to the exclusion of AAPI perspectives. Subsequent addition of these voices to curriculum may transform how marginalized voices are included in all parts of society so students experience a robust, inclusive social studies curriculum, helping a diverse democracy thrive in future generations.

Keywords: Culturally responsive pedagogy, Asian American Pacific Islander, middle school education, diversity and inclusion.

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1. Introduction

Asian American history is often misrepresented or left out of the master narrative of American history in the social studies curriculum. In 2023, a bipartisan group of legislators fought for Assembly Bill 232 to pass in the Wisconsin State Assembly. The bill asked for a small change to state law, adding just three words, "and Asian American," to existing laws regarding including diverse voices in the Wisconsin curriculum (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2024). Jonah Hansen, a high school student of Filipino descent, said the exclusion of Asian American Pacific Islanders from his learning has made him feel culturally invisible. At the same time, Korean American teacher Kabby Hong argued that the rise in hate crimes against Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) during the COVID-19 pandemic created an "urgent need for visibility" (Spears, 2023, p. 26). With compelling evidence and bipartisan support, Act 266, requiring schools to include the perspectives of "Hmong Americans and Asian Americans," became state law in April 2024. This action requires schools to add AAPI to the marginalized groups already required by law: Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and American Indians.

Wisconsin law required the inclusion of these marginalized groups since 1995 but excluded AAPI perspectives. Since 2016, Asian Americans have been the fastest-growing group in the United States, and their exclusion from history can perpetuate misunderstanding and promote discrimination. Understanding how teachers have curated sources, focused on creating an inclusive environment, and supplemented the curriculum to include these perspectives will help inform preservice teacher training and the development of professional learning opportunities for in-service teachers. Since Act 266 became law on April 4, 2024, teachers have needed guidance to include AAPI perspectives in the curriculum, which can help all students gain a deeper cultural understanding and prepare them for global citizenship.

While often underrepresented, AAPI is a growing population. According to the 2020 census, Asian Americans are the country's fastest-growing population (Benard et al., 2023; Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). Among 19 categories of Asian origin groups, eleven doubled in size from 2000 to 2019 (Budiman et al., 2019). By 2060, Asian Americans will comprise 12% of the American population (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). In Wisconsin, the

largest Asian American population is Hmong, with 62,331 (Budiman et al., 2019; Pfeifer, 2024). From 2010-2020, the Hmong population in Wisconsin grew by 26.59%, the second fastest growth rate in the country after Minnesota (Pfeifer, 2024). Their history in the state began with their arrival as refugees in the 1970s after participating in the CIA's secret war in Laos during the Vietnam War era (Vue, 2020). However, immigrants from China, Japan, and the Philippines established Asian American identities as early as the eighteenth century (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005). Asian American history is part of American history, yet Chen et al. (2020) pointed out that Asian Americans have faced both erasure and characterization as perpetual foreigners throughout history. They are integrated into American society but often lack representation in popular media, government, business, and education (Chen et al., 2020).

Culturally relevant pedagogy supports the value of including diverse voices. Including AAPI perspectives in the curriculum is part of culturally relevant teaching. While many agree that culturally relevant teaching and culturally responsive practices (CRP) increase student engagement, comprehension (Hammond, 2015), and achievement (Byrd, 2016), these practices are not required in the classroom. However, Muniz (2019) discovered that eight culturally relevant teaching competencies support teaching standards, and most states incorporate culturally responsive teaching into their professional teaching standards.

There is clear evidence that AAPI perspectives are missing and underrepresented in middle school social studies curricula nationwide and in Wisconsin. This represents a gap in practice. This study was needed to understand how teachers include AAPI perspectives. Parkhouse et al. (2021) argued that a lack of access to culturally relevant curriculum and inadequate professional development were obstacles to implementing culturally relevant practices. Mathews et al. (2023) also found that access to culturally relevant curricular resources, collective expectations, and administrative support were positively associated with enacting culturally relevant practices. When Act 266 became a state law in 2024, social studies teachers needed guidance on best incorporating AAPI perspectives. This study filled that gap by identifying current strategies in use.

2. Literature Review

The framework used for this study was culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings built on multicultural education to create culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Gutierrez et al. (2022) described five crucial elements of multicultural education: content integration, reducing prejudice, utilizing equity pedagogy, knowledge construction, and developing an empowering school culture. Ladson-Billings' framework focused on student achievement through educator cultural competency and the development of critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Elements of educator cultural competency included cultural humility, knowledge, critical consciousness, and empowering curriculum. Brown et al. (2023) and others claimed that culturally responsive educators must have a mindset of cultural humility (Martin & Spencer, 2020; Zygmunt et al., 2020). Achieving this mindset required self-reflection about personal identity and privilege (Reidel et al., 2024). Building on this mindset allowed educators to develop knowledge. Parkhouse et al. (2023) claimed that CRP required two kinds of knowledge: content knowledge and knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds. Critical consciousness is an attitude informed by knowledge and experiences. Neri (2020) argued that utilizing CRP required educators to understand the social and political context facing students and communities and integrate the empowerment of these communities into the curriculum. According to Brown et al. (2023), this empowerment came from opportunities for students to analyze and think critically about social inequalities. Young and Young (2023) categorized culturally responsive teaching practices as knowledge of culture, embedding culture in curricula, creating a caring community, and developing proficiency in communicating across cultures. Examining teachers' knowledge, disposition, and experiences when supplementing the curriculum to add diverse voices required a foundation in Ladson-Billings' framework. Focusing on teacher practices and dispositions was essential to achieving CRP (Hu et al., 2021).

2.1 Asian American Studies

Scholars have examined the success of Asian American ethnic studies courses from structure to impact on students. Asian American studies emerged from civil rights activism in the 1960s. Over forty years after this initial push, Kures (2022) evaluated the state of Asian American studies and argued for a thematic approach to accommodate the diverse cultures within AAPI identity. Themes of Asian American studies courses included how conflict led to displacement, empire expansion, Asian cultures seen as "other," and community as a uniting force (2022). In 2015, over 70 colleges offered Asian American studies courses (Trieu, 2018). Researchers contended that Asian American studies courses helped students create an identity as part of the panethnic Asian American identity and feel a stronger connection to their cultural subgroup (Trieu, 2018; Yamashita, 2022). Rabbani (2023) supported the argument that ethnic studies courses amplified the perspective of minority groups.

Although ethnic studies courses are important, many arguments exist for building cultural competence in all students, not just children from marginalized groups.

2.2 Arguments for Including Diverse Voices

Researchers have identified a wide range of reasons to include diverse voices in the curriculum. In literature supporting the inclusion of underrepresented groups in the curriculum, four key themes focus on reasons for teaching diverse perspectives: empathy, valuing inclusion, building critical literacy, and upholding the civic mission of education. A report by the Annenberg Center in 2011 focused on the civic mission of schools. It represented a refocus in the field. According to the report, students should learn to be responsible for others, participate in communities, listen to other opinions, and be concerned with the welfare of others (Hatcher, 2024). Taylor and McKeown (2021) claimed that perspective-taking was essential for functioning in a diverse democracy, while Samuelsson and Ness (2019) focused on apophatic listening, which required students to listen so they understood diverse backgrounds. In addition to valuing listening, Watson-Canning (2020) argued that when teachers valued multiple perspectives, they found ways to convey that message explicitly in the curriculum.

2.3 Impact of Representation

To understand the impact of representation in the social studies curriculum, scholars have focused on the teacher's role in shaping the curriculum, discovering that attitudes, values, and resources available influence the impact. Researchers have found that when it comes to including Latinx perspectives, most teachers accepted the master narrative and were unwilling to challenge a story focused on white history (Monreal & McCorkle, 2021). Masta and Rosa (2019) contended that teacher-crafted historical narratives replicated the problem of master white narratives, even though teachers believed their intentions were good and historically accurate. Educators sometimes found that uncomplicated and uncontroversial history led to student disconnect (Swalwell & Sinclair, 2021). On the other end of the spectrum, Gao (2020) established that most educators avoided discussing or examining race in the classroom because they were trying to avoid controversy. Cook-Sather and Des-Ogugua (2019) also focused on values conveyed through inclusion, arguing that teachers who reflected on their own cultural lenses opened space for students to share more about themselves.

2.4 State Standards

Several researchers tackled the topic of representation by analyzing curriculum standards through various lenses to understand how minority groups are excluded or included. When An (2022) analyzed social studies standards by focusing on the inclusion or exclusion of Asian Americans, she argued that textbooks conveyed to all students that excluded groups were not cared for, valued, or worthy of respect. Davis (2019) focused on Latinx representation in Florida standards. Conner (2023) analyzed the inclusion of Latinx perspectives in Georgia state standards and found that history was whitewashed, and the portrayal of Latinx Americans focused on poverty and immigration issues while ignoring discriminatory policies. Scholars agree with Cuenca and Hawkman (2019) that while standards often include historically marginalized groups, inclusion regularly fails to reflect the complexity of human experience and intersectionality of identity. In their analysis of the standards-writing process in Missouri, Cuenca and Hawkman found that the process supported hegemony to avoid controversy (2019). Duncan et al. (2023) focused on supplementing the social studies curriculum to center Black joy. While most researchers focus on history standards, Hornbeck (2018) examined civics standards and found that stories of people of color were missing from most political science state standards because of exclusion from voting and representation throughout United States history. Social studies contains many subject areas that lack analysis, including geography and economics. A final tool for analyzing standards is the power of the words within each standard.

Some researchers have focused on the impact of standards' language rather than just the content of the standards. Conner (2023) examined the language of power in Georgia social studies standards, finding token inclusion that did not disrupt the master narrative. Other scholars have examined the language of standards to determine the impact on students of color. Busey and Walker (2017) analyzed elementary social studies standards across the United States, finding that acts of collective activism were ignored in narratives focused on individual acts or a temporary movement for civil rights. According to the authors, this depiction distorted reality and diffused the power within the tradition of collective Black American resistance (2017). Lewis and Crowley (2024) examined how the language in AP textbooks explained policies that advanced white wealth in the 1900s. They were surprised to find a complicated story that failed to make clear how white people benefited most from policies. Jones (2023) analyzed who was represented in history curricula in nine states, including Virginia, finding that 90% of individuals referenced in the standards were white. She concluded that the standards promoted white supremacy by avoiding the language of responsibility for white people, promoting a pro-confederacy ideology,

or painting a picture of white victimhood. Scholars have uncovered layers of exclusion and profound distortion within state standards. The processes for writing and adopting standards vary by state, but as this study focused on Wisconsin, their system must be considered.

Overall, the standards system in Wisconsin is a balance of standardization and local control. While Wisconsin does have model academic standards for each subject, including social studies, no district is required to follow those standards. However, because the state constitution requires that they follow some set standards, most use the Wisconsin state standards (WI. Const. Chpt. PI 8). Wisconsin's local control system means that curricula can vary widely throughout the state. In 1994, the state-mandated accountability testing for public schools (WI. Const. Chpt. PI 8). A standardized social studies test is required in fourth, eighth, and tenth grade. Although this test is not content-knowledge based, as in many other states, it measures social studies skills in six areas: history, inquiry, political science, economics, geography, and behavioral science. Standards impact curricula and instruction; according to scholars, they are explicitly and implicitly biased. Teachers who value culturally responsive teaching must consider how to work within these standards to bring representation of diverse perspectives to the classroom.

2.5 Impact of Exclusion

Research on the impact of missing AAPI representation in the curriculum focuses on the community, whole group, and individuals. According to Stone (2021), the null curriculum may have discouraged students from excluded groups from participating in the civic life of the community. Lee and Ramakrishnan (2020) found that in higher education spaces, AAPI students felt racialized and dealt with microaggressions by being seen as the "other." He called for separate and distinct histories of the monolithic AAPI group. Gay (2018) further argued for differentiation between groups, finding that Hmong refugee perspectives, for example, were missing from the curriculum. Pheng and Xiong (2022) described AAPI students who felt like perpetual foreigners and dealt with a model minority stereotype that erased and ignored the struggles of lived experience. In her examination of AAPI inclusion in state standards, An (2022) examined the impact of excluding groups from the official narrative.

When analyzing this impact on individual students, she found that children dealt with conflicting ideas. The social studies curriculum in school focused on the United States as a benevolent savior. At the same time, families from diverse backgrounds were more likely to support listening to the perspective of marginalized people. Rectifying these two perspectives creates a mental conflict for children (An, 2022). Rodriguez (2020) argued that Southeast Asian American students also experience mental conflict. Teacher apathy and a lack of understanding students' countries of origin, languages, and cultures characterized their education experiences. Gao (2020) claimed that AAPI college students felt invisibility, prejudice, and stereotypes. Shin et al. (2022) described feelings of unwelcome, danger, and cultural isolation. Considering this broad psychological impact, defining the complexity of AAPI history is essential.

2.6 Defining Asian American History

When considering how Asian American history fits into the master narrative, nearly all researchers focus on two main themes that define the way AAPI people live with a racialized identity: the model minority and the perpetual foreigner (Bodemer, 2018; Chung, 2024; Neighbors & Kleinrock, 2021; Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). Neighbors and Kleinrock traced the model minority myth to a 1966 New York Times article about a Japanese American family typified by a strong work ethic, family values, and focus on education (2021). The model minority myth focuses on overachievement through economic and academic success and divides Asian Americans from other minority groups while also ignoring the challenges faced by subgroups who face more significant struggles, like Southeast Asian refugees (Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). Benard et al. (2023) mapped Asian American stereotypes and found that stereotypes of being passive, education-focused, and lacking in sociability and leadership skills persist. On the other hand, the perpetual foreigner stereotype traces its roots to Orientalism (Said, 1977). Under this dichotomy, the West is the norm and standard, while Eastern cultures are the opposite and exotic (Bodemer, 2018; Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). At one end of the stereotype spectrum is the "yellow peril," which characterizes AAPI, especially Chinese Americans, as hostile and untrustworthy (Kurien & Purkayastha, 2024). The major episodes used to include AAPI stories as part of the master narrative of United States history perpetuate these myths further.

As previously established, scholars have pointed out how problematic representation in United States textbooks is. However, they are still a strong indicator of the portrayals of AAPI that shape understandings of United States history, and those portrayals were limited. When Asian American history was included in social studies textbooks, Japanese incarceration during World War II was most often included (Neighbors & Kleinrock, 2021; Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). In addition, the second most likely episodes included from history were Chinese

American participation in building the transcontinental railroad and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892 (Neighbors & Kleinrock, 2021; Shin et al., 2022). Other events included immigration reform in 1965, the arrival of refugees in the 1970s and 1980s, the destruction of Korean American businesses during the LA Riots in 1992, and backlash against South Asians after 9/11 (Kurien & Purkayastha, 2024; Neighbors & Kleinrock, 2021). Many elements of AAPI history were left out, including history that might be considered difficult for children to comprehend.

3. Problem, Research Questions, Sampling, Data Analysis, Findings

3.1 Problem Statement

The problem was that Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) perspectives were missing and underrepresented in the middle school social studies curriculum in Wisconsin. Past research on social studies standards and curricula provided empirical evidence that non-White stories were missing or underrepresented in social studies curricula across the United States (An, 2022; Davis, 2019). According to Act 266, passed in 2023, no requirement previously existed in Wisconsin to include AAPI perspectives in the school curriculum (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2024). Wisconsin statute 118.01, passed in 1995, required citizenship education at “all grade levels” that provides students with “an understanding of human relations, particularly concerning American Indians, Black Americans, and Hispanics” (Wisconsin Constitution, 118.01, parag. 8).

According to the Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies (2018), human relations are a part of behavioral sciences, and therefore, must be taught in the social studies curriculum in kindergarten through twelfth grade. However, no social studies standards require specific content. Instead, they do include “historically marginalized groups” as “topics open for exploration” in the history curriculum (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2018, p. 42). Furthermore, Act 31 builds on Statute 118 by requiring K-12 schools in Wisconsin to teach about Wisconsin’s eleven tribal nations and treaty rights (American Indian Studies in Wisconsin, Act 31, 1991). However, Moody (2019) found that despite this law, Wisconsin educators still struggled to incorporate content about Native Americans.

Further complications to the problem of underrepresentation of minority groups were the obstacles teachers face in rectifying this oversight and exclusion. Cruz et al. (2020) uncovered teachers’ feelings of being unprepared and inadequate when they attempted to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy to include knowledge and cultural contributions that represented the students in their classes (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Parkhouse et al. (2023) contended that teachers often lacked confidence in diversifying the curriculum as a part of culturally relevant practices. Whereas Vasquez (2018) found that while Midwestern teachers often asserted a proficient understanding of CRP, they avoided discussions of race because it was too political and might be disruptive to the class environment.

3.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers currently include missing voices of AAPI identities and perspectives in the middle school social studies curriculum by interviewing 12 middle school social studies teachers from locations across the state utilizing semistructured interviews. As the only cultural group excluded by state law from inclusion in the curriculum until 2024, Asian American Pacific Islanders represented a unique case in Wisconsin. Although it came under criticism in the 2020s political climate, the education community widely accepts culturally responsive teaching as a critical element of effective teaching and essential to student achievement (Muniz, 2019). The 2020 census data confirmed that Asian Americans are one of the country’s fastest-growing populations (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). The intersection of these facts created a need for understanding.

The two research questions provided an overarching direction for the study. The following questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do middle school teachers meet the requirements of statute 118.01 to include the voices of American Indian, Black American, and Hispanic perspectives in the social studies curriculum?

RQ2: How do middle school teachers meet the requirements of Act 266 to include Asian American Pacific Islander voices in the middle school social studies curriculum?

3.3 Sampling

As this research focuses on middle school social studies in Wisconsin, the criteria for selecting interview participants was teachers who were currently teaching sixth through eighth grade in Wisconsin. The selection criteria were aligned with the plan to interview 12-15 teacher participants. Participants from the Wisconsin Council for Social Studies and state teachers of the year were recruited initially and when enough candidates for

interviews did not emerge from this pool, social media was used.

The participant group was not culturally diverse. However, this does reflect the state's teaching population. According to *A Teacher Who Looks Like Me*, by the Wisconsin Policy Forum (Chapman & Brown, 2020), 30.7% of Wisconsin K-12 students were students of color in 2020. However, that same year Black teachers comprised just 2% of the state's workforce. Hispanic teachers also made up just 2% of the workforce (Chapman & Brown, 2020). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2020 only 1% of teachers in Wisconsin were AAPI (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Two study participants were Hispanic. The other 10 participants were white. In the Midwest, 93% of teachers were white in 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Details about participant gender, grade levels taught, location, and school size are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Grade level	Location in Wisconsin	School size
1	Female	7	Southeast	Suburban large
2	Female	7	Southeast	Suburban large
3	Female	6, 7, 8	Southeast	City-Large
4	Male	6	Eastern	Town-distant
5	Male	7	Eastern	Sub. Midsize
6	Female	8	Western	Sub. Midsize
7	Female	7	Southeast	Suburban large
8	Male	6	Southeast	Suburban large
9	Female	7	Central	City Large
10	Female	7, 8	Eastern	Rural distant
11	Male	8	Southeast	Suburban large
12	Female	8	Southeast	Suburban large

3.4 Data Analysis

Finding 1

The first finding is that the primary barriers for teachers when including the voices and perspectives of Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, and Asian American Pacific Islanders were the limited scope of the curriculum and time constraints. In addition, the obstacle of student bias is often manifested in student research choices. Administrative pressures to prioritize certain narratives during designated months (e.g., Black History Month) also further complicated the inclusion of diverse voices. In contrast, several participants felt supported by administrators as they included diverse voices, confirming the findings of Matthews et al. (2023). However, current literature supports the finding that time constraints are one of the significant obstacles for teachers of social studies (Parkhouse, 2021; Reidel et al., 2024).

Asian American Pacific Islander inclusion (RQ2)

Obstacles specific to AAPI inclusion were difficulties finding adequate resources, a lack of confidence in teaching AAPI histories, and a tendency to overlook AAPI perspectives when there are no AAPI students in the classroom. Participants also noted that existing resources primarily focused on just two significant events, the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1800s and Japanese American Incarceration during World War II, which left a gap in broader AAPI narratives. This focus on two events confirmed the findings of Neighbors and Kleinrock (2021) that many episodes in AAPI history are left out of social studies instruction.

Finding 2

The second finding of this study is that the intended curriculum, based on the master narrative of history, portrayed minority groups unevenly. The portrayal of marginalized groups in the curriculum fell into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative. While Black American and American Indian voices were more likely to be portrayed positively through activism and contributions, Hispanic American perspectives were less frequently included and predominantly framed in negative contexts.

This study also confirmed that the portrayals of American Indians and Black Americans included layers of resistance that studies previously found lacking (Thomas et al., 2023). Analysis of how teachers fit marginalized groups into the intended curriculum revealed that American Indians and Black Americans were far more likely than Hispanic Americans and AAPI to be portrayed as leaders. For Black Americans, collective action movements were also prevalent portrayals. However, the episodic nature of teaching history chronologically led to disrupted understanding. Most participants valued teaching the Civil Rights Movement, but the continuity of the movement and connections to the long history of fighting for civil rights were missing (McGinley, 2023). While the white master narrative of US history follows a story of improvement and positive change, marginalized groups do not benefit from that continuity. This finding confirms the argument of scholars that the white master narrative remains unchallenged by most teachers (Monreal & McCorkle, 2021; Vasquez, 2018).

Although several participants said they wove in all voices throughout the school year, the data demonstrated that all groups were still not consistently part of the intended or enacted curriculum. Due to the requirements of Wisconsin Act 31, which requires teaching American Indian history, teachers have found varied ways to incorporate Wisconsin's sovereign tribal nations into the curriculum (Sharma, 2022). The availability of resources and a better understanding of the role of Black Americans, when compared to the other three marginalized groups, gave teachers confidence in including the history of Black Americans as well. Access to resources and training are essential elements of successful CRP, according to Parkhouse et al. (2021).

Asian American Pacific Islander inclusion (RQ2)

Among all four marginalized groups, AAPI were included the least in all three categories: positive, neutral, and negative. Furthermore, AAPI and Hispanic Americans were more likely to be excluded throughout American history. These missing historical roles perpetuate the null curriculum, which Fryberg et al. (2024) pointed out can promote otherness and devalue these marginalized perspectives. Interview analysis revealed that participants were likelier to include these two groups in geography lessons about foreign countries, as "different" cultures, or as ancient cultures or civilizations. These portrayals sustained the perpetual foreigner myth that scholars have identified as prevalent in Asian American history (Rodriguez & Kim, 2018).

This study's results illustrated that the intended curriculum in Wisconsin omits Hispanic Americans and AAPI from the complex identities of other marginalized groups. While 83% of participants mentioned hard history in their interviews, the portrayals of Hispanic American and AAPI voices suggested that challenging the master narrative with hard history was a considerable obstacle. Difficult histories sometimes include violent themes but are essential to understanding the complexity of history. Including difficult topics challenges the dominant narrative of history, dispels accepted misunderstandings, and connects the past to current problems (George et al., 2023; Moffa, 2022).

In analyzing portrayals of AAPI perspectives in the social studies curriculum, participants most often included AAPI perspectives as part of a larger multiracial immigration unit. Consistently including AAPI as part of a thematic unit considering a wide range of cultures was not problematic. However, when considering the full breadth of AAPI inclusion, there was evidence of the null curriculum. While 58% of participants included AAPI in the curriculum as part of a larger group of marginalized voices, study findings show that AAPI perspectives were also the most likely of all marginalized groups to be portrayed as victims by 75% of respondents. No participant mentioned individual AAPI leaders, empowering movements, or collective actions by AAPI. The only positive portrayals were in terms of military service.

The situation was similar for Hispanic Americans regarding neutral voices and lack of positive portrayals. However, Hispanic American portrayals had some specificity regarding people or movements. Teachers included Cesar Chavez's activism, Frida Kahlo's role in culture, and the Chicano movement. However, the Asian American movement of the 1960s, the case of Wong Kim Ark v. the United States, and the role of activists like Yuri Kochiyama in the Civil Rights Movement were absent. These results confirmed the current literature findings that textbooks and standards exclude AAPI perspectives from the official curriculum (Leslie, 2021). This disparity highlights the need for a more nuanced representation of AAPI histories and contributions. As

Wisconsin has no required social studies content standards, the standards instead focus on skills. Examining the intended curriculum and the role of teachers as curators and enactors of the curriculum also led to additional findings.

Finding 3

Despite the limitations of the intended curriculum and master narrative, teachers still had agency in the classroom when it came to focusing on critical thinking and valuing perspectives as the enacted curriculum. They employed strategies that promoted historical thinking skills and complex narratives. To include Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and American Indian perspectives, educators focused on sourcing skills to analyze primary sources and understand historical perspectives. They also emphasized the importance of making local connections and fostering student-led research to enhance engagement with diverse voices. The skills that participants focused on in their classrooms confirmed current scholarship about critical thinking in social studies. Student-led research and inquiry focused on essential questions offered room for adding diverse voices to the intended curriculum.

Asian American Pacific Islander inclusion (RQ2)

As established in Finding 2, fewer teachers included AAPI perspectives because of scope and time limitations. Although they utilized the same critical thinking strategies and empowered students with tools to understand complex history, only 25-33% enacted the curriculum for AAPI history using critical thinking and complex history. While AAPI perspectives were included through thematic connections and the local histories of Wisconsin's Hmong and Rohingya communities, the depth of inclusion remained limited compared to other minority groups (Pheng & Xiong, 2022).

In terms of teacher background knowledge, this study provided new insight. Scholars have argued that deep knowledge of students is essential to and enables deep content knowledge (Parkhouse et al., 2023). This study found, however, that participants often focused on the first part of this equation - deep knowledge of students - and used this as a reason not to include AAPI voices. They put such a focus on the students in front of them that they missed the community context and the need for students to learn about AAPI experiences to gain cultural competency.

Study findings confirmed that teacher values and motivation significantly determined how diverse voices were added to the curriculum. The findings of this study confirmed that significant barriers to enacting culturally relevant practices existed across the state. While time and the limited curriculum scope were the main obstacles for 83% of respondents, evidence of resistance to including AAPI perspectives due to lack of content was apparent. For 50% of participants, the refusal to include AAPI voices was also due to trouble finding resources to supplement the curriculum. Participants also confirmed the findings of Matthews et al. (2023) that the dominant-narrative focus of the general curriculum is a barrier to including diverse voices through culturally relevant pedagogy.

Participant 2 said she feared challenges from her administration for including a marginalized group if the group was not represented in her student population, so she “tiptoes.” Participant 10 described a deliberate and strategic process for including diverse voices with care so she does not face challenges in her curriculum choices. These experiences reflected the impact of a push to ban critical race theory that started in 2021. This effort sought to restrict education on racism, bias, and the contributions of specific racial groups in history in as many as 36 states in 2022 (Ladson-Billings; 2021). In 2022, the Wisconsin legislature passed a bill banning the teaching of critical race theory by threatening to withhold funding from schools that taught that a person could be responsible for actions taken in history by groups of that person's race (Goldberg, 2023). The governor vetoed the bill, but the impact on schools was still felt in 2024, as evidenced by this study's findings.

An additional layer of resistance to including diverse voices as part of culturally relevant practices was also revealed in this study. Resistance takes the form of not just refusal to include diverse voices but also a sense of best intentions being good enough. Young and Young (2023) found that some teachers categorize the CRP framework as an add-on to their workload. They categorize it as an extra part of the job, like assessment, social-emotional learning, and classroom management. At the same time, Young and Young argued that CRP is an all-encompassing framework (2023).

Finding 4

Effective curation of resources was essential for including diverse voices. Teachers prioritized authenticity, cultural responsiveness, and collaboration with colleagues, community members, and librarians when curating.

This study did not find a significant difference in curation strategies between marginalized groups. Participants excelled at adding diverse voices to the curriculum. They worked with scholars, experts, community members, and cultural leaders.

In analyzing the methods and criteria for curation, this study identified a knowledge gap and disconfirmed some assumptions. It was challenging to find current literature about social studies teacher curation. Studies about middle school social studies curation could not be found. However, this study contradicted some of the assumptions about curation practices in general and revealed a gap in understanding how social studies teachers use different criteria for curation than other secondary-level, subject-focused teachers or elementary teachers (Curcio et al., 2024). This study found that curating primary sources guided middle school social studies pedagogy and created the opportunity to add diverse voices to the curriculum. Curating sources created opportunities to teach students to analyze sources and build critical research thinking skills. Curation for social studies teachers did not fall into some negative portrayals in the current scholarship (Harris et al., 2023). Participants described a curation methodology focused on trusted, reliable sources from museums and vetted history institutions. They used primary sources from these trusted organizations and located sources independently. They also valued accurate and authentic portrayals in secondary sources and historical fiction that did not reinforce white perspectives. A focus on accuracy and authenticity reflected best practices for building cultural competency.

Enacting culturally relevant pedagogy requires a level of criticality that not all participants exhibited. Tanase (2020) urged culturally responsive educators to critique education materials for inclusion. Participants 3 and 7, two of the three interdisciplinary teachers interviewed, described this practice most clearly. Most participants were critical of textbooks but did not offer strong alternatives. Almost all participants relied on primary sources or historical fiction that they curate. In this way, most participants applied a strategy to work around administrative control over the curriculum and ensure that diversity was included. Several researchers have discussed the role of teachers in challenging the dominant narrative and dispelling misunderstandings in history this way, and this study's findings confirm this research (George et al., 2023; Moffa, 2022).

Asian American Pacific Islander Inclusion (RQ2)

Participants were more likely to have difficulty finding sources on Hispanic American and AAPI history. While most participants were motivated by curiosity and their researcher identity, the deep knowledge needed to take complex ideas about AAPI history and curate sources that middle schoolers could analyze was a daunting obstacle for many participants (Parkhouse et al., 2023). Furthermore, the scarcity of materials hindered the search for AAPI resources. While the inclusion of Black American, Hispanic American, and American Indian perspectives has been required since the 1990s, the legislation requiring AAPI inclusion passed in 2024 and was still being implemented. This change created a new and ongoing need for resource development. As previously noted, access to resources and the time to collaborate with other educators are critical to empowering culturally relevant teaching practices (Parkhouse et al., 2021).

Finding 5

Strategies such as fostering belonging, engaging in hard conversations, and integrating community voices were critical for supporting students' understanding of diverse identities. Student-led research focused on inquiry skills and critical thinking stood out as a valuable tool for bringing diverse voices from all four marginalized groups into the curriculum. Implementing these strategies required teacher artistry. For the groups included in RQ1, Black American, Hispanic American, and American Indian, teachers described joyful learning, helping students navigate complex histories, and building a sense of community as among their strategies (Whipple, 2021).

A review of recent scholarship revealed that social studies pedagogy has been evolving. Scholars have argued that social studies teaching in the twenty-first century requires relevance, complexity, and authenticity (Nelson & Durham, 2022). This complexity derives from interdisciplinary approaches and a focus on diverse human experiences (Monte & Quince, 2021). This study confirmed that Wisconsin middle school teachers were focused on these factors as they applied artistry and strategies to the enacted curriculum.

Ladson-Billings' CRP framework outlines five essential ways to enact culturally relevant teaching. She described building relationships, creating a safe environment, choosing quality materials, using effective strategies, and having self-awareness as the five essential parts of CRP (2021). Participants shared evidence of meeting all five elements, but only two were strengths. As data were coded, building relationships, creating a safe environment, and using effective strategies were evident in participant responses. However, using quality materials and implementing effective strategies were strengths. Critical consciousness is essential to Ladson-Billings' CRP framework, along with cultural humility, knowledge, and empowerment (2021). Most participants did not foster

critical consciousness, which Diemer et al. defined as empowerment in marginalized communities that develops through analyzing and taking action (2021). Participant 1, 5, 9, 11, and 12 demonstrated critical consciousness values in their interviews, but how much this transferred to their students was unclear. Empowerment for minority students was not mentioned by any participants (Brown et al., 2023).

This study demonstrated that participants valued knowledge as a shared creation that builds belonging and community. They also valued student-led research projects to foster shared creation. Given the pressure to cover a specific amount of history in one school year, about half of educators still found ways to incorporate student research, discussion, and sharing of personal stories to teach critical thinking skills and build empowerment in each child. All participants exhibited a passion for the content that Ladson-Billings described. Evidence of their passion came through in the time dedicated to curating sources, which included locating, evaluating, and scaffolding sources for various reading levels and integrating them into the curriculum (Sawyer et al., 2020).

Asian American Pacific Islander Inclusion (RQ2)

When it came to including AAPI perspectives, 50% of teachers described strategies that encouraged belonging and engagement for all students. For Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and American Indian inclusion, 75% of participants rely on joyful learning strategies, and 42% focus on building community. When including AAPI perspectives, participants focused on belonging and developing interdisciplinary learning opportunities.

This study's analysis also revealed that refugees can be included authentically. Participants 1 and 3 prioritized a student-centered focus over a content focus. Most study participants did not include this kind of focus. While 58% described student-centered practices and strategies, the curriculum's historical content was the focus of most participants. They spoke of scope limitations and not having time to cover all the content required from the curriculum. However, Participant 3 focused on equipping her students with knowledge about identity and navigating citizenship. Both concepts were highly relevant to her English learners but also fit into the civic mission of schools, which the literature demonstrated is often still considered the focus of social studies education (Hatcher, 2024).

Conclusion

The significant findings of this study included barriers to inclusion and a wide range of strategies, curation, and artistry that educators utilized to include diverse voices in the curriculum. Educators worked within the intended curriculum, which relied on the master narrative of history and left out complex portrayals of marginalized groups. For Asian American Pacific Islanders, additional obstacles to inclusion were a lack of teacher confidence in this history, a dearth of resources, and the limits of the master narrative that often paints this group as victims in American history.

For all four marginalized groups, Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, and Asian American Pacific Islanders, teachers adapted to the uneven portrayals of marginalized groups in the intended curriculum. The intended curriculum portrayed marginalized groups in three ways: positive, neutral, and negative. In this study, Black Americans and American Indians were more likely to be portrayed positively as activists and leaders, while Hispanic Americans and AAPI were less frequently included, with negative or absent portrayals. AAPI had the smallest number of portrayals of all groups and was often framed in a way that emphasized victimization or exclusion, reinforcing the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype.

There were some limitations to this study. The study's small size was the most significant limitation. Also, challenges in successfully recruiting participants limited the kinds of school contexts represented. Most participants were from suburban settings. Rural middle school teachers were under-represented in the group. Second, due to recruitment challenges, gender was not equally represented in the group. A third limitation was the lack of racial diversity. Only two participants were non-White. These factors may limit the transferability of the study. By design, this study only included Wisconsin teachers and focused on middle school. These factors also limit the transferability of the study.

Findings from this study supported and extended existing research on how AAPI voices are included or excluded in the curriculum. The study focused on middle school teacher experiences including four marginalized groups' perspectives in the curriculum in this study. The study also focused on AAPI representation because legislation requiring the inclusion of this group became Wisconsin law in April 2024. Due to years of exclusion, there was a gap in knowledge regarding teacher experiences and practices including this group. This study's findings revealed that middle school social studies teachers struggled with various obstacles, including the exclusion of AAPI from the master narrative of history. Teacher discomfort with including AAPI history due to a gap in their knowledge, the lack of AAPI resources, and the power of the null curriculum to send a formidable message of

exclusion are all themes that deserve further attention. Recent scholarship has established that the null curriculum promotes otherness and devalues the perspectives of marginalized groups, which has negative psychological impacts (Fryberg et al., 2024), but the role of the educator in choosing the null curriculum warrants further analysis.

Further research can help illuminate the role of teachers in curating sources and ways to improve professional learning. Research is needed on how social studies teachers use supplementary materials to reinforce the dominant narrative or add diverse voices to the curriculum. This study's findings contradict current scholarship on curation and supplementing the curriculum. More research is needed into the methodology of social studies teachers who curate primary sources and other instructional materials from trusted history institutions (Grant et al., 2022). Feeling uninformed about AAPI history was a common refrain from participants, and research into how best to rectify this situation through meaningful, high-quality professional development is needed. Neri argued that effective professional development can guide teachers in building knowledge and tools to help students see and question racism and inequality and then act (2020). Hsieh et al. (2022) found that educators who participated in professional development changed their understanding and implementation by utilizing iterative, co-constructed, scaffolded implementation, collaboration, and feedback. These ideas should be further researched to ensure that Act 266 is enacted with fidelity.

This study's analysis underscored the need for systemic support and resource development to enhance the representation of AAPI voices alongside other minority perspectives in the curriculum. Teachers' insights revealed a commitment to inclusion, yet they faced significant challenges that required ongoing collaboration, professional development, and the curation of diverse resources. More nuanced, inclusive curricula that represent not only marginalized groups but also foster critical thinking, cultural competency, and a deeper understanding of the histories and contributions of Asian American-Pacific Islanders are needed. Education stakeholders can develop a more comprehensive and inclusive social studies curriculum that reflects the rich tapestry of American history. The analysis of Monte and Quince (2021) supported the argument that twenty-first-century students must develop a sociopolitical consciousness; therefore, addressing real-world problems with cultural competence should be the goal of the curriculum.

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