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*“The work of art is a scream of freedom”: The power of multimodal arts and humanities in teaching marginalized histories*

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**“The work of art is a scream of freedom”: The power of multimodal arts and humanities in teaching marginalized histories**

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**Introduction**

For too long, social studies education has reproduced dominant narratives from hegemonic texts, which have attempted to silence the voices and narratives of historically marginalized groups (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Schmidt, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This case study examines how one preservice teacher understood and then enacted the pedagogy of critical multimodalities towards counter-storytelling in social studies education. The study firstly asks, how does a preservice teacher conceptualize the use of critical multimodalities as pedagogical tools to represent historically marginalized voices and disrupt dominant narratives (counter-storytell) in social studies education? Secondly, it asks, how does said preservice teacher actually take up and engage with these critical multimodalities in order to counter-storytell in their social studies student teaching experience?

Answering these questions takes teacher education down a path of using the arts critically in social studies to challenge the well-worn historiographies, power narratives, and ahistorical national memories that can be all too ubiquitous in history classrooms, texts, and standards nationwide (Levy, 2014, 2017; Lowenthal, 1998; Thelen, 1989; Trouillot, 1995; Wertsch, 2002). Engaging in such pedagogies can not only influence perspectives and practices of preservice teachers, but also possibly lead to increased engagement in history content for students in classrooms across the country (Garrett & Kerr, 2016). These pedagogies have always been a matter of imminent importance for teachers and students alike, and for the histories each deserves to co-learn. Furthermore, looking closely at counter-storytelling tools that can encourage and support more equitable education in social studies has never been more important than it is right now. We are amidst an ongoing battle to teach an unvarnished, productive history of our nation that strives to better itself by learning from what *actually was*, instead of wielding white privilege with aims to warp selective nostalgia into historical remembrance—or even no remembrance at all (Brown & Brown, 2010; Epstein, 2010; Loewen, 2008; Scott, 2019; Zou & Kao, 2021). This study aims to show how utilizing counter-story art in social studies preservice teaching can be an effective tool in supporting the former.

We begin by sharing our theoretical frame, researcher positionalities, and existing literature in the field surrounding counter-storytelling in social studies via the arts. We then move into the conceptualizations and lived practice experiences of one preservice teacher, tracing the transfer of pedagogical knowledge shared in a teacher education setting to its embodiment in student teaching practice. We end with implications that this study holds for current social studies teachers and their classrooms, as well as the teacher preparation programs who have the duty to support preservice teachers in their social justice education journey.

## Theoretical Framework

The term *critical multimodalities* refers to visual/aesthetic arts such as portraits, murals, sculpture; media such as films, music and television; and spoken word poetry, theater, and more that, in both its artistic authorship and message/objective, aims to dismantle inequitable power structures via artistic storytelling and foster more just understandings of our past and present through art (Garrett & Kerr, 2016). We situate this definition of critical multimodalities in Critical Race Theory (CRT), believing this can amplify learning that encourages greater reflection for students and also deeper pedagogical praxis for teachers, both current and preservice (Collins, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Freire, 2018; Grande, 2004; Kumashiro, 2002). Specifically, within CRT, we position the arts in this study as vital tools of counter-storytelling which challenge hegemonic curricular voices past and present, for "storytelling is racialized, gendered, and classed and these stories affect racialized, gendered, and classed communities", and *counter-storytelling* is a "tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 31-32). These counter-stories exist and transform not only in written narratives, but powerfully in artistic and visual realms as well (Marshall, 2016).

We come to CRT as people who live in a world governed by a racial contract (Mills, 1997). We come to it as authors who grew up and have existed on the side of whiteness in a systemically racist society, a side which historically and currently reaps property rewards, cultural legitimacy, and much, much more to remain productive in its white supremacy (Bery, 2014; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2013; Mills, 1997). Many works by artists we use in the study, as examples of what transformative, counter-story multimodal humanities can be, delve urgently and meaningfully into race, class, gender, and other identities that we have never and will never experience (Garrett & Kerr, 2016; Marshall, 2016; Soden & Castro, 2013). To anchor our positionalities and methods when it comes to both the sources used and the participant that we co-learned with, we rely deeply on the sentiments and lived lens of standpoint theory (Harding, 2004). These multimodalities offer a richer, more equitable pathway towards listening to voices of those who have materially struggled against historically embedded structures of sexism, racism, colonialism, nativism and more, and thus hold wisdom and experiential knowledge no other curricular source can provide (Au, 2012; Collins, 2004; De Lissovoy, 2008; Hartsock, 2004; Sabzalian, 2018). It is our position that using multimodalities can privilege the voices of those historically marginalized, those with standpoints of *having lived the experiences* that educators topically teach. Multimodalities can center artists of historically marginalized groups as the "subjects of knowledge," as transformative authors of canons of knowledge themselves (Banks, 1993; Harding, 2004, p. 4). We aim to give these artists and creators that respect and role in this study, knowing their experiences are not ours, and also knowing that we need to listen to them as a collective education community who must move forward towards thoughtful, transformative social justice teaching (Collins, 2004; Collins & Bilge, 2016).

## Researcher Positionality

We conducted an intrinsic case-study (Stake, 1995) on how preservice teachers use multimodal counter-storytelling to push back on dominant historical narratives in social studies teaching (Barton & Levstik, 2004; King, 2016; Miles, 2019; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Shanks, 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A contextual examination of our positionalities here, especially in regard to what social justice truly means to individuals like ourselves, is tied to the research we conduct, oceans-deep, and in need of much explanation.

As researchers, one of us identifies as a white woman, and the other as a biracial white/Arab man. These identities are undoubtedly at play as we convey the stories, lived experiences and memories of the preservice teacher who is the focus of this study. We will also be using CRT's tenet of counter-storytelling to share our findings and shape implications and future steps forward in a field of education that is Eurocentric, Westernized and white-majority (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). We aim to share these stories and truths in a way that is deeply worthy of our participant's and artists' personhood, being and voices. We recognize we can never fully know nor understand their experiences, nor many of the artists whose work is utilized in the study, especially in regard to their race, culture and gender identities. This study is not to 'other', or evoke pity, or claim allyship. It is to truly let the voice of one preservice teacher speak when it comes to their own educational experiences, and hopefully to listen and make changes to the field according to findings that emerge. If we have the privilege of being in an academic space with the power to raise awareness around issues of social justice teaching in social studies, and how preservice teacher voices deserve a place in that realm, then we must—all while mining our own privilege, prejudices, and blind spots. Our work there is never done (Picower, 2009).

We extend the same respect and place for our participant who exists in societal, political and economic place that we can never know in an embodied, physical, and emotional sense: they are now an early-career teacher who holds unique experiential knowledge that we do not. We do not posit here for our own expertise, but rather understand gravely our responsibility to share their voice and agentic growth with justice and clarity on this platform of power that we have been given (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

For both researchers, the intention of all educational research, and this piece in particular, is not to simply share the valuable words and insights of preservice teachers. It is rather to work *with* them as co-conspirators (Love, 2019) to dismantle the barriers that hinder individuals' potentials, stymie their voices, and/or quell their actions. We wish for this piece to serve as an addition to the powerful research scholars have already conducted, and, most importantly, as an opportunity for the participant to share their histories, beliefs, and experience with all who read this.

### **Literature Review**

There is a valuable canon of literature surveying student teacher responses to social justice-driven teaching resources that challenge dominant narratives in history and social studies teaching (King, 2016; Martell, 2017; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Salinas et al., 2016; Shanks, 2018; Vickery & Salinas, 2019). There is also a rich tradition of research on the power of the arts in teaching as a general field, and in teaching the humanities especially—in language arts, ethnic studies and other school courses (Diaz, 2019; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Mills & Doyle, 2019). There is a smaller sector of deeply valuable work, especially empirical research studies, on how multimodalities—or the use of the humanities and arts like film, music, spoken word and written poetry, literature, theater, performance, gallery and street art, visual online spaces, and more—have indelible power in developing a critical consciousness and challenging dominant narratives for both students and teachers in social studies (Garrett, 2015; Garrett & Kerr, 2016; McCall, 2004; Pellegrino et al., 2013; Stoddard & Marcus, 2010).

Some studies even attend to this concerning preservice teachers and social studies. For example, McCall's (2004) study found that poetry serves as a more accessible means for students to learn about current issues and cultural facets in social studies contexts. In relation to preservice teacher education, McCall asserts poetry, "captures the attention of preservice teachers and motivates them to think about multicultural, social reconstructionist ideas" and makes "abstract issues of cultural diversity and racial, economic, and gender injustices real" (p. 176). Less research attends to the overlap of the two spheres of social studies and more visual arts outside of literature and poetry. Moreover, there is an even smaller subset of research on where preservice teachers fit in this overlap (Lenski & Thieman, 2013). There is a dearth of research on how preservice teachers in the field, who are actively teaching and learning, both interact with and then teach critical multimodalities towards counter-story representations of historically marginalized groups, especially in social studies.

Our study looks to fill this gap by examining how a preservice teacher initially interacted with critical multimodalities as pedagogical tools towards social-justice-centered social studies teaching in their coursework. This inquiry also explores how a preservice teacher actually takes up and engages with critical multimodalities, as a means to disrupt dominant narratives in social studies education and center long-silenced historical voices in the curriculum and their own pedagogy. Studying the intersection of how preservice teachers think about and then engage with disruptive artists and their aesthetic materials in social studies teaching has the potential to foster deeper understandings of social justice and more inclusive, agentic pedagogy for future and current educators.

### **Dominant Narratives and their Power in the Social Studies Teaching World**

Research on systems of oppression shows that education, including social studies education, has both unwittingly and wittingly legitimized and reinforced said oppressions via the teaching (or *not* teaching) of race, culture and gender in all subjects (Vinson, 2006). This is deeply embedded in the tenets of CRT (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) highlight how counter-storytelling can be a valuable tool for deconstructing the systemic oppressions that lie in race, culture and gender power dynamics in U.S. schooling. Yosso (2005) explains how upon hearing counter-stories and learning curriculum that exposes and goes against the dominant narrative, students—especially students who have been racialized as BIPOC (i.e., Black, Indigenous People of Color)—“become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves” (p. 75). CRT has been shown to give both preservice teachers and students tools to do just this; our study hopes to inspire greater attention on how these tools can be taken up pedagogically in history classrooms (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Marx & Pennington, 2003).

Many studies focus on the ways traditional social studies curriculum and its accompanying pedagogies forefront and prioritize white, cis-gendered, male, colonizing narratives and fail to honor the intersectional voices of women, people who have been racialized as BIPOC, the LGBTQ2IA+ community, and other marginalized groups, all of which can exist in constant identity intersection (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Brown & Au, 2014; Busey, 2017; King, 2016; Rodríguez & Kim, 2018; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Vickery & Salinas, 2019). Besides silenced voices, other studies have dug into how certain histories have been left out for fear that they are too raw, real, and “difficult” to teach, or are not included lest they upset a broad national memory or accepted version of past events (Britzman, 2000; Epstein & Peck, 2017; Garrett, 2011; Gross & Terra, 2018; Pitt & Britzman, 2003; Rodríguez, 2020; Wertsch, 2002).

Moving from this literature, scholars have also looked at how curricular silence and exclusion affects preservice teachers who are agentic participants, yet still visitors in a school setting that is not entirely under their curricular or pedagogical jurisdiction (Blevins & Salinas, 2013; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Kwok, 2021; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019; Vadas, 2007). Specific barriers such as text-book-heavy curricular training and pressure-cooking, time-dominating state standards upon which cooperating teachers' job securities and a school's financial wellbeing may rest also affect preservice teacher experience (Brown, 2010; Loewen, 2008). These studies and theoretical explorations have argued that neither excluding diverse, intersectional voices, nor shying away from difficult histories helps students engage critically with history itself, and the ways it has systematically reinforced inequities that affect lives today.

Numerous scholars have argued that history is a terrain of many silenced, difficult voices that remain dangerously unuttered and unlearned in classrooms. Histories of BIPOC people, women, immigrants, LGBTQ2IA+ individuals and more, and all their intersections, have been brutally silenced by white, cis-gendered, male, and upper-class narratives, with classroom teaching too often neglecting "a multicultural consciousness that recognizes and confronts the historical and institutional roots of oppression" (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002, p. 281; Hawkman & Shear, 2020; Mayo, 2013; Rodríguez, 2018; Schmidt, 2012). Also, scholarly work has shown that the way we treat groups in their historical retelling can dangerously transfer to how we presently treat groups in the classroom and beyond, for "traditional curriculum (which) prepares students of color to serve upper- and middle-class interests...[can] simultaneously uphold white privilege" (Yosso, 2002, p. 96). Particularly, when scholars have looked at how preservice teachers take up these pedagogies of social justice in their social studies teaching, findings show that even among the well-intentioned, dominant narratives are in danger of persisting unless they are met with active vigilance, deep understandings of racism, sexism and more, and a constant critique of the dominant historical narrative (Martell, 2017; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Shanks, 2018; Vickery & Salinas, 2019).

### **But...Critical Art and *its* Power in Counter-story Social Studies Teaching**

Scholars such as Maxine Greene (2001) and Elliot Eisner (2002) argue for using various art mediums for engaged, emotionally open educational experiences. This has been referenced as aesthetic education, which according to Greene, represents, "...an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts" (p. 6). Eisner states that multimodalities can pull the learner into sensory-heavy, deepened perceptions due to the qualities of sound, sight, taste and touch inherent in the arts. Greene argues that when we open ourselves to encounters with the arts, we are awakened and prepped for a deeper, different kind of living that puts our imagination to work and thus simultaneously, our transformation as humans as well.

In social studies education literature, Garrett and Kerr (2016) make the case for using aesthetic materials to teach critical and multicultural social studies education, arguing that "engagement with...works of art promote(s) connections and critical engagements with the social world" and that such engagements can introduce "multiple perspectives and historical empathy" (pp. 506, 508). Studies have argued that multimodalities such as poetry, music, and film are underutilized teaching resources in enhancing understandings of social studies (Burstein, 2014; Burstein & Knotts, 2010; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Vitulli & Santoli, 2013). Other studies have furthered that multimodalities are uniquely positioned both in their variety, and their power to engagingly tackle difficult histories around race and gender, thus exposing students to a topic's multiple perspectives (Soden & Castro,

2013; Wright & Garcia, 1992). Many scholars argue that utilizing the arts in social studies educational spaces, versus a textbook, for example, allows students to use their own voices and engage with content in a way that is more wholly alive and contextualized (Epstein, 1989; Marcus et al., 2018; Miles, 2019; Moats & Poxton, 2011; Stoddard & Marcus, 2010). In teaching a historical topic, aesthetic materials that speak to the experiences of marginalized groups can be transformative because they can challenge other systemically racist, sexist, classist and homo-and-trans-phobic recordings of the topic (Bell, 2019; Garrett & Kerr, 2016). When it comes to preservice social studies teachers and critical multimodalities specifically, we look to contribute to the rich legacy of how multimodalities can inform social studies pedagogy—especially since little research attends to critical, disruptive multimodalities being used by preservice teachers to center voices and stories of those historically marginalized.

## Method

Data collection for this intrinsic case study began in the fall of 2019. Intrinsic case study methods enabled deep immersion when collecting and analyzing one preservice teacher's learning experiences with multimodalities (Stake, 1995). We chose this method of study because critical multimodalities are profoundly important to us as educators, researchers, and preservice teacher educators, and we are intrigued by how preservice teachers incorporate them into their teaching. Our guiding research questions were: 1) How does a preservice teacher conceptualize using critical multimodalities as pedagogical tools to represent historically marginalized voices and disrupt dominant narratives (counter-storytell) in social studies education? 2) How does said preservice teacher actually take up and engage with these critical multimodalities in order to counter-storytell in their social studies student teaching experience?

## Study Context

Eva (participant-chosen pseudonym) was a preservice teacher at the same large Southwestern university where we are both pursuing a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. Conveniently sampled as a member of the university's social studies Master's program that we as PhD students worked with, she volunteered to take part in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The professional development sequence designed by the college places preservice teachers like Eva into secondary social studies classrooms full-time during the fall semester of their second year. This allows them greater opportunity to build semester-long relationships with their students, craft multi-day lesson plans, attend professional learning community (PLC) meetings with their cooperating teacher, and most importantly, grow in their practice. The data collection for this study revolves around our experiences working with Eva in this fall semester.

Eva engaged in one social studies methods class themed on how to use critical multimodalities in social studies teaching aimed towards social justice transformation (Bell, 2019; Garrett & Kerr, 2016). Indigenous history in the 1800's, a topic often silenced and deficit-framed in much teaching of U.S. history curriculum, was used in class as an example of how to engage with critical multimodalities and their power to counter-storytell (Sabzalian, 2019; Shear et al., 2015; Shear et al., 2018; Urrieta & Calderón, 2019). This particular topic in U.S. history was chosen for its egregious roots in what Grande (2004) calls the "whitestream imagination" (p. 106). The teaching of America's West in the 1800's is notorious for its uncritical examination of various concepts. These concepts include but are not limited to manifest destiny and westward expansion, with very little awareness—let alone push back—on banal yet dangerous mythical narratives such as the land being empty for the taking,

immigrants getting a fresh start, farming proliferating, and Indigenous peoples conveniently disappearing in flight and disease (Journell, 2009; Krueger, 2019; Loewen, 2008; Shear et al., 2015, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In fact, the West was and is Indigenous land; many immigrants such as the Chinese, Irish and Mexicans were exploited in the building of railroads and more (Chang, 2019); the environment was raped by the industry of farmers whose tactics literally planted seeds for future environmental disasters such as the Dust Bowl (Worster, 2004); and while it was yet another chapter in the violent displacement and deliberate genocide of Indigenous peoples, there was little in the way of victimization and much in Indigenous historical displays of agency, resistance and rich cultural lives lived in the midst of such oppression (Calderón, 2014; Grande, 2004; Lomawaima, 1993; Miranda, 2012; Tuck & Fernandez, 2013). It should be noted that while all Master's students in the cohort received this lesson, Eva was the only one to take it further via lesson implementation in her preservice teaching. This, combined with her voluntary action, meant she became the case study's participant.

1800's Western America is thus a chapter of United States history intensely ahistorical in the ways it can be and often is taught, robbing Indigenous history not only of its agency and tribal diversity, but silencing it altogether. Thus, teaching Indigenous history within this topic is primed for the use of critical multimodalities to deeply and evocatively push back on the dominant narrative with a counter-story voiced by those who have been historically marginalized. Critical multimodalities can center Indigenous authorship of these narratives and can offer a deeply textured, complex reality of the history (that most textbooks do not) in order to help students know, feel and understand what happened in the past (Garrett & Kerr, 2016).

Therefore, the Master's students, including Eva, were given a methods lesson in their university course with this context and choice of topic in mind. After a brief refresher lesson on Indigenous history and the necessity for counter-storytelling within that subject matter (which delved into the social justice implications not only for Indigenous peoples themselves, but also the students who are receiving such hegemonic history teaching over time), preservice teachers were presented with a variety of critical multimodalities based on Indigenous histories challenging dominant narratives (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Sabzalian, 2019). These included a piece of poetry, a street art mural, a documentary film excerpt, and a film excerpt all dealing with different aspects of Indigenous history in the 1800's. Preservice teachers experienced the critical multimodality as a group, and then were guided through answering question prompts, making their own sets of historical inquiry tools to mine information further, questioning their own socialized assumptions, and recording notes on how they might use this material in future critical teaching (King, 1995; Peck & Seixas, 2008; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; VanSledright, 2010).

While we were never directly responsible for grading their work in a classroom environment, we did operate in other supervisory roles, as well as in a general mentorship capacity, which could be construed as positions of power over their scholarship and work. Even though we worked assiduously to remind the participant of the voluntary nature of the study and reiterated that no difference in treatment would occur based on their participation, elements of power, age and imagined outcomes assuredly affected the study's data (Merriam et al., 2001).

We recognize the Westernized, Eurocentric standards which might say this topical situation is too close to the researcher, that too much emotion is at play, and that preexisting social and power relationships can cloud outcomes and clarity in the research itself (Banks, 1998; Haraway & Goodeve, 1997). There are disadvantages to closely knowing your participants, to be sure. But rooted in our



complex identities, as a woman and bi-racial man respectively, we feel and know that there are deep advantages, and trusts, connections and thus eminent truths in the data that come from preexisting relationships as well. The fact that we knew this preservice teacher before the study, and continued to know them afterwards, means some tension. But it also means that there is long-standing respect and connection between us, which only made our conversations around social studies pedagogy and the difficulties of challenging the dominant historical narrative richer (Acker, 2000). It is our hope that we share the participant's stories and truths in a way that honors their personhood even more so because of this relationality.

We want to collectively say in this section that we proudly approach this research from the lived reality and honor of having been, and always thus being, teachers. One of us taught high school in Buffalo, New York prior to her PhD candidacy, and it influences her work daily. Particularly, in this context it informs her insider understanding and knowledge of what preservice teachers are doing/trying to do—but she is also an outsider, no longer teaching in the high school classroom, nor a preservice teacher herself (Collins, 2004; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). She comes to that position with humility and much self-mining, trying to channel Tuck and Yang (2014) who remind that cold objectivity is a myth not worth chasing, and that the real work lies in relentless interrogation of power and privilege. We attempted to address this via multiple rounds of member-checking with our participant at each stage of our analysis, writing, and editing.

The other member of our research team is fully aware that his experiences differ from the participant. He comes to this work knowing others' interpretations of current and historical events largely shape their understandings and teaching decisions. Yet, he would be remiss not to highlight the power and agency every individual possesses to change systems of oppression influencing educational spaces and beyond (Wade, 2003). As a former teacher from Dallas, Texas, and current teacher-educator, the work he engages in individually and with others must always be grounded in the continuous hunger and desire for equitable change.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Eva's written notes and thoughts from this class day were collected, and her printed lesson plan was saved for future analysis. Following the class session, we conducted a one-hour semi-structured interview on how she thought about the use of critical multimodalities in social studies teaching, and how she might take them up in her own student teaching towards amplifying historically marginalized voices and speaking a counter-story to hegemony. Eva was also member-checked afterwards with additional questions, clarifications, and follow-ups concerning the first interview. After this initial interview, we then observed Eva teach one, 50-minute lesson utilizing critical modalities in her seventh-grade Texas History class student-teaching field placement. Observation notes focused primarily on how Eva incorporated critical multimodalities. An additional 30-minute post-observation semi-structured interview was conducted in order to explore Eva's perspective regarding her use of critical multimodalities in support of counter-storytelling. Both interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and stored securely. We first read the interviews, observations notes and artifacts separately, taking notes on themes while paying particular attention to the participant's use of critical multimodalities. We then analyzed and coded all data according to patterns and themes together, comparing notes throughout (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We then triangulated themes with interview and observation codes, which were member-checked afterwards (Merriam et al., 2001; Miles et al., 2020; Stake, 1995).

## Findings

In this study, themes emerged that deepen ideas around how one preservice social studies teacher *conceptualizes*, and then *takes up and engages*, the use of critical multimodalities as pedagogical tools to represent historically marginalized voices and disrupt dominant narratives in social studies education. The three themes of this case study that emerged were: multimodalities as access for counter-story teaching, a lack of curricular support, and the necessity of content knowledge.

The first theme illuminates how critical multimodalities were productive and dexterous pedagogical spaces from which Eva conceptualized the use of counter-storytelling in social studies teaching, and also actually put into practice teaching the counter-story in hopes to center historically marginalized voices and enact transformative social justice teaching (Au, 2009; Banks, 1998; Tyson & Park, 2006; Wade, 2003). However, this pedagogical practice was not without challenges. The second theme, lack of curricular support, displays how difficult it was to do this counter-story work via critical multimodalities when it was not supported by national and state standards and classroom resources that enforce, normalize and re-entrench the majoritarian story (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017; Stanley & Longwell, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Lastly, the theme of the necessity of content knowledge came through strongly, showcasing that as powerful as critical multimodalities can be in teaching a social-justice-oriented counter-story, it must sit on a rich understanding of the overall historical content knowledge of the topic at hand, including its dominant narrative—which is tiered, deep, and taxing work to resource and do alone, especially as a preservice teacher (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Shulman, 1986; VanSledright, 2002).

### Multimodalities as Access for Counter-story Teaching

Across the data we identified numerous indications that multimodalities can serve as avenues to teach historical counter narratives. Eva was open to using critical multimodalities in teaching Indigenous history throughout. In her words, this implementation elicited robust student feedback, showing that critical multimodalities were an engaging way to bring students into a socially just teaching of history. While language around offering Bishop's (1990) idea of mirrors/windows/sliding glass doors in curriculum is usually framed around elementary literacy learning, after her teaching experience our participant Eva argued that this can be true—and needs to be—for secondary social studies learning as well (Purnell et al., 2007).

Reflecting on her curriculum decision-making, she described how using works of critical art created by members of the very historically marginalized group discussed was a powerful and effective way to disrupt the dominant narrative about Indigenous histories, in all their complexity and agency, with her students. Emphasizing this point, Eva shared,

I wanted to do a lesson on...gathering information that we know and disrupting it, so that we could then go into learning about more specifics on Texas Native Americans. I think art was a really natural way to do that (Eva, Personal Interview, November 19, 2019).

She explained that using multimodalities allowed her teaching to begin with an image that all of her students recognized—the Disney cartoon depiction of Pocahontas—in order to problematize how dominant historical narratives depict Indigenous peoples. Starting on the problematic but common ground of this image allowed her students to access the topic, relate, and then jump into more challenging territory, Eva explained. She then asked her students why the image was familiar, why it

slotted in with what they had previously been taught about Indigenous peoples, and then took them into a thorough examination via visual literacy of the 1760 portrait of Pocahontas, based on the 1616 engraving. This elicited questions regarding race, skin color, context, clothing and more, which together with questions that Eva had scaffolded, led to a rich discussion around stereotyping, problematic pop culture representations of historical figures, and why students had not previously known the engraving.

Eva commented that having both Pocahontas images side by side was powerful, because she thinks of art as “an entryway that everyone can kind of have some initial comfort with, and then even if you don't at all...there is no background info that you need in order to start analyzing a piece of art” (Eva, personal interview, November 19, 2019). Eva is describing that multimodalities were a place to begin a sophisticated critical inquiry of history's dominant narratives. She also explained that pedagogically, it dislodges the top-down idea of history as an objective fact that only the teacher can lecture on, and instead invites anti-banking, participatory discussion and student observation into social studies education (Freire, 2018).

For this type of teaching to truly disrupt the counter narrative, however, Eva knew that she “didn't want to just include white artists and white painters from the past”, and not simply images that all students would recognize either, but multimodal works from Indigenous artists as well. This not only deconstructed monolithic ideas of historically marginalized groups such as Texas tribes like the Apache, Caddo, Comanche, and Kiowa (e.g., Grande, 2004), but also pushed her as a teacher to “find out history I hadn't known” (Eva, personal interview, November 19, 2019). Eva is describing the true authenticity of a counter narrative. It affects not only the students who get a telling of history that centers the historically marginalized groups who the history is happening *to* and *with* (a story authored by those who actually experienced the oppressions in the lesson and responded with incredible agency), but also pushes the teacher. Eva realized her lesson could not be a story of a historically marginalized group in a way that was told *for* them by another source, but that was told *from* them, from their standpoint and perspective, tapping something Garrett and Kerr (2016) call ‘other-wiseness’ (Collins, 2004; Sabzalian, 2018). For Eva, in order to problematize the depictions of Indigeneity from the white gaze, including Indigenous artists as original authors was a must (Grande, 2004; Lomawaima, 1999; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Shear et al., 2018).

This is, thus, a multimodal exercise in standpoint recognition for historically marginalized identities such as the Indigenous tribes of Texas (Hartsock, 1998). It is a monumental pedagogical endeavor to bring teachers and students in touch with something that allows for a window into another's life without actually *othering*. Eva's infusion of critical multimodalities into her practice of challenging dominant narratives echoes the experiences of preservice teachers in Salinas and Blevins' (2014) study focusing on critical historical inquiry. These scholars assert that teachers learning about counter narratives can “develop a deeper understanding of othering, or the process in which groups of people are marginalized based on race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.” (p. 45). Multimodalities and their humanity therein are ripe for the kind of pedagogical work that encourages *context* and *contact* with this otherwiseness, pulling students closer to a shared humanity that respects differences of a life in another space and time that is not their own (Garrett & Kerr, 2016). Eva shared that delving into the rich primary sources that multimodalities can be, instead of peering behind a fictitiously objective magnifying glass of history, left students alive and engaged with other parts of the world (Eva, personal interview, August 14, 2019).

## **A Lack of Curricular Support**

While using critical multimodalities has the potential to engage students in past worlds with historically marginalized groups through that groups' own voices, it is difficult work without strong curricular support—especially for preservice teachers. We found this to be even more true concerning the teaching of Indigenous histories. Eva's responses frequently expressed concern regarding the challenge of sustaining a pedagogy rooted in the narrative of counter-story. Specifically, these concerns included: majoritarian-heavy state standards, an overall school learning culture that did not support such work with linked resources or overall encouragement, and a general sense of intimidation concerning curricular silences on the same historically marginalized groups the rest of the year (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

A recurring comment Eva made in pre and post interviews was that existing curriculum standards give little to no room for this kind of work—work with a counter-story message, a multimodal format, and thematic recurrences throughout the year. She shared that all the work and research she did around the topic required support from her education school colleagues or was independently developed and thus extremely time-consuming (Eva, personal interviews, August 14, 2019 and November 19, 2019). Expressing this point, Eva shared, “It's these empty Google searches or emails [for help],” plus many nights in research “rabbit holes” that extended lesson preparation time in a way that was somewhat sustainable for one lesson, but not for all future ones (Eva, Personal Interview, November 19, 2019). Moreover, while this lesson happened in October, relatively early in the school year, Eva expressed frustration that once Indigenous voices were heard, there were no other standards that easily connected to this topic in subsequent units of study. In other words, it was a ‘stand-alone,’ after they were mentioned in the beginning of the school year, Indigenous voices faded out from the texts and standards. While Eva personally fought for moments in the curriculum to teach Indigenous histories where they weren't explicitly encouraged, she said “I don't feel like there's been a lot that we can tie it back into throughout the year” (Eva, Personal Interview, November 19, 2019; Lesson Observations throughout 2019).

Eva's school also favored discipline of students over critical, creative pedagogy. She spoke of being forced to adapt classroom management styles that were ‘top-down’ and not her own when being observed by school personnel, which strained her ability to fully be present with her students and their active, anti-banking learning (Lesson Observation, October 30, 2019). This highly disciplinary attitude that dominated school culture was counter to the pedagogy of exploration that critical, liberatory work with history requires. Eva thus shared that when students were presented with this kind of learning that asked them to get in touch with their own emotional reactions and funds of knowledge, instead of rote memorization practices and ‘right answers,’ they were often unfamiliar with how to engage in this praxis, because it was not something modeled in previous grades or other classrooms (Batt, 2021; González et al., 2006; Sheppard & Levy, 2019).

Furthermore, getting students more familiar with this type of liberatory praxis required extra time—time Eva did not necessarily have due to the state requirements she felt pressured to checkmark. “I feel like this lesson could have taken a whole week, could have been *fully cool*,” she expressed (Eva, Personal Interview, November 19, 2019). She wished there had more time for the lesson so students could have revisited their discussion after gaining confidence and dexterity with both the content materials of critical multimodalities created by Indigenous artists, and with a dialogic pedagogy that didn't have them memorize answers but reflect, engage, and seek them collectively.

Lastly, even when Eva went the extra mile of creating a counter-story lesson plan complete with critical multimodalities in a very sophisticated way, there was tension in finding majority Indigenous authors (Lesson Observation, October 30, 2019). Eva was torn between offering more white-authored pieces that would be familiar to her students and thus readily accessible, such as the photographs of Edward Curtis or Gast's *American Progress*, versus finding Indigenous artists like Wendy Red Star who were less familiar to her students and thus more deserving of 'unpacking' time, which was difficult due to the tight class schedule they had (Eva, Personal Interview, November 19, 2019). This catch-22 of the dominant narrative staying familiar and thus dominant was only strengthened by how difficult it was for Eva to find Indigenous, counter-story voices in the maze of state-sponsored materials and less-than-neutral internet search bases (Noble, 2018). The majoritarian story was embedded both in Eva's own K-12 experience, and in the readily available resources she looked to for support before deeper digging—which was, of course, more labor intensive (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

### **The Necessity of Content Knowledge**

The final theme shows that finding multimodalities without deep historical content knowledge about the topic was an uphill climb for Eva, as it is for most preservice teachers (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Shulman, 1986; VanSledright, 2002). Eva shared that using critical multimodalities "helped me feel a little more excited about teaching social studies, and competent in being able to do that [even if] I don't have a degree in history" (Eva, Personal Interview, November 19, 2019). But finding multimodalities without deep historical content knowledge of the dominant narrative (in order to disrupt it) is a difficult enterprise (Murray, 2012). Eva's responses reflected this difficulty as she struggled to find critical multimodality resources on a topic where she lacked extensive historical knowledge. Eva's frustration mirrors the challenges Gudmundsdottir and Shulman's (1987) novice teacher faced. She was not an expert in critical multimodalities or Indigenous history, yet tried tirelessly to think about the subject matter in a unique fashion in order to educate her students. Thus, limitations here are not her own, but lie in the education system that did not amply prepare her with Indigenous history content knowledge in the first place—an issue that acted as a challenge as she simultaneously tried to create and enact a lesson to ensure her students did not suffer a similar fate.

Eva commented repeatedly that without explicit mentorship and teacher preparation program supports which cracked open the metaphorical door for lesson plan leads, she would not have found these resources with the same success. However, she also noted that once she received assistance, this created a pedagogical pathway to follow lesson plan ideas and hone an emerging reflex to dig into the counter-story more. In fact, during interviews, Eva shared resources, previously unknown to us, featuring brilliant critical Indigenous artists that we then incorporated into future professional developments in social studies consortiums, teacher trainings, and more (Lesson Observation, October 30, 2019).

### **Discussion**

The mere use of critical multimodalities towards social justice teaching will not battle a majoritarian story to pedagogical perfection, nor amplify historically marginalized voices to the pitch that teaching today demands (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Instead, such a philosophical practice must be nurtured and strengthened over time, with fellow teachers, education program participants and other educational mentors aiding preservice teachers in their journey of using critical tools to counter the dominant narrative and teach towards transformation and social justice (King, 2016; Martell, 2017;

Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Salinas et al., 2016; Shanks, 2018; Vickery & Salinas, 2019). Furthermore, the practitioners who must work alongside preservice teachers cannot stand alone in teaching and deepening such work. This is often the case, as national and state standards around education are still wedded to preserving the majoritarian, white-streamed story of history which privileges the voices (both in authorship of history, and who is starred in the history itself) of white, cis-gender, wealthy, straight men over all other groups and identities (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This has never more been true than in the current moment and in a state like Texas, wherein critical race theory and other equity-minded approaches to teaching social studies are under attack from various political and parental organizations (Chavez, 2021; Méndez, 2021). Using critical multimodalities must be contextualized in what it means to truly teach a counter-story narrative in social studies (Salinas & Blevins, 2014). It must also be added that when this is done via visual literacy, some linguistic challenges that might stop some students from engaging with written historical material are lessened as learning obstructions (Fránquiz & Salinas, 2011). But this type of pedagogy has to come in the form of both knowing deeply the historical content you are teaching, and in knowing its dominant narrative well, so the counter-story teaching can successfully subvert and even supplant the majoritarian story and its values (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

However, teacher coaching/mentoring/training in what the counter-story is, looks like, and can do is not enough. There has to be a greater emphasis, both in social studies teaching programs and teaching institutions in general, that a counter-story is nothing if it does not champion and frame the history it teaches *from the voices* of those who have been oppressed. Teaching, for instance, about the Trail of Tears from a non-hegemonic text that discusses Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole peoples in this genocide, with real attention to social justice and reparations, is indeed a step forward from damaging rhetorics of the past on display in many a social studies textbook. However, even though these materials are more readily available in some cases, especially to preservice teachers who are not yet teaching daily or not yet submerged in their content matter, they do not fully deliver a counter-story from the *perspective* of anyone Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole (which of course would expand beyond trauma as the frame through which so much Indigenous history is seen in the average textbook, and introduce resistance, agency and more in addition) (Urrieta & Calderón, 2019). This authorship struggle must be amended. It is not only about greater access to primary sources authored by those who have been historically marginalized, but about these sources being abundant in mainstream state curriculums and textbooks, and aligned with social studies standards. If these sources are continuously too difficult for preservice teachers to find, it will be too difficult to integrate them into curriculums, especially for new teachers. Teaching transformative social justice social studies shouldn't be something any teacher has to fight to seek, hone and practice—the tools for this kind of teaching must be out in the open, plentiful and shared often by educational programs and schools at large.

It also must be stated that the necessity for content knowledge is less about sharing a specific source or having all the answers. Most of what we heard Eva searching for was about knowing she was not alone in this work. She sought both positive pressure and support as she engaged in counter-story-telling history teaching that sought to center historically marginalized voices and root students in an engaged understanding of social justice (Lesson Observation, October 30, 2019; Eva, Personal Interview, November 19, 2019). It is no small feat to do so, and requires much support—from the schools that host student teachers, to the programs that train them, to the colleagues that learn alongside them.

Additionally, the pedagogy that best undergirds social justice social studies teaching with critical multimodalities is one firmly rooted in what Freire (2018) would call liberatory praxis. Freirean understandings of this kind of pedagogy support critical multimodal teaching in social studies because of the very discussion and anti-banking learning that it thrives on. This too must be centralized in pre-service teacher training and school cultures, or else early teachers such as Eva will have a challenging time getting students to share, speak out, and identify just what moves them in an image that was selected to get them talking and out of their seat to touch a gallery wall, instead of staying in chairs as they memorize yet another historical timeline. A dogmatic school culture—one that seeks to control young people instead of encouraging them to engage in learning built to care about their funds of knowledge and feelings as they connect to the stories we share as a community—runs opposite to the kind democratic praxis necessary to support students' liberatory, agentic exploration of multimodalities (Cornbleth, 1984; Giroux & Penna, 1979). Unless education's culture changes in tandem with teaching philosophies such as utilizing critical multimodalities, such ways of learning will be hard-pressed to flourish pedagogically in a landscape of undemocratic schooling.

This also holds true for teaching social studies towards social justice in a sustained, supported way. For example, one isolated lesson that frames the fight for women's rights in multi-ethnic feminist voices, with primary-source poetry authored by women such as Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa and Rupi Kaur, can be a fantastically impactful lesson. But if that is the one time in the semester that BI-POC and Asian women's voices are raised, and they are silent through the historical teaching of other topics where such women were certainly present, then a great disservice has been done to not only the voices of those historically marginalized, but to students who will seemingly learn that certain groups are only around at certain times, and that single issue stories are the norm (Lorde, 1982). This type of work isn't just for a critical multimodality lesson. In fact, it is never done, because the historical oppression and agency that it brings to life for learners goes on, too. Teaching in this vein must be sustained, constant work.

### Implications

Preservice teachers, and every other teacher alongside them—whether years into the field or stepping into the classroom for the first time—need and deserve support from teacher education programs, state standards, administrators, mentors, and overall school culture when it comes to transformative social justice teaching. Moreover, *students* deserve this. The use of critical multimodalities is just one way to help arm teachers' minds and hearts for the fight to teach transformative social studies that challenges the hegemonic story and shares the voices of those historically marginalized, a learning right students should always be able to access.

Although Eva faced the challenge of working within the framework of state standards intent on evaluating students and maintaining cultural and political hegemony (Apple, 1971), she still saw the benefit of incorporating critical multimodalities into her teaching. Critical multimodalities such as music and artworks allow teachers and students opportunities to learn beyond information solely found in textbooks. Through their integration of diverse, international music and songs into social studies practices, Pellegrino et al. (2015) assert "effective social studies teachers do far more than ask students to read from a textbook or passively listen to a lecture filled with names and dates" (p. 67). In addition, McCall's (2004) infusion of poetry into their teacher preparation program helped their preservice teachers develop a more social justice-oriented lens to their pedagogies and most appreciated "the engaging language, personal tone, and deep emotions found in poetry that are missing from social studies textbooks" (p. 176). However, these nuanced and exploratory means of learning

must contend with obstacles in the ever-evolving politics of teaching. Social studies teacher preparation programs looking to subvert oppressive structures found within educational spaces should expand beyond the confines of their discipline and potentially reach out to departments and community organizations already engaged in the fight for social justice and equity.

What could this look like? On a very basic level, more time in social studies preservice teacher methods classes to teach the benefits of multimodal arts is a necessary start. One class session was not enough, and a reinforcement throughout the semesters on utilizing aesthetic materials in concrete lesson-planning examples where students take the lead is needed—one cannot teach Freirean pedagogy via a banking lecture model. Perhaps in conjunction with art education and/or bilingual education programs, preservice social studies teachers could be given the opportunity to deeply delve into non-Eurocentric multimodalities and how they might be used to teach counter-stories. For instance, this could be done with the cross-disciplinary assistance of theater, film and fine art departments in colleges and universities who would maybe offer internships for such collaborations. Moreover, the connections and communities outside of college gates cannot be undervalued. From museums and galleries to local artists and collectives, by resourcing work and finding artistic, inspirational value equally in paid admission spaces and public street art alike, relationships can flourish between teacher education programs and the communities they serve and are actively a part of—all while supporting local, BIPOC artists. Lastly, the more preservice teachers that are exposed to this pedagogy, the more past graduates can visit as guest speakers and share how this type of critical work has been wielded in school settings with difficult environments relating to cultural responsiveness, time, testing and more.

We hope the importance of critically using multimodal resources helps teachers and students engage in different perspectives than their own, explore historical empathy with emotionality, and connect with the world at home and at large through artistic engagement, all in a way that reaches the eyes and hearts of educators and education policy makers. We even and especially wish this for those who have no experience in such educational fields, yet serve on boards that make sweeping educational decisions with national repercussions (Thurman, 2013). If we are to outgrow national traumas of genocide and slavery, sexism and racism, homophobia and transphobia, xenophobia and colonialism, and much, much more, we must *learn better*. Critical multimodalities are a path to that learning, a way to support preservice teachers in taxing classroom environments and express and perhaps achieve, as artist Christo once said, a loud and defiant freedom. But we must journey there together. As is the case in so many other teaching practices working towards equity, teachers such as Eva, her colleagues and her students should not have to—and perhaps cannot sustainedly—do this work alone.

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