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From Margins to Center: Developing Cultural Citizenship Education Through the Teaching of Asian American History

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Abstract: Citizenship education is considered a primary purpose for social studies education. However, in elementary classrooms, it is often limited to the memorization of mainstream civic knowledge and learning about a handful of American heroes. This qualitative study of three Asian American educators uses Asian Critical Race Theory to explore how the teachers drew from their own cultural and linguistic experiences to inform pedagogies of cultural citizenship education that interrogated what it means to be a citizen. By (re)defining the terms Asian American and American (citizen), the teachers enacted cultural citizenship education through the use of counternarratives and children’s literature that disrupted normative conceptualizations of citizen. Their work demonstrates how educators can present more inclusive depictions of civic identity, membership, and agency to young learners.

Keywords: Asian critical race theory, citizenship education, critical race theory, cultural citizenship, elementary education, teachers of color

While the panethnic term Asian American masks great ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and other forms of diversity (Espiritu, 1992), its socio-political roots were grounded in shared historical limitations on citizenship privilege, social mobility, and economic opportunities, which served as the basis for the development of a shared Asian American identity (Iwata, 2005). This panethnicity can be a means to express agency and “to contest systems of racism and inequality in American society—systems that seek to exclude, marginalize and homogenize” (Espiritu, 1992, p. 175) Asian Americans. One

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of the most significant aspects of Asian American history was the designation of Asians as “aliens ineligible to citizenship” (A. A. Parker, 1925), which distinguished them from other migrant or racialized groups and distanced them from the national cultural terrain (Lowe, 1996). This distinct disenfranchisement on the basis of citizenship demonstrates the need to uncover histories usually hidden in schools, especially at the elementary level, as well as the explicit teaching of broader understandings of citizenship.

This article examines how three Asian American elementary teachers’ pedagogical decisions regarding the teaching of Asian American history were influenced by their racialized understandings of citizenship. The theoretical frames of Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) and cultural citizenship revealed the tensions of broadening young students’ understandings of civic identity and civic agency as the teachers taught Asian American histories rarely discussed in schools. AsianCrit was essential to this examination as it centered the Asian American experience in the teachers’ decision-making processes, asserting the significance of their common identity as Asian Americans (Omi, 1997) in spite of their personal and professional differences. Through their work, the teachers enacted cultural citizenship education that disrupted traditional and normative examples of civic agents and civic action as they presented their students with Asian American counternarratives. Given the lack of attention paid to Asian American historical narratives throughout P–12 education, the teachers’ pedagogical practices offer important insight into the nuances of teaching histories normally excluded in the curriculum.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Asian American

The term Asian American¹ was coined by activists Emma Gee and Yuji Ichioka in 1968 when they co-founded the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at the University of California, Berkeley. The AAPA was a diverse organization composed of multiethnic Asians from a variety of geographical, socioeconomic, class, and immigrant backgrounds united by anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics (Maeda, 2012). Despite these origins, Asian American is no longer widely used as a political–racial identifier due to several recent trends that have altered its meaning (Philip, 2014), including the increased ethnic diversity of Asian Americans, perceptions of the model minority stereotype (Park, 2008), and census use as a racial category. While recognizing the complexity of this term (Chen & Buell, 2018), in this article, I use Asian American to describe any person of Asian descent living in America, whether they are first generation immigrants or fourth generation Americans of Asian heritage.

Asian American Citizenship

Asian American immigration history in relation to U.S. citizenship was distinct from other migrant or racialized groups as Asians were the only group for whom legislation was crafted to exclude their entry into the United States (e.g., Page Act of 1875, Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) and the only group legally rendered “aliens ineligible to citizenship” through the denial of naturalization (Naturalization Act of 1870). Although the Supreme Court case *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898) upheld birthright citizenship for Chinese and other Asian immigrants, the dissents in the 7–2 decision emphasized popular notions of the unassimilability of the Chinese, citing blood lines as an indicator of their immutable foreignness (Lowe, 1996). These sentiments came to the fore in *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Thind* (1923), cases whose Asian American defendants invoked both science and popular knowledge to argue for the classification of Asian immigrants as white²/Caucasian (rather than “Yellow,” “Oriental,” or “Mongoloid”) and therefore eligible for citizenship (Haney-López, 1996). The *Thind* decision declared that understandings of whiteness could only be extended to other European immigrants “unquestionably akin to those already here and readily amalgamated with them” (*United States v. Thind*, 1923, p. 213), asserting the assimilability of Southern and Eastern Europeans in contrast to the inalterable foreignness and subsequent unassimilability of Asians. Moreover, although the *Ozawa* and *Thind* cases applied only to Japanese and South Asians, the Supreme Court made a leap in racial logic and applied the rule of ineligibility to citizenship for Koreans, Thais, Vietnamese, and other Asian nationalities in the final paragraph of the decision (Ngai, 1999).

The Immigration Act of 1924, which prohibited Japanese immigration³ and barred the entry of women from China, Japan, Korea, and India while allowing thousands of Europeans to immigrate, completed full Asiatic exclusion by codifying racial exclusion into American immigration and naturalization law (Ngai, 2004). Since the mid-1800s arrival of Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush, U.S. immigration policy has been built on legal definitions of “white” and the rule of racial unassimilability (Ngai, 2004) that impacted a wide range of Asian American experiences and opportunities, from basic rights, such as access to public schooling and the right to testify as a witness in court, to property rights and interracial marriage (Lee, 2015; Sohoni, 2007). Consequently, immigration was the most important historical and discursive site of Asian American formation, as it has directly impacted Asian American citizenship, naturalization, and racialization for 150 years (Lowe, 1996).

Changing historical conceptions of race continue to disrupt Asian Americans’ ability to function and be identified as U.S. citizens. In the American imagination, to be Asian American means to act according to fundamentally different cultural dictates regardless of legal status or political

activity (Volpp, 2011) that render individuals unassimilable and immutably foreign. Being viewed as perpetual or forever foreigners (Tuan, 1998) is an experience common to many Asian Americans, whose sheer presence challenges the requirements for recognition as citizen in the United States (Young, 2004). As Tupper (2006) noted, modern-day “citizenship has not necessarily transcended the exclusions that once shaped its very existence” (pp. 46–47), regardless of the number of generations that Asian Americans have lived in the United States.

Troubling Traditional Textbook Depictions of Citizenship

According to Nelson and Pang (2014), in the United States, “the social studies curriculum often does a poor job of examining the disparity between the credo of justice and equal treatment and the pervasiveness of racialization in everyday life” (p. 208). In particular, the U.S. history curriculum has centered white middle/upper-class, Christian narratives and experiences as the norm (Yosso, 2002), often neglecting or avoiding substantive discussions about marginalized groups historically excluded from full participation in national culture (Kymlicka, 1995) and the subsequent civic estrangement and racial and gendered hierarchies they must confront (Haney-López, 1996; Tillet, 2012; Vickery, 2017a). American schools have generally ignored complex and inclusive renditions of citizenship and instead present narrow, simplified constructions that leave many students feeling detached and unrecognized (W. C. Parker, 2003; E. Taylor, 2009). Students and teachers of color, then, may have had experiences that differ drastically from textbook depictions of citizenship, resulting in racial, ethnic, and religious identification before national allegiance to the United States (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Bondy, 2014, 2016; Ghaffar-Kucher, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Vickery, 2017b).

Research has demonstrated that Americans who occupy more privileged social locations are more likely to engage as traditional participatory citizens (Tupper, 2006; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), while individuals whose multiple identities are marginalized by the broader society may be less apt to identify as citizens (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Rubin, Hayes, and Benson (2009) argued that larger social forces (including racial and socioeconomic inequality), as well as youth’s daily schooling experiences, affected their emerging sense of civic being. Therefore, teachers must recognize that civic identity is constructed within particular structures and practices, a departure from conventional notions of civic education (Rubin et al., 2009; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). As the ideals of citizenship found in school spaces do not necessarily match students’ life experiences, Abu El-Haj (2007) called for public schools to reinvigorate their “commitment to citizenship education in ways that engage with diversity, conflict, and structural inequalities” (p. 312), recognizing schools as “one of the few sites in which youth come together across the many communities that constitute our global village” (p.

312). By reframing citizenship education in this way, teachers can expand definitions of civic membership and thereby construct more robust possibilities for civic identity and civic agency.

Asian american history in schools. In general, the U.S. social studies curriculum has rarely included meaningful representations of communities of color (Wills, 2001), and people of color are often only present when relevant to Anglo-European experiences or actions (Cornbleth, 1997). Many scholars of social studies education have attended to the need to critically reframe traditional narratives of African Americans (Busey & Walker, 2017; King, 2016; Vickery, 2017a, 2017b; Woodson, 2016), Latinx (Cruz, 2002; Salinas, Fránquiz, & Rodríguez, 2016; Santiago, 2017), and Native Americans (Craig & Davis, 2015; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Shear, Knowles, Soden, & Castro, 2015). However, the field continues to neglect curricular representations of Asian Americans. Asian Americans are nearly invisible in K–12 history educational standards (An, 2016; Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; Noboa, 2012; Pang, 2006) and textbooks (Harada, 2000; Hartlep & Scott, 2016; Suh, An, & Forest, 2015), typically addressed just twice in secondary U.S. history: upon the enactment of Chinese exclusion in 1882 and during the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II (Noboa, 2012). This minimization of Asian American involvement in U.S. history is reductive in its attention to only two Asian American groups pre-1965 and problematic in context: Chinese and Japanese Americans are presented as pariahs, either wholly excluded from entry or viewed as enemies of the state, and removed from any past or present contributions to the nation.

Considering the minimal, if any, mention of Asian Americans in the curriculum, K–12 teachers are unlikely to include Asian American historical narratives in any substantive way. Notably, the few instances in which Asians and Asian Americans were mentioned in U.S. history textbooks followed typical narrative templates of American progress (Suh et al., 2015) and focused on male immigrants, relegating women and children to supporting, if not invisible, roles bound by the home (Okihiro, 1997). Some secondary U.S. history courses and textbooks that mentioned Chinese exclusion and Japanese American incarceration during World War II referenced the economic and academic successes of Asian Americans in ways that perpetuated the model minority stereotype and depicted Asian Americans as passive rather than active agents who did not resist inhumane working conditions or wartime imprisonment (Harada, 2000; Hartlep & Scott, 2016; Suh et al., 2015). Yet at the elementary level, teachers rarely cover these topics. Instead, Asian Americans may only be addressed in relation to holiday celebrations and food (Hartlep & Scott, 2016). Such representations preserve exotic stereotypes that emphasize difference and situate Asian Americans as foreign Others (Pang, Colvin, Tran, & Barba, 1992). Overall, on the rare occasions

when Asian Americans are discussed in schools, they are depicted as outsiders who are decidedly more Asian than American.

However, the realm of multicultural children's literature offers elementary educators alternative instructional resources about Asian Americans. While children's literature, like textbooks, is dominated by white, middle class, cisgendered, abled characters (Koss, 2015), there have been notable increases in books both by and about Asian Americans (Children's Cooperative Book Center, 2017). Early children's literature about Asian Americans often perpetuated stereotypes and maintained notions of Asian Americans as forever foreigners (Aoki, 1981). While this remains an issue with contemporary Asian folktales (Hartlep & Scott, 2016; Roy, 2008), studies revealed growth in positive, non-stereotyped portrayals; historically accurate information; and contemporary representation of Asian American life in books published during the last three decades (De Manuel & Davis, 2006; Harada, 1995; Yi, 2014; Yokota, 2009). Although many of these books are recognized by professional organizations like the National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS), they are typically used to represent diverse cultures rather than for the explicit teaching of Asian American histories and are rarely consumed by the general public, indicating a lack of demand by parents, teachers, librarians, and booksellers (Loh-Hagen, 2014).

This study contributes to the extant research on teaching Asian American histories through its focus on elementary contexts with Asian American teachers in the South. Unlike comparable research on the introduction of Asian American histories in secondary classrooms (Halagao, 2004; Kiang, 2004), these teachers did not have any background in ethnic studies content and/or pedagogy (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015) and worked in communities where there was no critical mass of Asian Americans. This study also highlights the use of children's literature as a resource for teaching more diverse histories and examples of citizenship, an area of growing scholarship in social studies education, albeit with limited attention to Asian Americans.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Citizenship education is shaped in great part by teachers who, in turn, are shaped by their own religious, political, and social commitments (Gutmann, 1999). This study of three elementary educators is framed by two bodies of research. First, in recognition of the complex racial, cultural, and sociopolitical identities held by the Asian American teachers in this study and the influence of these multiple identities upon their pedagogy, I utilize the theoretical lens of AsianCrit. Second, this study is framed by the notion of cultural citizenship, which facilitates a nuanced analysis of the

ways the teachers (re)visioned their pedagogical approaches about whom is considered an American “citizen.”

Critical Race Theory and the Call for AsianCrit

AsianCrit draws heavily from the larger, well-established traditions of critical theory, critical legal studies, and Critical Race Theory (CRT). These critical strands of research are founded on resistance to oppressive aspects of society for the purposes of fostering societal and individual transformation (Tierney, 1993). Early critical race legal scholars, such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Mari Matsuda, understood racism to be a normal, not aberrant, part of U.S. society, with racial inequality permeating every aspect of social life (Delgado, 2013). CRT has since been applied in a variety of fields, in addition to outgrowths that address more specific issues beyond race faced by other groups, such as Critical Race Feminism, Tribal Critical Theory, Latino Critical Race Theory, and AsianCrit. These branches of CRT are extensions of a theory that remain rooted in the same basic principles yet grew in different directions to address distinctive community needs based on complex histories and experiences in multiple contexts (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

In recognition of the failure of civil rights work and CRT scholarship to address Asian American issues, Chang (1993) called for the formation of Asian American legal scholarship. The discrimination faced by Asian Americans, Chang (1993) argued, “is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that suffered by other disempowered groups” (p. 1247) and CRT had “not yet shown how different races matter differently” (p. 1248). The Black/white paradigm that dominated early CRT work ignored the complexity of America’s racial hierarchy (Gotanda, 1995, 2010; Haney-López, 1996) and the convoluted nature of Asian Americans’ racial designation. Asian Americans were positioned as perpetual foreigners and threatening yellow perils since their earliest arrivals in the United States (Lowe, 1996; Takaki, 1990) through an “outsider racialization” that situated Asian Americans as immigrants and foreigners regardless of their actual citizenship status (Ancheta, 1998). Asian Americans also suffered from nativistic racism distinct from the nativism of the 1840s that included anti-Catholic and anti-European strains (Chang, 1993; Gee, 1999). Moreover, as described previously, the uniqueness of the Asian American experience is noted by the legislative response to Asian immigration and citizenship. AsianCrit recognizes and forefronts the racialized history of Asian immigrants and its subsequent impact on Asian American citizenship and experiences in U.S. society.

Mindful of AsianCrit’s emerging status in the wide field of CRT, Curammeng, Buenavista, and Cariaga (2017) proposed three directions to move AsianCrit forward in the future. First, they urged AsianCrit scholars to dismantle model minority constructs while also interrogating Asian American

complicity in Anti-Blackness. Second, while recognizing the need to critique the perpetual foreigner trope, AsianCrit research must also consider settler colonialism and other logics of power. Third, the authors called for meaningful engagement with ethnic studies and interdisciplinary perspectives. Together, these directions offer AsianCrit greater relevance and responsiveness in solidarity with all communities pursuing struggles toward justice.

AsianCrit in Education

As schools are powerful institutions that create and reinforce racial inequality (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2010), CRT applications in school contexts can deepen understanding of the educational barriers faced by people of color (E. Taylor, 2009), from the inequality in school funding to issues related to assessment and curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), which often marginalize the knowledges of students of color (Yosso, 2002). AsianCrit has been applied in educational research studies to critically examine curriculum (An, 2016, 2017a), the experiences of Asian American students (Kolano, 2016; Quach, Jo, & Urrieta, 2009), and in teacher education (An, 2017b; Han, 2014). This study's focus on Asian American elementary teachers and their social studies pedagogical practices marks a new development in the application of AsianCrit within P-12 classroom settings, building upon recent studies of how young learners understand race and its role in the teaching of history (Adams & Busey, 2017; Falkner, 2018; Salinas, Rodríguez, & Lewis, 2015) by attending to the Asian American identity and histories often rendered invisible in U.S. social studies curricula.

Museus and Iftikar (2014) offered an AsianCrit framework characterized by seven tenets that center racial realities at the core of Asian American educational experiences. Two tenets of AsianCrit are particularly salient in this paper: *(re)constructive history* and *story, theory, and praxis*. *(Re) Constructive History* underscores the importance of (re)constructing a historical Asian American narrative by re-analyzing history to expose racism toward Asian Americans and recognizing their racial exclusion from American history. This tenet also emphasizes the need to advocate for transcending this invisibility and silence to construct a collective Asian American historical narrative and foster strong Asian American identity and consciousness.

Story, Theory, and Praxis underscores the notion that counterstories, theoretical work, and practice are important, inextricably intertwined elements in the analysis of Asian American experiences and advocacy for Asian American people and communities. The tenet of *story, theory, and praxis* draws from CRT scholars such as Bell (1992), Delgado (2013), and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who emphasized the importance of counter-narratives/counterstories. Counterstories are "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the

margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32) and “can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Given the invisibility of Asian Americans in schools, counterstories are important pedagogical tools that can resist and disrupt the dominant curriculum and white normative conceptualizations of citizenship (Williams, 2004). Together, these two AsianCrit tenets provide a foundation to examine the experiences of Asian Americans by articulating and historicizing the distinct ways in which Asian Americans are commonly racialized in spite of their vast intergroup diversity.

Cultural Citizenship

Citizenship has been defined in a multitude of ways across a range of fields. In schools, Tupper (2006) argued, citizenship espouses a vision of what is “good” and “responsible” for teachers and students without interrogating the concept itself and developing understandings of the (im)possibilities that inhibit and foster meaningful social and political participation. This study regards citizenship as an ontological problem that is both a crisis of meaning and a crisis of belonging (Carson, 2006). As illustrated earlier, Asian Americans and other marginalized groups have been and continued to be viewed as not fully American and are structurally excluded from full economic, social, cultural, and political participation (Abu El-Haj, 2007). Therefore, Rosaldo’s (1997) notion of cultural citizenship, the process of “claiming membership in, and remaking America” (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997, p. 58), provides a useful lens through which to view the work of Asian American teachers in this study as they (re)conceptualized the meaning of (American) citizen with their students.

Cultural citizenship emphasizes the agency in marginalized groups in establishing and asserting human, social, and cultural rights to enfranchise themselves (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Kang, 2010). However, cultural citizenship is also “a dual process of self-making and being made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (Ong, 1996, p. 738). In particular, cultural citizenship goes beyond traditional classroom discourses of “kinds” of citizen based on formal processes of civic action (e.g., Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) by instead highlighting those groups whose cultural practices have historically been disrespected and rendered invisible and their ongoing struggle to participate in a truly democratic society (Stevenson, 2011). Like other marginalized groups, Asian Americans’ experiences with citizenship are deeply tied to their racialization in American society but are also influenced by immigration status, class, and international events.

Early scholarship on cultural citizenship focused on Latinx populations (Bernal, Alemán, & Carmona, 2008; Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Rosaldo,

1997) but later expanded to examine the experiences of Asian Americans, Muslims, and other marginalized communities worldwide (Bhandar, 2012; Kang, 2010; Lopez, 2016; Merchant, 2016; Ong, 1996; Stevenson, 2012). However, the application of cultural citizenship within education remains limited. Fránquíz and Brochin-Ceballos (2006) outlined four ways educators can develop cultural citizenship: providing access to culturally relevant oral, visual, and written texts; offering multiple opportunities for children to use cultural assets in the production of texts; fostering cultural preservation; and engaging students in activities with transformative potential. U.S. educational research on cultural citizenship has generally focused on immigrant and Latinx students (Bondy, 2014, 2016; Fránquíz & Brochin-Ceballos, 2006), with fewer studies that center the role of the teacher (Jaffee, 2016; Salinas & Alarcón, 2016). However, regardless of their research subjects, these cultural citizenship views of education examine ways in which we can ultimately foster societies founded on respect, democracy, engagement, and learning (Stevenson, 2012).

METHODS

This instrumental qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) advances Asian American perspectives in elementary citizenship education by looking in depth at the ways Asian American teachers enacted Asian American history and understood citizenship. This study was centered on the following research question: How do Asian American elementary educators broaden their students' understandings of citizenship?

Setting and Participant Selection

The study took place during the 2016 spring semester in Navarro,⁴ Texas, a large city where Asian Americans constitute 6% of the city's population, which is comparable to national statistics. As the study was foregrounded by AsianCrit, I actively sought Asian American elementary teachers in Navarro Independent School District (NISD) who expressed a personal interest in transforming (mis)representations of Asian Americans. Recognizing that Asian American history is rarely taught in K–12 schools and is particularly scarce in elementary schools beyond cultural celebrations, I selected participants based on the following criteria:

1. The participant identified as Asian American and was willing to discuss their cultural and immigrant experiences both in and out of the classroom.

2. The participant agreed to teach multiple Asian American history lessons. The form and scope of these lessons was at the teacher's discretion.
3. The participant committed to attending a half-day professional development workshop on Asian American history sponsored by NISD's elementary social studies department. I was an invited speaker at this workshop and provided several dozen instructional resources for teaching Asian American history to elementary students.⁵

This case study was bounded by the participants' self-identification as Asian American elementary teachers willing to diverge from traditional social studies curriculum. Although each teacher's school context and student groups were distinct (see [Tables 1 and 2](#)), there were many parallels in their educational, cultural, and professional experiences. Moreover, unlike the majority of extant literature on Asian American teachers set in the West Coast, this study examined the racialized experiences of teachers in an area with no critical mass of Asians but experiencing Asian American population growth (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). The teachers studied were frequently the sole faculty member of their ethnoracial group and/or the first Asian American teacher that students had.

Participants

After receiving research permissions from NISD, I was provided with a list of the district's Asian American elementary teachers. Similar to national statistics, these educators composed 2% of the district's teaching force (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). From this list, I contacted 19 individuals based on reputational case selection (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982) and snowball sampling (Yin, 2014). As a former NISD teacher, I benefitted from my personal and professional relationships with teachers and administrators in the district to establish which Asian American elementary educators taught social studies and might be willing to teach histories traditionally missing from the curriculum. These relationships were pivotal in determining which NISD teachers were contacted for participation. Ultimately, five Asian American teachers participated in the study, although two teachers only taught a single lesson on Asian American history. This article focuses on the three Asian American elementary teachers in NISD who taught multiple Asian American history lessons during the 2015–2016 school year.

Elyse was Vietnamese American and in her tenth year of teaching. She held a post-baccalaureate degree in elementary education and taught all subjects in a third grade classroom. Her campus had a disproportionately large percentage of Asian/Asian American students (9%) due to the many Asian families who lived in the nearby university's graduate student housing

Table 1. Teacher Participants, Ethnic & Cultural Diversity

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Birthplace	Immigrant generation	Languages spoken	Religion
Elyse Huynh	Vietnamese American	Germany	1.5	English, Vietnamese	Christian
Krishnan Kamath	Indian American	Kenya	1.5	English, Hindi, Gujarati, Spanish	Hindu/Jain
Virginia Ye	Chinese American	U.S.A.	2	English, Cantonese	Southern Baptist

Table 2. Teacher Participants, Professional Experience

Pseudonym	Grade(s)/Subject(s) taught	Years teaching	Degrees/Teacher preparation
Elyse Huynh	3rd grade, all subjects	10	B.A. in sociology, post-baccalaureate in elementary education
Krishnan Kamath	3rd & 5th grade, Spanish language arts, social studies & science	6	B.A. in architectural studies, Texas Teaching Fellows
Virginia Ye	2nd grade, all subjects	8	B.S. in elementary education, M.Ed. in language & literacy

and were zoned to her school. Krishnan⁶ was Indian American and in his sixth year of teaching in the United States. In addition to his six years in NISD, Krishnan had experience teaching elementary students in India and Guatemala. Krishnan went through an alternative certification program and was a dual-language teacher who taught language arts, social studies, and science in Spanish to third- and fifth-grade students. His campus' dual language program was an enrichment program overwhelmingly enrolled by non-native Spanish speaking, upper class white students in a neighborhood that underwent significant gentrification in the last decade. Virginia was Chinese American and in her eighth year of teaching. She was the only teacher in this study who went through a traditional undergraduate teacher preparation program, and she also held a master's degree in education. Virginia taught second grade at a Title I school composed exclusively of Latinx and African American students.

In addition to the participants' 6–10 years of teaching experience in NISD, all three were bi- or multilingual and the children of Asian immigrants or refugees. Illustrative of Asian diasporas, Elyse was born in Germany after her parents fled Saigon on a German naval ship during the Vietnam War, and Krishnan was born in Kenya to parents of Indian descent. Both immigrated to the United States as children and received first through twelfth grade schooling in Texas, learning English upon their arrival. Virginia was the only participant born in the United States. She grew up in a Texas suburb with a tight-knit Chinese American community. All three participants described active participation in their respective ethnic communities as children but did not have many Asian or Asian American friends as adults living in Navarro. Of these three teachers, only Virginia recounted teaching any Asian American historical content in the past. This instruction was limited

to the teaching of Japanese American incarceration in relation to the book *Sylvia and Aki* (Conkling, 2011) with a third grade class.

Data Collection

Interviews. The Asian American elementary teachers in this study participated in three semi-structured interviews outside of the classroom space (see Appendix for a partial interview protocol). The first interview, conducted prior to classroom data collection, focused on the participant's cultural background, family, and personal experiences in school. The second interview, conducted within a week of their first observation, explored their reasons for entering the teaching profession, their teaching philosophy and goals, and established context for their classrooms and campuses. The third interview took place after the end of the school year and served as an opportunity to reflect on their pedagogical choices and understandings of citizenship, to consider how they might teach Asian American history in the future, and to discuss how our conversations about race and culture over the course of the semester influenced their personal and professional lives. At the third interview, participants were also provided with student work samples and/or transcripts of a project related to Asian American history from their classrooms and were asked to reflect on their students' learning and their instructional decisions during that particular lesson.

In addition to these three interviews, multiple informal lesson debriefs and lesson planning discussions occurred within the school space. Before and after lessons were taught, the teachers sat down with me during their lunch and planning times to describe what they were planning, what they observed while teaching, and to explain their instructional decisions. These informal interviews occurred at the teachers' convenience and were often unplanned and interrupted, but they provided valuable insight into the many decisions that took place in the classroom. Some lengthier reflective conversations also took place via Skype in the evening, allowing the teachers more reflection time when their hectic schedules did not permit an immediate post-lesson debrief. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and provided to the participants.

Classroom observations. A minimum of six observations were conducted in each participant's classroom on days when the teachers informed me that they would be teaching Asian American content, either as stand-alone social studies lessons or integrated with language arts. My role as participant observer (Merriam, 2009) varied based on the lesson and age of students being observed. Younger students tended to engage with me directly as a classroom helper, while older students treated me as a formal observer or content expert. All observations were audio-recorded for the duration of the lesson, and in some cases, two audio recorders were used

on opposite sides of the classroom to capture as many student conversations as possible. During observations, field notes were written, setting diagrams were drawn, and photographs of any relevant writing on the dry erase board were taken. Any videos shown in class or books referenced or read aloud were documented such that moments when videos were paused to allow for clarification were noted for timestamps and pages/paragraphs where the teacher stopped to ask questions were also explicitly described in the field notes and transcriptions. Field notes included direct quotations of both students and teachers, descriptions of the setting and layout of the people in the classroom, activities throughout the lesson, and my own reflective comments.

Artifacts. The artifacts collected in this study ranged from PowerPoint slides created by teachers for the purpose of direct instruction to pieces of children's literature and teacher-scribed notes on the dry erase board during a classroom discussion. Some examples of student artifacts included group-created posters, photographs of students' research notes, and reading reflection journals. Student artifacts were only collected from students who obtained parental consent.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) explained, "The sense we make of the data we collect is equally influenced by the theoretical framework. That is, our analysis and interpretation ... will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place" (p. 48). First-cycle coding occurred with all interview and observation transcripts and artifact data in the form of descriptive and en vivo codes (Saldaña, 2009). AsianCrit served as a guiding lens to determine codes describing the ways race, culture, experience, language, and history intersected, resulting in codes such as "sharing stories of self," "family history," and "language use." Social studies notions of curricular enactment and the dominant narrative of history led to codes such as "connections across racial/ethnic groups," "addressing (in)equality/(in)justice," and "students recognize (in)equality/(in)justice" while the frame of cultural citizenship influenced codes such as "marginalized perspective" and "examples of agency."

After an initial descriptive and en vivo coding of all data, values coding was conducted to analyze the participants' perspectives and worldviews in regard to issues, such as the teaching of diverse historical narratives and institutional racism. Saldaña (2009) noted that values coding is particularly appropriate for case studies that "explore cultural values and intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions" (p. 95). Analytical memos were also written during first-cycle coding to begin to synthesize emerging patterns and themes. These memos included

reflections on my personal/ethnic connections to the participants, reflections on the teachers' instructional decisions, and comments on the student responses to the content. During second-cycle coding, similarly coded passages were assigned pattern codes, such as "teaching students what they didn't learn in school" and "learning from the past." Given the wide array of data forms, axial coding was also used to examine specific data sources that were common among two or three participants. Axial coding groups similarly coded data in a wide variety of forms and can "bring codes and analytic memos to life and help the researcher see where the story of the data is going" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 161). Some examples of axial coding included "teaching about difference," "who is citizen," and "Asian American agency/resistance."

Trustworthiness

Multiple approaches were used in this study to ensure trustworthiness. First, triangulation of multiple sources of data was conducted for each participant. For example, the application of values coding to interview transcripts, observation transcripts, and field notes corroborated coding and enhanced trustworthiness of findings by addressing whether the participants' attitudes and beliefs expressed in interviews were also addressed in their classroom observations and instructional decisions (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). Second, participants received electronic copies of all interview and classroom transcripts in order to provide member checks for internal validity (Merriam, 2009). Third, peer review and debriefing was conducted throughout the study, particularly in regard to the teachers' understanding of the dominant narrative of history and their ethnic identities. As I conducted these peer reviews, I consulted both Asian American educators as well as non-Asian American elementary educators to consider multiple pedagogical and cultural viewpoints during my analysis. The decision to consult both Asian American and non-Asian American educators in the review of observation field notes and interview transcripts was an attempt to ensure greater trustworthiness given my own identification as an Asian American elementary educator.

Researcher Positionality

As the American-born child of Asian immigrants, a former NISD elementary teacher, and current elementary teacher educator, I know Asian American teachers' voices are grossly underrepresented in educational research. However, Asian American educators have distinct experiences and knowledges that can be immensely valuable to their colleagues and students. In an educational atmosphere that continues to struggle with the needs of both teachers and students of color but tends to overlook the experiences of Asian

Americans, I believe this growing population deserves space to express their voices and should have opportunities to see their own (hi)stories in the curriculum they teach and learn.

Wertsch's (2000) distinction between the official histories of school and the unofficial histories of home reflects my personal experience with social studies. The stories of individual, social, economic, and political struggle in their homelands and upon arrival in the United States shared by my parents and family were never present in my textbooks. In school, I never learned about Asian immigration to America, as our conversations were limited to European immigrants in Ellis Island at the turn of the 19th century. My parents' native languages were never uttered in school, and I had no access to those languages in formal educational settings. Knowledges, histories, and ways of being related to Asia were always absent in school. I recounted many of these stories and the emotions associated with them as I recruited participants for this study, and these memories often served as starting points for lengthy conversations about identity, race, citizenship, and the role of social studies education during our interviews.

By sharing identities and stories with one another, reciprocity and rapport were increased, while the notions of power and authority invested in the role of the researcher were broken down (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Oakley, 1981). As an Asian American cultural insider (Banks, 1998), it was important to illustrate the complexity of Asian American identity and Asian American history that is so often ignored in mainstream society. However, as I did not share the same ethnicity, religion, or Asian language (s) as my participants, I was simultaneously positioned as a cultural outsider. These varying positions undoubtedly benefitted and challenged my research in a multitude of ways that scholars have detailed elsewhere (Coloma, 2008; Merriam et al., 2001).

FINDINGS

The data analysis revealed that the elementary teachers' individual experiences and understandings of citizen influenced their social studies praxis in three ways. First, as Elyse, Virginia, and Krishnan embarked upon the ambitious work (Grant, 2003) of teaching histories beyond the dominant narrative, they often referenced their own experiences with culture, language, and immigration to help their students understand the term *Asian American*, which their students initially understood as foreign and not American. Second, the teachers interrogated the term *American*, and over the course of multiple lessons, their students developed broader understandings of who was considered "American" and "citizen." Third, the teachers emphasized notions of cultural citizenship in their teaching of Asian American history.

(Re)Defining Asian American

The American *citizen* has historically been defined in contrast to the Asian *immigrant* (Lowe, 1996), from the earliest renderings of Asians as exotic barbarians (Said, 1978) and the threatening “yellow peril” (Takaki, 1990) to contemporary perceptions of Asian Americans as perpetual or forever foreigners, regardless of how many generations their families have lived in the United States (Tuan, 1998). The teachers in this study were acutely aware of these tropes as well as the common lumping of Asian identities and cultures into a monolith. To support their students’ understanding of what it meant to be Asian American, the teachers used themselves as examples. In an interview, Elyse described how she revealed her Vietnamese identity with her students at the start of each school year:

The first day of school, I’m like, “I’m from Vietnam. These are my pictures from when I was in Vietnam. Vietnam is here. It is not China. China’s here.” You know? I have to let them know everything. “Don’t call me Chinese” ... all that stuff.

Elyse’s efforts to broach these conversations soon after meeting her students revealed that she recognized her young students’ tendency to misunderstand all things Asian as Chinese and, therefore, was verbally and visually explicit about the distinction between China and Vietnam. By establishing China and Vietnam as separate countries with unique cultures, languages, and traditions, she disrupted student perceptions of Asia as having a singular culture and instead began to foment understandings of inter-group differences within Asian America.

Virginia and Krishnan also described giving similar introductory explanations about their ethnoracial identity with each new group of students and continued to address stereotypes and misconceptions related to their Asian heritage throughout the school year. In spite of their different ethnicities, the three teachers’ lived experiences revealed an intimate understanding of the attachment of foreignness to Asian American bodies and practices (Chang, 1999), and subsequently, they actively worked to disrupt such misperceptions with their students. “They assume everything I bring (for lunch) is Chinese food,” Virginia recalled with amusement during our first interview. “Is that Chinese food?” “No, it’s spaghetti!” The teachers recognized that their students frequently conflated Asian with all things Chinese and/or Japanese and used such moments as opportunities to dispel racist discourse and stereotypes that construct Asians and Asian Americans as homogenous groups that are “all alike” (Lowe, 1996).

The teachers’ Asian American identities were not always part of planned daily instruction in the classroom but sometimes emerged unexpectedly in student conversations and provided serendipitous opportunities

for discussion. For example, Virginia reflected on a lively argument that arose during one lesson when she shared a photo collection of Japanese Americans during World War II. Her students argued about the “race” of the individuals pictured:

“They’re White! No, they’re Black! No, they’re White!” (my students) were confused about whether or not they thought Japanese Americans were Black or White. And I’m like, “Well, they’re not really either.” And then I think (my students) were kind of like, “What about Ms. Ye? She seems like she could be Japanese American.” They made some kind of comment ... and I was like, “No, I’m *Chinese* American,” and they were like, “Hmm, interesting.” And then (they were) starting to remember that Chinese American and Japanese American *aren’t* the same thing.

During a lesson many weeks later, Virginia reiterated this distinction with her students. “I am Chinese American. I was born in Houston, Texas... My parents are Chinese, my grandparents are Chinese, we are *all* Chinese. I’m *also* American. So I’m Chinese *and* American.” Virginia’s continued need to clarify the distinction between Asian countries indicated her young students’ struggles to fully understand Asian Americans. As the only Asian American teacher at a campus that was predominantly Latinx and African American, she was often the only Asian American teacher (and in some instances, the only Asian American individual) that her students encountered in their academic careers. Therefore, she was explicit in situating herself as an example of an Asian American citizen who was both Chinese *and* American.

The teachers’ pedagogical approaches to the overt nuances of Asian American identity, culture, and racial positioning were founded in their lived experiences as Others in society and schooling spaces. Volpp (2001) argued that identity is a citizenship discourse which is often denied to Asian Americans. Regardless of their legal status, Asian Americans are generally not fully considered citizens in terms of politics and American national identity. As the teachers introduced Asian American, Japanese American, and other such terms to their students, they confronted misperceptions and stereotypes pervasive in U.S. society and the media that situate Asian Americans as foreign, unassimilable Others while broadening examples of civic identity and membership. Furthermore, as race is typically only presented to children through a Black/white binary (see Bolgatz, 2005), the teachers’ work to (re)define Asian American identity through the sharing of their own experiences in tandem with the inclusion of Asian American historical narratives signaled a major shift in students’ understandings of race in America.

(Re)Defining What It Means to Be an American

The history of U.S. citizenship has long been racialized, gendered, and classed (Jen, 2011; Lowe, 1996; Roediger, 1999; Rosaldo, 1994; Smith, 1997). Discrepancies in who is, and who is not, considered a part of the citizenry continue to challenge many people living in the United States and other societies today. As the children of Asian immigrants and refugees, the teachers in this study experienced Otherness in their own schooling that they shared in their interviews as well as with their students. Elyse recounted going through a silent period after arriving in elementary school from Germany as well as difficulty understanding English slang until she was in college. Krishnan described being the target of racial epithets, such as “towel-head,” from his classmates, while Virginia shared distinct memories of shame and embarrassment about the Chinese lunches her mother packed for her to eat at school. Unfortunately, these types of experiences of linguistic, racist, and cultural discrimination and oppression are all too common to those who grow up Asian in America (Goodwin, 2003).

As a Spanish dual language teacher, Krishnan regretted the loss of his native Gujarati and constantly reiterated to his students the importance of maintaining and honoring one’s cultural and linguistic heritage while also learning English. In his fifth-grade graduation speech, Krishnan told his students, “I had to grow up between cultures.” Similarly, in an interview, Elyse described how she felt “in-between, like I’m too White to hang out with these Vietnamese people but I’m too Asian to hang out with these White people.... I was in the middle.... At a very young age, I felt caught between the two worlds.” Similar to Anzaldúa’s (1987) notion of the borderlands “wherever two or more cultures edge each other” (p. i), the “in-betweenness” explained by Krishnan and Elyse is a hybridity common to the Asian American experience, as Asian Americans are often perceived as unassimilable perpetual foreigners, regardless of how many generations they have lived in the United States or how perfect their English may be (Chang, 1999; Tuan, 1998).

As the teachers taught social studies to their young students, their hybrid experiences as racially “in-between” informed their pedagogy. In his concluding lesson on Japanese American incarceration, Krishnan asked his students to write a response to the question, “What does it mean to be an American?” His students’ responses varied considerably. Some clung to the notion that “being American means being born in America” or possessing legal citizenship, while others described “being American” as a self-described identity. When asked what influenced the teaching of this lesson, Krishnan explained, “It comes from having to carry so many torches. You’re the voice of so many minority voices that aren’t going to be heard or their perspectives are not going to be given in schools if it doesn’t come through me.” Krishnan considered exposing his students to more than was offered in the standard

curriculum to be part of his personal responsibility as an educator, and he deliberately created instructional spaces to discuss “Other” narratives and present perspectives beyond the white mainstream.

The construct of “being an American citizen” also arose in Virginia’s class when she used the picture book *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1996) to teach her second-graders about Japanese American incarceration during World War II. In one illustration, a sign stating “I am an American” prompted the following discussion:

- José:** I think that they wanted to put up the sign to know that they’re Americans because (other people) thought that they was [*sic*] Japanese, but they are actually Americans cause they were born in America.
- Virginia:** So they were trying to prove to people that, “Hey, I am an American, too! Just because I don’t look the way that you think I should, the way that other people look like, I still feel like I’m an American. I *am* an American.”
- MJ:** Oh, like I’m Black?
- Virginia:** You want to say more about that, MJ?
- MJ:** Because the Black people, they come from America, and they’re getting treated differently.
- Anna:** They’re not just like Japanese because they’re not just Japanese, they’re American and because they were born in America.

While Virginia’s second grade students only recently learned the term “Japanese American,” they articulated emerging understandings of Asian Americans as *American* (citizens) and were able to make connections between Japanese Americans and African Americans (and later Mexican Americans) as groups of people who looked “different” but were still American. Moreover, they intuitively recognized whiteness as the default construction of who is an American citizen (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

The day following the above conversation, Virginia’s students described a white character in *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1996) as “regular” and the Japanese American character as “different.” As they were reconsidering their understandings of what it meant for someone to be American, they still implicitly understood whiteness as the norm in U.S. society and thus equated whiteness with Americanness, and in turn, citizenship. Virginia pressed her students to reconsider their proposal of what is “regular,” asking, “Does that mean all of us are *not* regular?” It is important to reiterate that Virginia’s entire class was composed of students of color, yet the equation of whiteness with what was perceived as normal was firmly embedded in her students. Her second-graders recognized whiteness as “the ‘natural’ state of affairs” and therefore, “to be nonwhite is to be non-American” (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997, p. 323), despite the fact that such a

construction placed themselves, as well as the characters in *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1996), on the margins. Consequently, for the remainder of the lesson and the semester, Virginia continued to interrogate student comments that equated citizenship to whiteness in an effort to deconstruct this notion.

Tensions about what it means to “be American” continue to pervade society as people of every age struggle to define what “makes” someone an American. While youth of color may already be civically engaged in home and community spaces (Knight, 2011; Salinas, Vickery, & Fránquiz, 2016), schools are an ideal site to nurture broader understandings of citizenship (W. C. Parker, 2003). In response to Asian Americans finding themselves “in between,” Goodwin (2003) urged, “We need to embrace the in between, take ownership of where we are. We need to reinvent ourselves, define ourselves as free-standing as opposed to in comparison or by default. We need to find space to resist” (p. 22). The three teachers in this study created such a space of resistance by drawing on their hybrid experiences “in-between” Asian and American cultures as they pushed their elementary students to consider the complexity of racial and civic identity in the United States and to disentangle notions of citizenship from dominant and normative whiteness discourses.

Promoting Cultural Citizenship

Rather than abide by traditional civic republican or political liberal conceptions of citizenship (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006), the three elementary teachers instead highlighted more inclusive, critical notions of cultural citizenship as they taught Asian American histories. In classroom settings, cultural citizenship can be exhibited in multiple ways. First, cultural citizenship views difference as a resource, not a threat (Flores & Benmayor, 1997). Second, cultural citizenship emphasizes the dynamic nature of citizen construction (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997; Salinas et al., 2016). Third, cultural citizenship includes the voices, experiences, and perspectives of students of color (Rosaldo, 1997). Fourth, cultural citizenship “speaks a language of rights and agency” (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006, p. 670), affirming that one does not and should not have to choose between belonging to one’s cultural community and belonging to the nation (Silvestrini, 1997).

Presenting Difference as a Resource

Cultural difference is traditionally seen as a threat to the integrity of the nation-state as it defies assimilation into the dominant culture (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Kymlicka, 1995). The teachers in the study were aware of the exclusionary nature of the traditional American historical narrative and, thus, were deliberate in emphasizing culturally and linguistically diverse groups in the teaching of social studies. “I want [my students] to appreciate and have empathy for people who are different; understanding that different

isn't bad, that different is actually something that's really good, and that we all have differences," Virginia explained. Elyse echoed these sentiments:

I definitely wanted to open their minds to people who are immigrants, or people who don't know English very well ... helping them understand that the norms are different in different cultures. And with kids, they're so—you know, they've only been alive for eight or nine years! Sometimes they don't realize they have norms until they've been taken out of their norms.... You learn about yourself when you read or learn about someone else's experience.

As Virginia and Elyse facilitated discussions of difference with their students, they engaged in the development of historical empathy (Barton & Levstik, 2009) toward the Other as a step toward broader understandings of diverse civic membership.

Sometimes the teachers drew on their own experiences as the Other to foster student empathy regarding difference. One day, when some of Virginia's students mocked the pronunciation of a Japanese phrase in a class read aloud, she admonished them:

If you're purposely putting a bunch of words together and saying that that's part of a language, that's pretty much like making fun of another language. I'm gonna tell you right now—when I was little and people would find out that I was Chinese, they would just say a bunch of random words to me that didn't make sense, they weren't even real Chinese words, and that was very hurtful because my language is important to me.... So can we try to say (the Japanese phrase) correctly? That's us trying to learn to say words correctly. Same with Spanish, when I'm trying to learn Spanish, I'm going to try my best to say it correctly. So we can be respectful.

Virginia addressed the issue of English hegemony (Shannon, 1995) that many Asian Americans experience in contemporary American society and used Spanish, the language spoken at home by many of her Latinx students, as an example to which they could directly relate. Her bilingual comparison between Asian American and Latinx panethnicities established shared struggles in a society that values English above all other languages and, in turn, associates unaccented English fluency with citizenship. In this example, Virginia tried to raise her students' consciousness about language status and power, engaging in humanizing pedagogy as her instructional efforts "coincide[d] with the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (Freire, 1970/1982, p. 62). Cultural citizenship interrogates the different regimes of power in civil society, including the ways individuals are positioned based on their cultural and linguistic capital.

In the same vein, Krishnan and Elyse also recounted sharing stories of their personal struggles learning English with their students. Because all three teachers were bi/multilinguals themselves, they were especially attentive to establishing the significance of language within the scope of civic identity and civic membership addressed in class. Rosaldo and Flores (1997) emphasized the role of uniform (English) monoglot in the construction of U.S. citizens, stating, “In ideological terms, the nation-state thus denies the very existence of polyglot citizens” (p. 82). In contrast, the teachers established that many citizens speak languages other than English, thus highlighting the role of language difference in identity and citizen construction and affirming that speaking English is not part and parcel of U.S. citizenship.

Recognizing Citizen Construction as Dynamic

Respect is a defining demand of cultural citizenship, which is an ongoing, contested, and urgent process. Elyse and Krishnan were purposeful in addressing the roles of (dis)respect and dehumanization in their lessons on Japanese American incarceration during World War II. During her read aloud of *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1996), Elyse paused during a scene when the Japanese American family arrives in their new “apartment” at the Tanforan Assembly center: “a dark, dirty horse stall that still smelled of horses. And the linoleum laid over the dirt was littered with wood shavings, nails, dust, and dead bugs” (Uchida, 1996, p. 17). She asked her students how they would feel if they were in a similar situation, emphasizing the dehumanizing conditions of the horse stable as well as the unfairness of the family’s removal from their home due to their ethnicity.

In Krishnan’s lesson with the nonfiction book *Dear Miss Breed* (Oppenheim, 2006), he urged his students to consider the perspectives of Japanese American children who found themselves the target of racial slurs and epithets after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. At the heart of these discussions was an emphasis on basic human decency. Elyse and Krishnan chose particular moments in their lessons to highlight the injustices and lack of dignity faced by young Japanese Americans during World War II who were born in the United States but were treated in unequal and degrading ways simply because they looked like the enemy. The teachers’ decisions to highlight dehumanizing moments when American citizens were treated as non-citizen Others were critical to the development of the notion of citizenship as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state of being. In particular, these conversations explored the limits of civic participation—although the Japanese American children highlighted in class were indeed American citizens, the U.S. government was directly responsible for denying their fundamental civil rights.

Krishnan and Elyse also dedicated multiple days of instruction to teaching about Asian American immigration, and the Asian American immigrants presented in Krishnan and Elyse’s lessons often fought for the respect of their

non-Asian peers and teachers. It is important to note that both of these teachers are considered “1.5 generation” immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Krishnan arrived in the United States from Kenya at the age of two, and Elyse arrived at the age of five from Germany, neither knowing English at the time of their arrival. The teachers embodied many of the challenges described in their immigration book selections, such as struggling with a new language, culture, traditions, and civic identity. Therefore, Elyse and Krishnan often referenced their own experiences as these issues arose in students’ conversations about the books. Thus, the act of revealing themselves as immigrants *and* citizens was significant in disrupting normative depictions of White, native English-speaking citizens.

The children’s literature used by Elyse and Krishnan demonstrated the Asian immigrants’ acculturation to life in America and included multiple instances in which the characters felt ashamed of their names, native language, and culture—themes common to the immigrant story regardless of country of origin (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). These depictions echo Rosaldo and Flores’s (1997) definition of cultural citizenship as “a process that involves claiming membership in, and remaking, America” (p. 58), even when one does not feel a sense of belonging and civic membership in the negotiated interactions of school and the community. As Asian Americans and other groups demand the full enfranchisement afforded to citizens of the dominant group, the process of cultural citizenship is dynamic, neither fixed nor guaranteed. Through the presentation of both Asian American citizens and Asians who recently immigrated to the United States, the teachers situated the claiming of civic membership as an ongoing, humanizing struggle for respect and dignity that was sometimes necessary regardless of birthright.

Including the Voices, Experiences, and Perspectives of Students of Color

In contrast to the propertied white subject who possesses dominant and unquestioned civic agency, cultural citizenship is founded in the experiences and perspectives of those who are marginalized, giving voice to the traditionally voiceless. In their lessons about Asian American history, all three teachers intentionally selected children’s literature narrated by Asian American children. Primary sources shared by Krishnan and Virginia often featured Asian American children, and Elyse brought in family artifacts to support her reading of *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai, 2011), a book about a Vietnamese refugee family whose journey to the United States mirrored her parents’ experience. These examples of Asian American civic identity and civic agency reiterated the teachers’ efforts to contest the normalization of citizenship with whiteness.

As she read *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai, 2011) to her third grade students, Elyse discovered that the book initiated cultural connections with

her East Asian students, who would often interject to describe how the story's events were similar to their cultures. Elyse's centering of an Asian immigrant narrative produced a space for her students to incorporate their own families' stories, both positive and negative. For instance, during a scene in which the Vietnamese mother struggled to communicate with a butcher in English, Sofia, a child whose mother was from Spain, commented, "When my mom came here, she had an accent and people thought she was dumb." In an interview conducted after she completed the book with her students, Elyse noted, "I think that the quieter kids like Sofia connect in the sense that they empathize with being different or the cultural struggles, but just aren't ready to talk about it and share and have the attention on them." *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai, 2011) offered a complex representation of civic membership and identity with which students could commiserate in various ways. Furthermore, the use of a book depicting an immigrant family's struggle to acculturate to life in American society, coupled with Elyse's descriptions of her own family's journey to the United States, created multiple moments for her students to openly share their unofficial histories (Wertsch, 2000) and experiences related to culture, discrimination, acceptance, and civicness.

Cultural citizenship highlights how communities of color often strive for full recognition in U.S. society while they simultaneously challenge the requirements for recognition. The Asian American voices, experiences, and perspectives selected by the teachers in this study were not rewritten to appeal to the larger culture but instead advanced views from the margins (Ching & Pataray-Ching, 2003). Such acts that emphasize the transformation from cultural Other into legitimate American subjects rather than common narratives of "becoming American" are a discursive process of cultural citizenship that intervenes into existing discourses of power, both acknowledging and rewriting the American story (Young, 2004).

Speaking the Language of Rights and Agency

Sharing examples of social justice and activism was especially important to Virginia. During one of her social studies lessons, Virginia's Latinx and African American students began to discuss the 2016 presidential candidates and expressed their concerns about Donald Trump's disparaging remarks about Mexicans (Reilly, 2016). When a student commented that she could not make a difference because she was a kid, Virginia described ways in which the student did have agency:

You might not be able to go to the voting booth and vote, but you can use your words. You can make posters, you can make signs, you can write notes, you can write letters—those are all things that you *can* do.... What I want you to realize is that you have a voice and you can say something about all of these things that you see are unfair.

Virginia was unequivocal in her determination to give her students agency: “Ordinary people can do things that make a difference for the world. I want (my students) to leave knowing that they’re capable of doing that.” The children’s literature and racially diverse historical narratives that Virginia and her students engaged with over the course of the semester provided a range of representations of civic identity and civic agency. Her students ended the school year by recording group podcasts that reflected their emerging consciousness through self-constructed narratives that discarded dominant narratives and official histories and instead centered the agency and resistance of communities of color.

The study participants’ approaches to cultural citizenship in their lessons on Asian American history exemplified how educators can challenge exclusionary and restrictive representations of citizenship and promote more inclusive views of civic identity, membership, and agency that reflect America’s diversity. While this particular group of Asian American elementary teachers drew heavily from their own experiences being Othered in school and society to critically engage students in Asian American histories, their efforts to view difference as a resource; to emphasize the dynamic nature of citizen construction; to include the voices, experiences, and perspectives of students of color; and to position students as having rights and agency are important aspects of broader understandings of citizenship that all elementary educators can enact.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study heeds Abu El-Haj’s (2007) call for educators to shift their conceptual frameworks for citizenship education “in ways that engage questions of identity and inequality, and that educate youth for social change” (p. 309). Two themes emerged in response to the research question of “how do Asian American elementary educators broaden their students’ understandings of citizenship?” First, the teachers enacted the AsianCrit tenet of *(re)constructive history* as they presented students with Asian American historical narratives and representations of citizen that countered the exclusionary narratives that permeate traditional curricula. Second, the teachers embodied the AsianCrit tenet of *story, theory, and praxis* as their personal experiences as racialized, cultural Others informed a transformational pedagogy of cultural citizenship education.

Centering Asian American Perspectives and Histories

While the complex and exclusionary nature of citizenship has been well established, appeals for more inclusive approaches to elementary citizenship education often neglect issues related to race and immigration. In the state of

Texas, home to the teachers in this study, elementary citizenship standards overwhelmingly focus on state and national symbols, customs, celebrations, and characteristics of “good citizenship,” such as truthfulness, justice, and equality (Texas Education Agency, 2010). Yet the vast majority of historical and contemporary figures listed in the Texas standards are white, reiterating notions of whiteness as the default construct of citizen (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2004), and historical standards related to (in)justice and (in)equality focus on events in the past. By centering Asian American perspectives and histories in their classrooms, Virginia, Krishnan, and Elyse revealed racism and discrimination in the past *and* present beyond the Black/white binary (Rodríguez, 2017) while embodying agency and broader representations of what it meant to be an American (citizen). Such efforts align with the *College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework* (NCSS, 2013) by providing more expansive approaches to the possibilities of civic virtue and participation. Furthermore, such value-based instruction centered on equality of opportunity, justice, and diversity is an essential aspect of what the NCSS (2017) regards as powerful and purposeful elementary social studies.

The teachers’ curricular and pedagogical choices in the teaching of Asian American histories often drew from their own lived, marginalized experiences as a way to disrupt stereotypes and misperceptions, which simultaneously nuanced and countered the dominant civic narrative. Lowe (1996) proposed that culture is the means by which “the subject becomes, acts, and speaks itself as ‘American.’ It is likewise in culture that individuals and collectivities struggle and remember and, in that difficult remembering, imagine and practice both subject and community differently” (p. 3). As the educators shared stories and images of diverse individuals, they presented to their students multiple portraits of *who* is citizen, *what* citizens do, and *how* one can be citizen/American. As demonstrated in the findings above, teachers’ decisions to help students interrogate their misconceptions about who is and is not considered an American can lead to a richer enactment of a more representative American history.

Elementary teachers can use Asian American children’s literature as a means to disrupt exclusionary official narratives and dominant notions of white citizenship, supplementing historical fiction with primary source photos, letters, and media to provide additional historical context. Such acts of critical historical inquiry (Salinas, Blevins, & Sullivan, 2012; Salinas et al., 2016) emphasize the agency of marginalized communities and their negotiation of civic identities, agency, and membership, an aspect of cultural citizenship heavily endorsed by the elementary educators in this study as they broadened student understandings of citizenship beyond the simplistic notions traditionally taught in school (e.g., following rules, voting). When used through the lens of critical historical inquiry, Asian American children’s literature can be an important site through which children can merge their existing understandings of the world

around them with the new ideas, situations, and stories that they encounter to think critically about the multiple meanings of citizen in U.S. society.

Counterstorytelling as Praxis: Toward Cultural Citizenship Education

Instruction tailored to build on students' comments, connections, and worldviews affirms the AsianCrit tenet of *story, theory and praxis* that “practice can excavate stories” and “stories inform theory and practice” (Museus, 2014, p. 27). Like Elyse, Krishnan, and Virginia, teachers may use counterstories from their own lives, as well as primary sources and Asian American narratives, to nurture understanding of the Asian American experience, historically and contemporarily. This combination of perspectives can deliberately dislodge majoritarian tales through the development of counterstories, which are essential in exposing, analyzing, and challenging the raced and gendered norms of citizenship that dominate educational curricula (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Through counterstories, students of marginalized groups can see themselves reflected in the political process in multiple forms—as civic members and as civic agents—in order to fully develop civic identity. Thus, the inclusion of counterstories, particularly those told by people of color, contributes to the knowledge base of those often pushed to the margins (Milner & Howard, 2013) while exposing members of the dominant group to perspectives beyond their own worldview. In citizenship education, counternarratives play a vital role in challenging, disrupting, and/or counteracting the multiple conditions and realities of oppression found in both schools and society (Vinson, 2006).

When teachers adopt a critical stance in the teaching of histories, counternarratives can lead to transformative understandings of the past and present. However, it is important to note that counterstories can be used in ways that uphold the dominant narrative rather than resist it (Wertsch, 2000). Teachers must be intentional in both using a critical lens (e.g., examining notions of racism, classism, and sexism) as well as contextualizing history. For example, when using texts like *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1996), teachers should address both racial injustice and dehumanizing civil rights violations in order to trouble the dominant narrative of justified incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II (Rodríguez, 2017; Rodríguez & Ip, 2018). *The Bracelet* on its own is an Asian American narrative with transformative potential, but its use as a counternarrative is dependent on whether the historical narrative is centered and problematized by teachers and students. Additionally, teachers must be attentive to the particular dangers of introducing marginalized groups to students for the first time and should be careful not to underestimate within-group differences and hybridities (Lowe, 1996); consider, for example, how the experience of a Korean American raised by Korean immigrant parents might contrast with a Korean American raised by U.S.-

born parents, and both experiences may be far removed from those of a Korean adoptee raised by parents of a different race.

The introduction of Asian American and other marginalized histories are crucial elements of cultural citizenship education, which can ultimately transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life. By centering counterstories that have historically existed within the margins of mainstream institutions and in the dominant narratives of history in ways that often reinforce tokenized perspectives (Cornbleth, 1997; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Goodwin, 2010), cultural citizenship education's emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity and agency offers educators a means to truly prepare *all* students to participate in America's democracy. While some teachers may fear backlash from students and their families as a result of this type of pedagogy, it is important to note that no students demonstrated any resistance to the ideas of cultural citizenship presented in the three classrooms, nor did the teachers report complaints from their students' families or their school administrations.

Promoting Cultural Citizenship With Current and Future Educators

The majority of pre- and in-service teachers hold a vision of citizenship that aligns with what Westheimer and Kahne (2004) termed a "personally responsible" model of teaching—one that teaches students character traits and how to be a cooperative member of a community. Educators who lack substantive critical social studies content knowledge (Castro, 2013; Fry & O'Brien, 2015; Patterson, Doppin, & Misco, 2012) may hold thin conceptions of citizenship that continue to marginalize Asian Americans and other historically disenfranchised groups. In this study, the Asian American teachers' intimate personal experiences with discrimination, immigration, biculturalism, bilingualism, and transnationalism cultivated an epistemology of race and contested belonging in America that white, native-born and English monolingual teachers may not be aware of or be able to fully articulate as outsiders to such experiences.

In order to adopt a cultural citizenship approach in their classrooms, in-service teachers may consider the following questions in regard to who/what is American (citizen): Are examples of citizen diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and other aspects of identity? Are pathways to legal citizenship taught alongside obstacles to legal citizenship (e.g., financial and linguistic constraints)? Are diverse examples of civic action presented, even when such action may be "against the rules" but is ultimately in pursuit of what is socially just? Do students have opportunities to express their own voices and agency in the classroom community, enacting a range of civic actions and then reflecting upon their execution and efficacy? Additionally, as the United States' population grows more diverse with increasing numbers of mixed race individuals (P. Taylor, 2012), educators must be purposeful in adopting intersectional

approaches that acknowledge the complex identities held by their students and members of their communities.

In teacher preparation programs, teacher educators can promote cultural citizenship education by infusing historical examples of social (in)justice and agency beyond the Black/white binary to increase pre-service teachers' exposure to a more diverse array of perspectives and histories. Within social studies methods courses, opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in projects focused on critical historical inquiry and teaching difficult histories can provide spaces for learning marginalized historical narratives that can later be applied in classrooms. Many practicing teachers are genuinely interested in engaging students with more diverse representations in U.S. history beyond the textbook. However, they likely were denied access to such representations in their own schooling, requiring innovative approaches to professional development. Museums, community organizations, colleges, and universities can provide ongoing professional development opportunities and partnerships that further not only pedagogical content knowledge, but also critical pedagogical content knowledge—one focused upon other perspectives and countering majoritarian tales.

The pedagogy that emerged from these Asian American educators' personal experiences revealed the depth of perspectives that teachers of color may offer in classroom spaces. Unfortunately, teacher preparation programs rarely afford prospective teachers of color opportunities to consider how their unique societal positionings might be used for transformative purposes in the classroom. Teacher educators should consider ways in which they might highlight the cultural and linguistic capital possessed by their preservice teachers of color (Yosso, 2005) and how such capitals might inform more inclusive pedagogical practices for all prospective teachers. Given the increasing diversity of America's public schools and ongoing calls to increase and maintain a diverse educator workforce, it is imperative that teacher preparation programs adapt their own pedagogies and curriculum to attend to the full range of students they have the privilege of preparing to enter the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The civic participation taught in traditional citizenship education models results in an assimilationist pluralism that appears inclusive through a false depiction of racial harmony (Ching, 2005; Vinson, 2006). As schools are a technology of power (Ong, 2006), it is essential that educators are cognizant of the ways in which they may be complicit in citizenship discourses that maintain normative formations while making invisible identities and subjectivities of marginalized groups (Maira, 2009). In order to achieve the American ideals of a pluralistic democracy, elementary school teachers can engage in cultural

citizenship education by centering more culturally diverse representations of civic identity, membership, and agency. Such an approach can transcend the invisibility of marginalized groups in the dominant narrative of U.S. history and work toward the social studies goal of truly preparing *all* our future citizens.

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NOTES

1. As this study's teacher participants did not identify as Hawai'iian or Pacific Islander, nor did the teachers' instruction of historical content include the Pacific Islands, I prefer "Asian American" for its specificity within this study's context rather than terms such as Asian Pacific Islander, Asian Pacific American, or Asian American Pacific Islander.

2. Drawing from the work of critical race legal scholar Neil Gotanda, I consciously leave white lowercase while capitalizing Black. Despite its use as the dialectical opposite of Black, white has historically and contemporarily summarized racial domination and "is better left in lower case, rather than privileged with a capital letter. 'Black,' on the other hand, has deep political and social meaning as a liberating term, and, therefore, deserves capitalization" (Gotanda, 1991, p. 4). Therefore white will only be capitalized in this paper when used in direct citation, and Black will be used in lowercase only in direct citation.

3. The Immigration Act of 1917 restricted the entry of individuals from the "Asiatic Barred Zone," effectively extending Chinese exclusion laws to all other Asians, with the exception of teachers, merchants, and students. However, the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907–1908 exempted specific classes of Japanese immigration that remained unaffected by changes in U. S. immigration law until the Immigration Act of 1924. As Guam and the Philippines were under U.S. jurisdiction at the time, they were not included in either immigration act (Azuma, 2005; Palumbo-Liu, 1999).

4. All names are pseudonyms.

5. Recognizing that few teachers receive Asian American historical content in schools and/or teacher preparation programs, the workshop attendance component was designed to provide participants with district-approved teaching materials about Asian American history. The NISD workshop centered on

book studies of particular pieces of Asian American children's literature provided by the district and the subsequent development of lesson plans in preparation for Asian Pacific Heritage Month in May. NISD's elementary social studies department asked me to provide an initial overview of Asian American populations and Asian American history for 30 minutes followed by an hour and a half of collaborative lesson planning time for attendees. During that lesson planning time, I was present as a content expert and provided feedback and suggestions to all attendees. Participants in my study, including the three teachers described here, composed one-fifth of the total workshop attendees and worked with non-study participants to design lessons for NISD. However, none of the study participants in this paper taught their group-designed lessons.

6. Krishnan and I attended the same small school in Texas as adolescents. We were in different grades and did not formally meet until we were both teachers in NISD and recognized each other at a professional development workshop. Prior to this study, Krishnan collaborated with me on a bilingual education project with preservice teachers in the fall of 2014 that did not address any aspects of Asian American identity or history. However, he did express an interest in future collaboration, leading to his recruitment for this study. I did not know Elyse or Virginia prior to their participation in this study.

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APPENDIX

Partial Interview Protocol A (Cultural Identity/Situating Participants)

1. *Background Information:*
 - a. What are the ways you self-identify?
 - b. How do you racially/ethnically identify? What are some of the ways that you express this/these self-identification(s)?
2. What is your family's immigration story?
3. What did you study in university (degrees earned)? What made you decide to choose this career?
 - How did your family/friends feel about this choice? What were some of the things they said to you?
4. *What are some of your earliest memories of...*
 - School?
 - a. What was it like being [*Asian American*] in school when you were growing up? Are there any things you remember specifically that came up about your cultural heritage?
 - b. What was your parents' involvement/understanding of schooling like compared to your peers'?
 - c. Did you "see" yourself in the books/curriculum of school?
 - Home? Was home life different from school life in any way?
 - Language? What languages do you speak? Where/how did you learn?
 - Spaces/places—one language over another?

–Cultural/religious experiences?

5. What are some of the things you like to do in your free time?
6. What is a typical day/week like for you?
7. What is it like being [(South) Asian American] in Navarro?
8. Is it important to you to maintain your [Asian American]ness? If so, how do you maintain it?

Partial Interview Protocol B (Teacher Identity/Philosophy)

- a. Do you live near your school community? Do you think you understand/relate to your students' personal lives?
- b. Asian American representation—Did you have any Asian American teachers growing up? How did this presence/absence impact you? Do you think your presence as a teacher is something students find surprising or out of the ordinary (non-Asian vs. Asian students)? Do you feel expectations to represent or explain Asian culture/stuff? Do you think your personal story is distinct from your peers and/or students due to your ethnicity/culture/religion? Is your personal story something that you try to share with others? Has your personal experience with Asian culture/immigration/language/etc. impacted the way that you teach or consider particular students (immigrants, English language learners, students of color, etc.)?
- c. How do students/parents/peers respond to your name?

2. Teaching social studies

- a. What were your experiences/feelings toward American History when you were in school? Did you feel like the stories you heard included people like you?
- b. Did your family share stories about their past that were different from what you learned in school?
- c. Do you think anything has changed about the way social studies are taught since you were a child?
- d. What personal experiences, if any, have colored the way you approach teaching history?
- e. Do you think students learn a different version of history at home from what they learn in school?

Partial Interview Protocol C (Lesson Reflections)

1. How did your knowledge/understanding of Asian American history grow this semester?
2. Did you use the binder provided? To what extent?

3. Did the February PD impact your teaching of social studies/language arts? To what extent?
4. What areas/topics in Asian American history did you teach this semester and why did you choose those particular topics? Why did you opt not to teach (examples)? How did you choose the resources you used and what would you do differently?
5. Are there any examples of teaching Asian American history that you are particularly proud of doing? Which ones and why do you feel this way?
6. How did teaching this content challenge you? Any specific examples?
7. Did you find yourself sharing personal stories related to these topics? How did students respond? Was this different in any way from stories you've shared in the past or related to other topics?
8. How do you think your students responded to the Asian American content? Do you recall any specific feedback/comments from students, parents, or teaching peers? Are there any stereotypes or misconceptions that came up or that you initiated yourself?
9. What successes did you achieve with this content? Any specific examples?
10. How do you think you will move forward with this work in the future?
11. How do you define social justice teaching? Do you consider yourself to be a social justice teacher? Why/why not? If so, what role models or peer supports have you had as you've worked toward this goal?
12. How would you respond to someone who says that teaching Asian American history, especially topics like the discrimination faced by Chinese and their ultimate exclusion and the unconstitutional incarceration of Japanese during WWII, is too controversial or makes America look bad?
13. How did our conversations impact your understandings of what it means to be Asian American? Do you look at any things/comments/situations differently?
14. What would you like to learn more about related to Asian American identity, culture, or contributions to American history/society?
15. What do you think your students would like to learn more about related to Asian American identity based on what you recall from your lessons?
16. How do you think Asian American history could be implemented on a wider scale in elementary schools?