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**Abstract**

All written communications have perspective. Instructional materials framed from some perspective may contain hidden messages that have not been recognized or questioned. At the same time, unrepresented perspectives left out of educational materials may unwittingly propagate misrepresentation and social injustice. The omission of these perspectives may deprive students of the meaning-making and praxis needed to understand events from different points of view and develop empathy. This study examines how adding the narrative of additional perspective(s) as counter-storytelling with guided questions can help students make connections to new stories (null curriculum), reveal underlying messages (hidden curriculum), and create new knowledge and social justice awareness within existing instructional goals. This project aims to add to current research with an in-depth literature review and a comparison study. For the comparison study, I created two versions of an American Government lesson, one for a control group, and one for an experimental group, which added perspectives and critical thinking questions. I distributed links to these lessons to two voluntary sample groups of adult learners with pre- and post-assessments for feedback. Later I facilitated a smaller focus group to encourage dialogue and feedback with professionals in the field of instructional design.
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Chapter I: Introduction

I have found the concepts of storytelling as tools for empathy and pedagogy fascinating since my first graduate class—Rhetorical Theory, in which I learned about classical theory and the origins of rhetoric from writings of the sophists and Greek philosophers. As I read Plato’s Gorgias, a dialogue in which Socrates debates the meaning of rhetoric with a group of sophists, the description of rhetoric as “the art of convincing the soul through words” resonated with me. As a lifelong avid reader, I have been shaped by the persuasive voices of great writers. As a parent and an advocate of education, I was dismayed by the trend I observed in my children’s school of developing curriculum and learning outcomes around standardized testing with minimal required reading. I was able to explore this idea in a short paper for that class entitled Exploring the necessity of empathy as text in rhetorical pedagogy, which concluded: “If rhetoric has the power to define attitudes and knowledge, then speech truly is a powerful lord, and the development of thoughtful, purposeful rhetorical pedagogy is a grave responsibility.”

I started my current position in content design for online learning toward the end of that class, bringing these ideas with me. What comprises thoughtful, purposeful rhetorical pedagogy? Thinking back to the writers and speakers who have influenced me the most, I started to see the pattern of story elements remaining with me over the years that I’ve repeated and used to communicate ideas. Of the thousands of things I have read and heard, anecdotes, illustrations, and stories remain when all else has faded away. Christians would argue that this is why Jesus taught in parables.

When I took the graduate class—Visual Rhetoric, I wrote my final paper on the idea of visual storytelling as a rhetorical tool for learning. The focus was on the use of images to help students with special needs. Within the text, I explored different types of visual intelligence and
how the use of imagery could help learners who might fall through the cracks of traditional teaching methods. My thesis called for and supported the paradigm shift from linear, textual lessons to visual multimedia, which I was only just learning was already happening and becoming possible because of the increased affordability and variety of available technological tools. I learned a great deal from writing this and wanted to explore more without being limited to visual storytelling.

In my research for the class Theory and Research in Technical Communication, I developed a prospectus entitled *Storytelling and narrative as a pedagogical tool for instructional and training materials*. With this project, I was able to go further and explore different types of storytelling as pedagogical tools for instruction and training. As I explored possible methodologies, I considered opportunities for focus groups and survey research that could also support the projects I had been collaborating on at work. Soon the plan for my field project started to take shape.

No one could have predicted the recent events that would change workplace situations and dynamics since I finished that initial prospectus. Neither could anyone have imagined the focus on social justice in the headlines in these unsettling times with the additional unjust killings of African-Americans Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and subsequent mass protesting and civil unrest. There still has been no prosecution of their killers or justice served through our systems as of this writing. Our nation’s two-party system has led to such polarization that both sides seem to occupy ideological silos in which neither side considers nor welcomes alternate perspectives.

I am fortunate to work for an employer that values education and looks to use its agency towards solutions through open discussion and sharing of stories. The CEO of our school, Frank
Britt, has sent communications out to all employees regarding belonging and equity, and has encouraged the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) discussion groups company-wide. This initiative included groups to advocate for students and collaborate to consider others' perspectives.

In researching ideas for my field project to build upon my earlier work, I came across the research of Amy C. Bradshaw, Ph.D. of the University of Oklahoma. I was particularly interested in the article *Minding the stories we tell: Acknowledging and addressing implicit narratives in IDT* (Bradshaw, 2018a), which discusses explicit and underlying forms of narrative in instructional design technology. The main focus of this research is that implicit, underlying narratives exist in instructional materials, and that acknowledging and addressing them can expand understanding of the field while also helping to make the field more accessible to a broader range of people.

Bradshaw (2018a) challenges those in the instructional design field to purposefully look for the null and hidden messages in the curriculum to facilitate discussion from various perspectives. Null curriculum discovered reveals stories untold, adding more knowledge and praxis—"reflection and action upon the world to transform it" (Bradshaw, 2018b, p. 343). Bradshaw's research question was, regarding instructional technology, "How can I better integrate social justice awareness and growth with the important existing goals of my courses, in ways that are relevant to students and that will not be perceived as imposed add-ons" (Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 244)? My research aims to continue this question by adding counter-storytelling with diverse perspectives and critical thinking questions to an experimental version of a course entitled ‘Origins of the American Government’ and compare results with a control group.
I selected the topic of this study, Origins of the American Government, aware of the bias found in mainstream education’s traditional storytelling. According to Adam Serwer in his 2019 article from *The Atlantic*, “U.S. history is often taught and popularly understood through the eyes of its great men, who are seen as either heroic or tragic figures in a global struggle for human freedom” (Para. 3). Around the same time I was working on the original version of this course as an instructional designer, the *New York Times Magazine* launched the 1619 Project, named for the date of the first arrival of Africans to America. The project’s initiative was to replace the mainstream story with the null curriculum by placing “the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative” (Serwer, 2019, para. 3). Viewed from the perspective of those denied the rights enumerated in America’s founding documents, the story looks quite different. The concern of many of the contributors was that most Americans still learn very little about the lives of the enslaved, or slavery affected the livelihood and opportunities of generations of families. Unfortunately, this monumental project, directed by *New York Times* reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones, received more attention for the criticism and debate it unleashed among historians and political commentators than the educational value added with new perspectives.

After some of the criticism had passed, Hannah-Jones told Adam Serwer of *The Atlantic*, “I think my point was that history is not objective. And that people who write history are not simply objective arbiters of facts, and that white scholars are no more objective than any other scholars, and that they can object to the framing and we can object to their framing as well” (Serwer, 2019, para. 44). Every historical account is framed from some perspective. What can we do to help students consider whose perspective is presented, whose perspectives are missing affected by the same events, and why it matters?
Of interest to me was how much anger and criticism arose from the presentation of a new perspective. There can be prejudices inherent in any storytelling. Still, to find truth, new perspectives can only help to make connections and draw conclusions. Omitting perspectives to control the narrative is censorship. White historians have produced and reinforced the dominant narratives of society, such as individualism and meritocracy. How these narratives have affected the lives of other racial groups is their story to tell.

In the book *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo (2018) lists an exhaustive set of examples of counter-stories to be told in her argument that a romanticized past is strictly a white construct, omitting:

- 246 years of brutal enslavement, the rape of black women for the pleasure of white men and to produce more slaves, the selling of black children, the attempted genocide of indigenous people, Indian removal acts and reservations, indentured servitude, lynching, mob violence, sharecropping, Chinese exclusion laws, Japanese American internment, Jim Crow laws of mandatory segregation, black codes, bans on black jury service, bans on voting, imprisoning people for unpaid work, medical sterilization and experimentation, employment discrimination, educational discrimination, inferior schools, biased laws and policing practices, redlining and subprime mortgages, mass incarceration, racist media representations, cultural erasures, attacks, and mockery, untold and perverted historical accounts. (p. 70)

Omitting these stories does not negate the impact of their existence, but it does distort truth and prohibit the opportunity to learn from them. Sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois argued that much of American history has been written by scholars offering ideological claims in place of rigorous historical analysis (Serwer, 2019). Discerning ideology
from objective fact is not always easy, but educators should afford students of history the critical thinking skills needed to examine a multitude of perspectives so they can discern for themselves. In actually listening to other stories without acting defensively, we need to separate intentions from impact.

Another important reason for educators to seek to add perspectives through counter-story is the value of identification and representation for students of all different backgrounds. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), American author and journalist, talks about this candidly in his autobiographical book *Between the World and Me*. Of his early education experience, he writes, “If the streets shackled my right leg, the schools shackled my left” (p. 25), and “Schools did not reveal truths, they concealed them” (p. 27). “Everyone of every import, from Jesus to George Washington, was white. Serious history was the West, and the West was white” (p. 43). His thirst for knowledge led him to seek new perspectives on his own, outside the educational system. As he put it, “my reclamation was accomplished through books, through my own study and exploration” (p. 37). “The pursuit of knowing was freedom to me, the right to declare your own curiosities and follow them through all manner of books. The classroom was a jail of other people’s interests. The library was open, unending, free” (p. 48). With new opportunities to present information to students in engaging and visual ways, there is immense value in curating materials to bring the library to the students and help them ask questions and find answers from a multitude of perspectives. Every student should be encouraged and empowered to pursue knowledge, consider many perspectives, make connections, and find representation in their educational endeavors.
Statement of the Problem

Since all written communications have perspective, educational materials may have underlying messages from the dominant perspective as hidden curriculum which have been unacknowledged and unexamined (Bradshaw, 2018a). There may also be unrepresented perspectives omitted as null curriculum, which not only deprives students of new connections, concepts, and skills, but also can enable social injustice and misrepresentation (Bradshaw, 2018a).

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

In what specific ways can adding additional perspective(s) as counter-storytelling with guided questions help students to

- Make connections to new stories (null curriculum)?
- Reveal underlying messages (hidden curriculum)?
- Create new knowledge and social justice awareness within existing instructional goals?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my research is to explore the use of counter-storytelling and counter-narrative for instructional communications, how these tools can reveal and challenge hidden curriculum, and how they can help fill in the gaps of null curriculum. This exploration aims to give students tools to reflect on and transfer knowledge to new learning situations.

Assumptions of the Study

In regard to this study, the following assumptions exist.

- Course development for online learning is growing for both academic institutions and corporate training.
• Tools for engagement and retention are needed that help all different types of learners, as learning styles and student needs are diverse.

• Previous research shows that storytelling is an effective tool for engagement and learning.

• Given that the study was anonymous and included no identifying information, it is assumed that participants answered questions honestly.

• Given that participants had a week to complete the study and permission to complete it during work hours, it is assumed that participants took the time to consider the material thoughtfully before completing the final assessment.

Definition of Terms

This study is predominantly qualitative, and it was expected that themes might emerge through data analysis requiring further delineation. The following are terms tentatively defined as they were considered in preparation for research.

**Counter-story.** Counter-story is defined as “a method of telling the stories of those 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” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, as cited in Marshall, 2016, p. 80), “stories that challenge social and racial injustice, which are usually not heard in education” (Gachago et al., 2014, p. 29).

**Culture/cultural.** Culture is defined as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). There are universal symbols or visual images that are globally understood, but language and cultural differences may impact the effectiveness of visuals unless they are adequately discussed and explained with “verbal as well as visual messages to suit each group of receivers” (Avgerinou & Pettersson,
2011, p. 12). When designed for an audience, visual and verbal storytelling incorporated together may have the potential to aid comprehension and increase accessibility across different cultural groups.

**Cultural hegemony.** Cultural hegemony is defined as dominance by one state or social group over others, retained primarily through culture as the subordinate groups adopt the dominant group’s values, beliefs, and perspectives, which is reproduced through normalization and acceptance (Gramsci, 2000, as cited in Öztok, 2020, p. 111). Öztok’s research provides the framework for understanding how this happens through schooling and public education. Curriculum is not neutral but serves the interests of one social group of the others, particularly white, male, middle-class, heterosexual worldviews (Baszile, 2010, as cited in Öztok, 2020, p. 111).

**Empathy.** Empathy has been described as the ability to share, appreciate, and understand the affective, cognitive, existential, and experiential worlds of other people (Moore & Hallenbeck, 2010, p. 271).

**Explicit narratives.** Among other purposes, intentional storytelling may be employed as an instructional strategy to entertain, instruct, aid memory and schema acquisition, and transmit cultural values (Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 231). Explicit narratives may exist even when not intentional, in the sense that “formal instruction tends to be developed and perceived as having a structured beginning, middle, and end” (Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 231).

**Hidden curriculum.** Two important constructs related to implicit narratives are hidden curriculum and null curriculum. Coined by Jackson (1968), the term hidden curriculum refers to “unstated norms, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs conveyed and learned in instructional settings, not as the formal overt curriculum but as underlying rules that structure routines and
relationships” (Eisner, 1985, as cited in Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 233) which are present but generally unacknowledged and unexamined. The concept of hidden curriculum is widely used to explain the reproduction of cultural hegemony and social inequity (Öztok, 2020).

**Implicit narratives.** Implicit narratives, which are harder to recognize, are the underlying narratives that develop and transmit, often below conscious awareness. Generally unacknowledged, this form carries messages about what is normal, moral, or expected within the surrounding culture, and may also convey unintended messages or lead to the development of erroneous perceptions that are subconsciously repeated (Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 232).

**Metacognition.** The argument is that stories, narrative, and metaphor can be catalysts for enabling metacognition—a “learner’s ability to monitor, reflect on, and improve upon his or her learning activities and strategies; it is a key factor in successful transfer of knowledge and skills to new learning situations” (Wozniak, 2018, p. 129).

**Metaphor.** Metaphor is a means by which materiality is connected to language and literal happenings can be automatically linked (Waymer, 2018, p. 245). When the source and target domains (of metaphor—material to abstract) overlap and the transfer of characteristics occurs, it produces a cognitive effect in the human mind that results in a new, separate understanding of, or insight into the target domain that did not exist before the metaphor was created (Waymer, 2018). In other words, the metaphor actively rearranges the understanding of the target (Ramsey, 2004, as cited in Waymer, 2018, p. 246).

According to Uri Hasson from Princeton, a story is “the only way to activate parts in the brain so that a listener turns the story into their own idea and experience” (Widrich, 2012). Middleton (2004) concurs with this notion by claiming that metaphors can bring “clarity and
depth to experiences that are otherwise difficult to explain and feel, making them an essential learning technique for establishing shared meaning” (Middleton, 2004, p. 29).

**Narrative.** As a noun, narrative is simply defined as “something that is narrated: story, account” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b); and as an adjective, as “having the form of a story or representing a story” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). As one is used to define the other, with narration and account being similar terms, the terms *story* and *narrative* will be used interchangeably throughout this research. Specifically, I would like to investigate whether narrative tools can support and critical thinking and increase accessibility for different types of generational and cultural groups.

**Null curriculum.** In contrast, null curriculum refers to topics and processes that are completely excluded. Described by Eisner (1985) as “the options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire” (p. 107, as cited in Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 233), Eisner also differentiated between two dimensions of the null curriculum: subject matter and intellectual process. Both dimensions have important ramifications. First, the null curriculum limits what topics and issues one should even be aware of or consider. If something from the null curriculum does slip through, the null curriculum limits how one can perceive and think about it.

**Praxis.** Regarding social justice, praxis is the process by which people develop understanding of their condition and by which they can liberate the oppressed and themselves (Bradshaw, 2018b, p. 343). Opportunities for critical self-examination should be intentionally integrated into themes of instruction.
Social justice. For the purpose of this research regarding instructional design, social justice can be defined as equity and inclusion of all groups of society in the given field of instruction.

Story. Story can be defined as “an account of something that happened. Stories can be imaginary, traditional, or true (Macmillan, n.d.). When a story is heard, people want to relate it to a personal experience. Searching for a similar experience activates a part of the brain called insula, which helps relate to that same experience or emotion (Widrich, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

In designing this study, I recognize the following limitations:

1. Authoring Tools Available—I used Articulate Rise to develop the two courses, mainly because it was the easiest to put together and distribute. Rise is not known within Courseware to provide the best user experience for students and some disadvantages, such as the inability to see the content as clearly on mobile devices. If it were within the scope of my project and I had the tools and the resources, I would have focused on the student experience, adding more video and interactive content for engagement. It came up repeatedly in user feedback that participants thought there should be more video and interactives and less reading.

2. Financial Resources—Budgetary considerations limited my options. If I had more resources, I would have looked into soliciting a larger sample group by offering incentives and possibly could have hired help to develop video for a better interactive experience.

Further limitations related to the study sample are listed in Chapter III: Methods.
Methodology

My approach to this research was shaped by a social constructivist worldview, and to some extent a transformative worldview. The social constructivist worldview holds that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences which are varied and multiple (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 46). My goal was to seek a complexity of views using open-ended questions, as the whole purpose of my research was to use multiple perspectives to support learning. Although there’s no way to be completely free of researcher bias, I tried to pore through the answers to the evaluation questions without looking for specific trends, but to ‘let the data speak to me.’ Likewise, with the focus group, I tried to inform the participants of the reason for the study while keeping questions general and allowing them to construct meaning from their own perspective, educational role, and personal experience. I was hoping the focus group would add the social aspect of processing information through interaction as participants brought up different ideas. Clearly, there was also no way for me to avoid the inevitability that my own background and experience would shape my interpretation of the findings.

Although it may be idealistic, I'd like to think that a transformative worldview also shaped this project, meaning my inquiry sought to influence change at the level of instructional design and to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Mertens, 2010, as cited by Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 47). The existence of null and hidden curriculum speaks to significant contemporary social issues, such as representation, agency, empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation. Despite the diminutive scale of this project, even drawing attention to the need to address social justice in instructional design with a study sample group that is 100% white is a start that hopefully will inspire more inquiry and research.
The online university that I work for has focused resources on providing alternative paths to education for those who may have felt disenfranchised within traditional schools or methods. The transformative worldview focuses on the needs of such individuals. It would allow them experiences to learn about varying identities with whom they might find representation, as well as the opportunity to share their own stories. In studying diverse groups, transformative research seeks to reveal inequities based on “gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class that result in asymmetric power relationships” (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 47). In order to form any recommendation of social action, it must first be shown that these inequities exist and that there is pedagogical value in learning from counter-storytelling.

**Mixed Methods Approach**

This mixed methods (but primarily qualitative) study examined user engagement by comparing a control group viewing a standard Origins of the American Government lesson and an experimental group viewing the same lesson with added perspectives from other groups (American Women, Native Americans, and African Americans). I modified the standard lesson from part of a college-level course designed to acquaint students with the origins, concepts, organizations, and policies of the United States government and political system. The objectives came from the beginning of the course, which was mostly a review of American government curriculum covered in Grades 11-12. National common core standards exist for English language arts and mathematics on a grade-by-grade level. For social studies, national standards are general and focus on literacy: reading, writing, speaking, and interpreting. States have their own standards for high school social studies, including government and civics classes, and they vary widely. For example, they can be as general as Nevada’s: “Satisfactory completion of courses in American government and American history is required for graduation” (Education Commission
of the States [ECS], 2016). They can also be specific, such as Pennsylvania’s (Education Commission of the States [ECS], 2016), which includes:

During grades seven through twelve inclusive, there shall be included at least four semesters or equivalent study in the history and government of that portion of America which has become the United States of America, and of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, of such nature, kind or quality, as to have for its purpose the developing, teaching and presentation of the principles and ideals of the American republican representative form of government, as portrayed and experienced by the acts and policies of the framers of the Declaration of Independence and framers of the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. The study of the history of the United States, including the study of the Constitution of the United States and the study of the history and Constitution of this Commonwealth, shall also be such as will emphasize the good, worthwhile and best features and points of the social, economic and cultural development, the growth of the American family life, high standard of living of the United States citizen, the privileges enjoyed by such citizens, their heritage and its derivations of and in our principles of government. (22 Pa. Code § 57.31, 4 Pa. Code § 16-1605, 24 P. S. § 16-1605)

This study was based out of Pennsylvania and the structure of the original course adhered to these statutes. It provided a review of the principles and ideals of the American representative form of government, before moving on to more detail on the structure and organization of the United States government as it functions today.

I was interested to see whether the replies between the two groups would be different with the new information or reveal new connections made. Therefore I used a convergent mixed
methods design, in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 186).

**Quantitative Data**

In this study, the participation invitation included a Self-Efficacy Evaluation/ Voluntary Demographic Survey. The evaluation comprised three self-assessment questions regarding knowledge on the subject matter of Origins of the American Government. The survey requested some demographic information questions to get an idea of the sample population's makeup. The survey was anonymous and not tied to any data. After the study, the post-assessment included the self-assessment questions again to compare responses between the control and experimental group as a whole.

**Qualitative Data**

I collected and coded qualitative for this study from answers to open-ended questions. These questions were presented in pre- and post-lesson evaluations, and less formally in a focus group session.

**Lesson Question Pre- and Post-Evaluations.** The open-ended questions of the pre- and post-evaluations were created to explore any overarching difference in the replies between the two groups. I was interested to learn whether the new information added would reveal new connections made.

There were also subjective questions regarding usability and design at the end of the post-evaluation to give users more opportunity to share impressions.
Focus Groups. The goal of the focus group was to explain the goals of the research and encourage discussion and honest feedback with a small group of participants. This would add more perspective from a different lens—those who design e-learning experiences on a daily basis, and who are knowledgeable about pedagogy and trends in the industry.

The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to identify any apparent trends or connections with as much data as possible given the limited sample.
Chapter II: Literature Review

This review has supported the idea that storytelling has significant potential to aid in learning, recall, engagement, and meaning-making. Visual rhetorical tools add another means to encode information and find meaning for recall. Of particular interest in this research was the value of storytelling in creating empathy, a type of understanding that is difficult to teach. The combination of meaning-making and praxis available from the connections made through story or narrative has made it more than a tool to facilitate learning and a basic pedagogical methodology.

With this methodology comes a great responsibility to examine what stories are being told, which are implied, and which are left out. The storyteller chooses the perspective used. Research on counter-storytelling indicates the critical role it can have in helping students make connections independently without changing the objectives or adding an agenda. My goal in adding to this research is to provide more information on how perspectives can increase representation, add to knowledge, and improve critical thinking.

Storytelling

Multiple sources provide research to support the use of storytelling as a tool for understanding and recall. The human brain operates based on symbolic information. One of the brain's tricks is to extract meaningful patterns from confusion so that the relationships among objects and ideas can evoke the recognition of new patterns (Lister, 1994, as cited in Leung & Fong, 2011, p. 469). Story and metaphor can help students access connections they wouldn’t otherwise make, allowing them to use existing knowledge to make sense of and create new knowledge.
It is a well-established notion of rhetorical study that much of our understanding of the material world relies on the use of concepts with immaterial foundations based on figuration and analogy. Science itself is shot through with “a moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms” (Nietzsche, 1954, as cited in Ihlen & Heath, 2018, p. 159). Classifying a single instance of involves comparing it to something else it is not (Black, 1979, as cited in Ihlen & Heath, 2018, p. 159). When the source and target domains of metaphor, material to abstract, overlap and the transfer of characteristics occurs, it produces a cognitive effect in the human mind that results in a new, separate understanding of or insight into the target domain that did not exist before the metaphor was created. The metaphor actively rearranges our understanding of the target (Ramsey, 2014, as cited in Waymer, 2018, p. 246). Metaphor is a means by which materiality is connected to language and metaphorical thought is unavoidable, as most if not all of human thought processes are metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, as cited in Waymer, 2018, p. 246).

Metaphor, as a building block of stories, allows humans to use what is known by social and physical experiences to provide understanding about an unlimited number of other subjects. According to the research of Leung & Fong (2011), people can easily transfer the words of stories into symbolic information because story contexts and components are usually close to the reality they may have seen or experienced. In other words, “stories can provide vivid images to readers through the processes of inputting story-elements, recalling reality, and cognitive processes” (p. 469). Students will find it easier to recall stories than lists of facts because they utilize patterns and symbolic information.

A story, then, facilitates instruction by aiding in the mental construction of a sequence of events enacted for or by the learner. Story structures, such as plots, problems, and contextualized
situations, act as an attention-focusing mechanism that aids in inquiry, decision-making, and learning (Gerrig, 1993, as cited in Andrews et al., 2009, p. 7). By having interesting settings, plots, and characters, stories “leave a lasting impression, either by piquing the audience’s curiosity and making them want to learn more, or by conveying a deeper meaning than” a typical sequence of causally related events (Ma et al., 2012, p. 12). Stories engage, trigger connections, and provide access to content where a student might otherwise struggle.

Visual storytelling, in particular, is trending because of the technical capabilities of new software to create interactives and engaging interfaces (Ma et al., 2012). The use of images adds even more strength to memory. The goal of any communication is to eliminate or minimize interference and thus maximize effective communication. Research regarding visual literacy and language shows that visual elements augment memory when reading a story.

The dual-coding memory model, or dual-coding theory, proposes a verbal system for processing and storing linguistic information and a separate non-verbal system for spatial information and mental imagery (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011, p. 13). The image is centrally important in facilitating long-term retention, at least for adults, because it is generally agreed that information presented in pictures is encoded twice, once as a picture and once as a verbal label that names the picture (Winn 1993, as cited in Avgerinou, & Pettersson 2011, p. 13). The redundancy in memory that results from this dual coding means that information can be retrieved from the pictorial or the verbal memory (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011, p. 13). The more methods there are for memory retrieval, the better the chances that students will recall what they've learned, as a term, an image, or an idea related through story can activate recognition.
**Perspective and Empathy**

More important for cultural communications could be the potential of authentic educational storytelling to create empathy by engaging with a story that illustrates a point of view that hasn’t been encountered through personal experience. Authenticity allows viewers to feel empathy for characters as they recognize their own emotions and reactions expressed. When viewers identify with a character, they might imagine how they would react to the circumstances they see the character experience (McDonald, 2009, p. 10). Identification as related through story can create a shared humanity that transcends cultural barriers. These barriers may exist simply because there has not been an opportunity to know and learn from different people groups.

While examining the role of narrative empathy as a crucial component of effective communication, Moore and Hallenbeck (2010) find that narratives are valued across all cultural groups as one method of promoting mutual understanding. Although people vary in their individual empathetic potential and empathy is understood within cultural context, it is worth studying whether narrative empathy can maximize resonance compassion among people (Moore & Hallenbeck, 2010, p. 473). An increase in compassion can only make the world a better place.

Exploring whether storytelling can be used as a tool to meet affective learning objectives, such as the development of empathy, is also an important benefit for the field of education. Empathy is “foundational to social and relational intelligence, which are increasingly valued as top skills in school and in the workplace” (Hay, 2018, 3. Increased Social Intelligence). Students who can empathize can also communicate, collaborate, and lead. One study that began in the 1950s and continued over 40 years found social intelligence to be “four times more likely than IQ to predict professional success and prestige” (Hay, 2018, 3. Increased Social Intelligence).
However, empathy isn’t easily taught. It can’t be learned through a lecture, but it can be reinforced by repeated exposure to the experiences and views of others through story.

In addition to cultural groups, generational groups may also benefit from storytelling in different ways. Adult learners bring significant experience with them to the classroom. Caminotti and Gray (2012) studied the use of storytelling for educators to reach adult learners and conclude that story is an effective andragogical tool. They reviewed existing research for both storytelling and adult learning to examine how storytelling is used in organizations to communicate complex ideas and motivate change. Experiential learning through role-play, case studies, and written narrative can create an effective and lasting impression on adult learners (Caminotti & Gray, 2012). There are many opportunities to create these impressions through learning management systems and discussion boards in e-learning environments. According to Jenkins (2006), “New media technologies make it much easier to bring stories to life and have become an increasingly significant part of participatory, popular culture” (as cited in Andrews et al., 2009, p. 6).

**Storytelling as a Pedagogical Methodology**

The principles of storytelling are a worthwhile addition to instructional design practice, as they allow instructional environments to engage students' attention and cognitive abilities towards more effective learning. Stories invite engagement in ways that a dry presentation of statistics does not (Bell, 2009, p. 109). McDonald (2009) comes to a similar conclusion after interviewing eight filmmakers who have successfully produced films that motivate, inspire, and educate to discover what they know about creating compelling instructional stories. His goal was to further illustrate an inventive approach for the creation of instructional environments.

Matthews (2018) looks to sources such as Disney engineers to examine the effect of narrative movement. He suggests that if learners can experience a real journey through a
course—for example, genuinely inhabiting certain theoretical positions and then moving on to and eventually arriving at others—then they will be more deeply engaged. The critical thinking required to go on such a journey can transform their understanding (Matthews, 2018, p. 254). The hope is that a narrative-like sequence will facilitate critical thinking while still covering the required content and achieving the required outcomes set in a course. Engaging and even aesthetic learning experiences have the greatest potential for this, and narrative movement is a key factor.

The research of Small (2017) finds that story is more than a method or tool for analyzing data. It is a methodology, a perspective through which the research process, as a form of sensemaking, can be better understood, performed, and evaluated. (Small, 2017, p. 246). They summarize the work of Boje (2001), who studied and theorized natural narratives—what he called “living stories”—at work in organizational contexts, used to make sense of the past and to predict what will happen in the future (Small, 2017, p. 246). Antenarrative was central to his work and focused on the parts of a story told and retold in different contexts and genres. My hope is that my research will pick up on Small’s (2017) assertion that now is the time to explicitly acknowledge the ways stories, storytelling, and narrative-centric research contribute to integrating knowledge, in this case social justice awareness and growth within existing instructional goals.

According to the findings of Hillen and Landis (2014), who compare how two analysts view e-learning design in their respective regions: the United States and Europe, innovative design theory in the United States includes information processing theory as well as generative learning theory. Information processing theory is a “teaching as delivery” model that considers learning to be the intake of information through the well-designed presentation of information
using media designed to enhance the perception process (de Vries, 2003, as cited in Hillen & Landis, 2014, p. 203). Generative learning theory acknowledges the importance of building on the individual learner’s past learning experiences by providing learning situations that call for experimentation, creativity, and open-mindedness (Hillen & Landis, 2014, p. 204). Both of these theories call for well-written narratives and the utilization of media tools to engage students toward higher learning.

In their analysis of e-learning design in the United States and Europe, Hillen and Landis (2014) conclude with the hope that increased awareness of newer modes of design might help to avoid limiting design options to simplistic, prescriptive patterns that have, in the past, limited opportunities for ever-expanding learners’ and teachers’ needs (Hillen and Landis, 2014, p. 218). Inspired by this research, I hope to examine the best methods for integrating relevant social justice awareness and growth as an ethical practice of instructional design through the lens of storytelling.

**Counter-Storytelling**

Storytelling in critical pedagogy aims to “give voice to normally silenced people and subjugated knowledge,” to provide “a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed” (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006, as cited in Gachago et al. 2014, p. 30). Storytelling is valued as a means for expressing and documenting experiential knowledge from personal experience. Counter-stories give new opportunities to understand previously untold experiences of racism, resistance, and the despair and hope at society's margins.

Before taking students on a narrative journey, the stories must be carefully examined for exclusivity as much as possible for ethical instructional design practice. Bradshaw’s research (2018a) suggests that “historical accounts are always subjective and incomplete, and mainstream
explicit storytelling tends to replicate and reinforce dominant systems and structures that may be harmful and exclusionary to some people” (p. 232). Recognizing and deconstructing implicit forms of story invites more people to the conversation and considers more perspectives in the pursuit of new understanding.

Bradshaw encourages creators of e-learning to learn how to acknowledge and examine stories at both explicit and implicit levels in ways that allow teaching the important objectives, while also working to recognize, reveal, and transform or disrupt potentially harmful implicit messages that reduce inclusion and equity (Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 235).

This is just as important for online learning as for classroom education, in which personal storytelling has been encouraged to challenge dominant discourses. The research of Gachago et al. (2014) suggests that having students analyze their own stories could “facilitate a nuanced conversation on consciously and unconsciously held beliefs and assumptions, as well as an awareness of themselves that may lead to questioning the dominant discourse” they have been socialized in (Gachago et al., 2014, p. 31). Counter-stories thus have distinct functions: they build community, challenge perceived wisdom, and “open up new windows into the reality of those living at the margins” (Gachago et al., 2014, p. 31). Furthermore, listening to these counter-stories seemed beneficial for students identifying with both privilege and disadvantage. Not only did marginalized students feel empowered and gain from the process of sharing and listening to 'counter-stories,' but privileged students equally benefited and experienced transformation, allowing them to understand their own realities in more meaningful ways (Gachago et al., 2014, p. 39). All students can benefit from counter-stories, whether by finding representation and deeper engagement or by creating empathy and awareness.
In *Field of privilege: Why instructional design and technology must engage issues of race, ethnicity, and social justice*, Bradshaw shares her convictions that because controlling the flow of information is an instructional technology, raising awareness and supporting positive means of addressing our collective ignorance of the connections to and ramifications of social injustice within the realm of instructional design technology is an ethical imperative (Bradshaw, 2014). A concentration of relatively privileged perspectives and positionalities, and lack of dialectical engagement with others from vastly different backgrounds, experiences, positionalities, and perspectives, is “conducive to the development of a field with a narrow mainstream” (Bradshaw, 2014). Instructional designers can be curators of perspectives and educators can be facilitators of self-directed learning, but this requires meaningful engagement and awareness within the design process.

This is supported by the research of Orón Semper and Blasco (2018), the key point of which is that teaching always communicates, both explicitly and implicitly, a ‘right way to understand life’—and that the explicit and implicit objectives of teaching may be at odds. If the designer can help bring the implicit to light, students can explore for themselves and make their own connections (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). There may be a model for this in Lee Anne Bell’s *Storytelling for social justice: Connecting narrative and the arts in antiracist teaching*, in which the arts, particularly storytelling, are examined as “ways to teach and learn about race by creating counter-storytelling communities that can promote more critical and thoughtful dialogue about racism and the remedies necessary to dismantle it” (Bell, 2010, *Abstract*). Bell outlines two important ways that counter-storytelling can do this. First, because stories “operate at both individual and collective levels, they can bridge the sociological/abstract with the psychological/personal contours of daily experience” (Bell, 2010, *The Storytelling Project*).
Model). Connecting individual experiences with systemic analysis can help students to unpack, in ways that are perhaps more accessible than abstract analysis alone, the institutions and cultural practices that sustain racism (Bell, 2010, *The Storytelling Project Model*). Second, because stories carry within them historical/social formations, counter-stories can help recognize normative and historical patterns that perpetuate racial privilege. They also potentially enable the development of new stories that “challenge the status quo and offer alternative visions for democratic and socially just relations” (Bell, 2010, *The Storytelling Project Model*). Abstract analysis doesn’t engage or provoke empathy the same way that stories will.

Bell uses the standpoint theory to support the effectiveness of counter-storytelling for learning. Only a story can give the vantage point of being on the periphery and looking at the center. Recognizing there are important things that can be seen from the margins that can't be seen from the center, how do we invite those stories into the conversation to learn from them? (Bell, 2009). Exploring the tools of language and images as a means of examining social justice is the goal of my research, as I agree wholeheartedly that stories are one of the most powerful ways that we learn about the world.

The explicit voice can only be understood better by unmuting the implicit voice and considering perspectives to get to know and humanize the ‘other.’ If counter-stories can ignite critical thinking or conversation around issues of oppression and privilege, they become a pedagogical intervention placed firmly in the context of social justice education (Gachago et al., 2014, p. 40). Creators and teachers of educational content have an opportunity to contribute to social justice by exposing inequalities through the incorporation of counter-storytelling.
Identification and Representation

Another important reason for educators to seek to deconstruct null and hidden curriculum and provide opportunity for counter-story is the value of identification and representation for students of all different backgrounds. Race, gender, and class are the three canonical identity categories by which scholars have investigated identification (Öztok, 2020, p. 21). Ignoring questions regarding whose values, perspectives, and beliefs are legitimized as mutual meanings can lead to inequitable learning situations, since such mutual meanings can reproduce cultural hegemony by compelling individuals to filter out their particular subjectivities in order to be identified with dominant discourses (Öztok, 2020, p. 27). Inequitable learning conditions can occur when individuals identify themselves with the non-dominant perspectives, and have their values marginalized or knowledge devalued (Öztok, 2020, p. 19).

This review has provided support for the idea that storytelling has become an accepted tool for teaching because of its potential to aid in learning, recall, engagement, and meaning-making. Counter-storytelling can help students by revealing or solidifying preconceived awareness of hidden curriculum, allowing them to reframe what they've learned previously, question things from another point of view, and evoke empathy for marginalized groups. My research aims to examine these ideas and support existing research with data collection involving e-learning design that incorporates counter-storytelling to support critical thinking and self-directed acquisition of knowledge.
Chapter III: Methods

Methods described here include participant selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and study limitations. Methodology as a research framework and schema is discussed in Chapter 1: Methodology.

Subject Selection and Description

I was given permission to solicit participants from my workplace, with the following caveats:

1) The work cannot violate any proprietary company material, meaning anything used as lesson material would need to be marked as copyrighted.

2) The employees I engage must participate voluntarily. Also, if any non-exempt employees participate, they cannot do so during work hours.

Because of the second caveat, it made the most sense to stick within my department (Courseware), as the head of Courseware was willing to coordinate with me for any testing that needed to happen during work hours. The Courseware department consists of more than 40 content managers, editors, and designers who work in the e-learning industry. The initial invitation was sent department-wide (and to two freelancers) by email, with a link to the initial survey. Recipients were asked to reply to the email with their name if willing to participate and to complete the initial survey. Twenty-six people responded that they would be willing.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for this study included an initial survey with a self-efficacy evaluation along with a voluntary demographic survey, and pre- and post-lesson evaluation surveys. Feedback was also collected from a focus group session.
Self-Efficacy Evaluation/ Voluntary Demographic Survey

The first survey tool, given through Qualtrics, was a screener to assess users’ self-measured knowledge on the subject matter (Origin of the American Government). This was to provide a baseline for prior knowledge, and the same questions were given at the end to measure any change after viewing the course. In order to find possible correlations with responses and demographic data, demographic questions were given with an explanation of what responses would be used for and an option to select ‘Prefer not to answer.’ An added question in the survey asked the participant where they have accumulated knowledge on the subject matter of Origins of the American Government. This question was not a screener and may not be directly beneficial to the research question, but I wanted to add it in case there was a correlation that could explain pre-existing knowledge of null or hidden curriculum in pre-questions. If rhetoric is “the art of convincing the soul through words,” do avid readers already make these connections? Or are we doing a much better job of telling stories through visual media? Theorizing that the more exposed to perspectives you are the more compassion and understanding you accumulate, I wanted to see if results might identify some correlation. Unfortunately, my sample size didn’t give me much room to explore this as much as I would have liked to, but I added a the idea to recommendations for further research. The primary evaluation/survey is shown in Appendix A.

Lesson Question Evaluations

With permission, I developed a section of a lesson from the college course American Government that was already been in use at the online university where I work (control group). I redeveloped existing content with the same learning objectives, integrating counter-storytelling and critical thinking elements (experimental group). Each lesson was abbreviated, covering three objectives estimated to take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.
Lesson Objectives. The lesson was designed so that students would be able to meet the following objectives:

- Summarize the motivations of the leaders and influencers involved in the formation of the United States of America
- Identify core American values held by the founders of the new government
- Evaluate their adherence to the ideals set forth for the nation

From the 26 willing participants in my study, I set up A and B testing groups with 13 subjects each. Both groups would take a pre-questionnaire as a baseline (Appendix B), complete each lesson, and then answer the questions again in a final assessment, including a response survey at the end (Appendix C). The pre- and post-questionnaires included basically the same questions. However, there were two additional questions in the post-questionnaire regarding perspective and a repeat of the self-efficacy scales to re-assess their perceived knowledge of the subject matter. Also, the post-questionnaire question “Were these values adhered consistently by those who fought for them?” was worded as “How were these values applied in the early history of the country?” in the pre-questionnaire. The entire study was estimated to take less than 40 minutes. I designed the online lesson sample in Articulate Rise with menu navigation so that participants could go back to it if needed without having to complete it in one sitting. They were asked to complete the study within one week.

The information added to the experimental group included four ‘Perspective’ tabs providing insight from other points of view into the information learned in the main lesson:

- Perspective: American Women
- Perspective: Native Americans
- Perspective: Rationality of Slavery
• Perspective: African Americans

I designed these sections to be informative—not as add-ons but as new perspectives after the first original structured content for the learning objectives. I then added reflective questions to each of these sections to challenge students to make connections and consider multiple perspectives. I was interested in learning whether the replies between the two groups would be different and whether the added information would reveal new connections made. My hope was that open-ended assessment questions could gauge this without leading or imposing ideas.

In designing the lesson, I struggled with determining where to place the Perspective sections. At first, I thought it might be more organic to intersperse new content within the topics where they were most relevant or to arrange content chronologically. However, when I attempted to do this, it seemed disjointed. Ultimately, I felt it was detrimental to the pacing of the course to split the content. Therefore I decided to keep the sections topical and let them speak for themselves after completion of the content from a typical textbook point of view.

**Sample Lessons.** Links for both the control and experimental lessons as of the completion of the study are listed here. All content is the property of Penn Foster, Inc.

• Control Lesson:
  https://rise.articulate.com/share/AksQzquvbIr5mmeGzXtdu2ii9fgzY6s

• Experimental Lesson:
  https://rise.articulate.com/share/e2o9Od92ipZf_BxlpXtu3L6t57afeRln#/lessons/tW7daVjp1p-ckJwD0e4iuK4sdL4n_V_G

**Focus Groups**

At the end of the study, I added one last poll question to ask participants if they were willing to participate in a focus group in another two to three weeks after I had a chance to
compile summative assessment data. If interested, they could give their email address for a follow-up invitation. An incentive of a $20 Amazon gift certificate was offered to anyone who completed the study through the focus group. My goal was to coordinate an online focus group of 6-10 people willing to hear more about the research and share their opinions. Five participants ultimately participated in the focus group, two from the control group and three from the experimental.

The focus group met virtually online, and I used a Power-Point presentation to show the initial study results. I also revealed new elements of the experimental lesson for the benefit of those in the control group. At this point, the goal was to solicit impressions from those experienced in e-learning design. Besides asking for general impressions and feedback, I posed the following questions:

- Are counter-story and reflection questions a good way to encourage critical thinking in online learning?
- Do you believe it’s the responsibility of Courseware to design to help students discover hidden or null curriculum? Why or why not?
- What value do you think there is for our students of different people groups to see representation of their identity in the lessons they study?

**Data Collection Procedures**

This study represented true experimental research, as participants were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups, and responses were broken down and compared. When the studies were completed, I ran reports from Qualtrics to get an overview of the data. Because this was a mixed-methods study, data was drawn from the pre-survey for baseline quantitative information involving self-assessment knowledge ratings and basic
demographic information. The same self-assessment scores were pulled from the post-assessment and compared, noting differences between control and experimental groups.

I collected most of my data from answers to open-ended questions for qualitative research in the pre- and post-assessments, and later the focus group. For these, I used Quirkos 2.3.1 software to organize participant responses into themes, groups, and subgroups. Keywords were defined and identified throughout the data. After coding all data, I compared responses between pre- and post-assessments and between control and experimental study groups.

**Data Analysis**

As 26 participants accepted the invitation to participate in this study, 13 received invitations to the control study, and 13 received invitations to the experimental study. Twenty-one participants ultimately completed the study. One participant (from the control group) completed the pre-assessment but never completed the post-assessment.

Of the 21 participants who completed the study, 13 answered the question regarding the focus group. Seven people indicated they would be willing to participate but only six gave their email address for an invitation. Less than 2% of questions were skipped with no answers given.

**Table 1**

*Sample Group Distribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Invitations Sent</th>
<th>Studies Completed</th>
<th>Focus Group Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Group</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11 (1 incomplete)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Group</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitations

The following limitations are recognized within the methods for this study:

1. Sample Size and Profile—I work for an online institution, and my employer was willing to allow me to solicit participation from my department, consisting of close to 50 people. I took advantage of the opportunity in the hopes that the focus group would provide more insight from online learning professionals. However, this resulted in a relatively homogeneous group of people. Of the 26 people who accepted the invitation, 100% identified as Caucasian, More than 77% were female, the largest represented age group (48%) was 35-44. For education level, 48% reported having obtained a Master’s degree, 43% a Bachelor’s degree, and the remaining selected ‘Some College, No Degree,’ or ‘Prefer Not to Answer.’ Of the 26 people who volunteered, only 21 completed the study. For further research, it would be worthwhile to find better representation from different ethnic groups, backgrounds, education levels, and age ranges to represent student populations. However, for the scope of this study, the sample group provided some interesting insights and it was advantageous to have access to online learning professionals. According to a report on instructional design in higher education (Intentional Futures, 2016), 67% of the 13,000 instructional designers in the United States are female, the average age is 45, and 87% have a Master’s Degree or higher. The sample may have been representative of professionals in the instructional design field, but more important to this research would be a sample representative of an online student population in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity. I did not have access to the student population for this study, but
would add the need for a more diverse study sample in recommendations for further research.

2. Data Collection Process—I used Qualtrics to design the surveys for data collection. Because all information needed to be anonymous, I asked participants to use an identifying number in the pre-assessment between 1 and 1,000 and use it again in the post-assessment. Some participants didn’t complete the study in one sitting, there were a few numbers that didn’t match up, and one person completed the pre-assessment but not the post-assessment. The participants were my co-workers, and some reached out to me with questions, but there were more than likely some who had questions but did not reach out for privacy reasons. Only 13 participants returned to the end of the study after the post-assessment to answer the focus group question though all received a reminder to do so. One person indicated a willingness to participate but did not give their email address in the following question.

3. Time—Participants were given one week to complete the study after receiving the link. Unfortunately, many high-profile projects were going on in the department at the time, with people juggling more work than they could handle. When I sent a reminder out at the end of the week, at least five people contacted me to request more time. This was granted, but time and competing responsibilities were likely the factors why five people did not follow through, and one started but didn’t complete the study.

Summary

The qualitative data collected in this project helped further explore subjective meanings for different individuals regarding the storytelling and critical thinking elements in this sample course. Having a mixed-methods approach with some numerical data gave me a framework to
work from while also being open to a complexity of views and feedback. The focus group affirmed the transformative worldview I sought to incorporate. Some of the focus group participants seemed to connect with the ideas of using perspective to reveal null and hidden curriculum and promote social justice principles, as small steps in the right direction toward truth and accountability. Despite the limitations of this study, it reveals some interesting trends to add to the conversation.
Chapter IV: Results

Results in this section are categorized by demographics, items analysis, and analysis of subject feedback in response to each of the research questions.

Demographics

Demographic information collected from the participants of this study include ethnic and gender representation, age, and education level.

Ethnic and Gender Representation

100% of the participants of this study were white/Caucasian. Of the 26 original volunteers who indicated willingness to participate in the study, 6 were male and 20 were female. 21 people completed the study and 5 participated in the focus group, two male and three female.

Age

The ages of this study sample are depicted in Table 2 and Figure 1.
**Table 2**

*Response to Question: What Is Your Age?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18 - 24</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25 - 34</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>45 - 54</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>55 - 64</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>65 - 74</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>75 or older</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total | 100% | 21   |
Figure 1

*Graphic Representation of Sample Age Distribution*

Education Level

The reported education levels of this study sample are depicted in Table 3 and Figure 2.
Table 3

Response to Question: What Is the Highest Degree or Level of School You Have Completed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Doctorate or professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, Ph.D.)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2

*Graphic Representation of Sample Education Distribution*

Item Analysis

Items for analysis include results of the self-assessment, pre-evaluation findings, post-evaluation results compared and contrasted between control and experimental groups, and focus group participation data.
Self-Assessment

Self-assessment scores improved significantly from pre- and post-assessments, but improved more with the experimental group.

Participants were asked to rate their level of confidence regarding their knowledge of the subject (Origins of the American Government) on a scale from 0-100.

Scale:

- 0 - You may have learned it at one point but don’t remember much
- 50 - You know the basic facts that would be taught in a standard high school course
- 100 - You could teach a course on the subject or have done extensive research

This assessment was given before the study and again at the end.

Table 4

Initial Evaluation Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I understand the motivations behind the Revolutionary War and the writing of the Constitution.</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>56.90</td>
<td>21.85</td>
<td>477.32</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can list the core American values as shared by the writers of the Constitution.</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>53.43</td>
<td>22.91</td>
<td>524.72</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can understand what these values meant to different people groups.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>87.00</td>
<td>55.86</td>
<td>19.29</td>
<td>372.03</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std Deviation</td>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I understand the motivations behind the Revolutionary War and the writing of the Constitution.</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>76.05</td>
<td>17.35</td>
<td>301.00</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can list the core American values as shared by the writers of the Constitution.</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>77.10</td>
<td>17.39</td>
<td>302.28</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can understand what these values meant to different people groups.</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>72.38</td>
<td>18.21</td>
<td>331.47</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Post-Study Self-Assessment Results—Total*
### Table 6

*Post-Study Self-Assessment Results—Control Group Only*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I understand the motivations behind the Revolutionary War and the writing of the Constitution.</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>20.76</td>
<td>431.09</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can list the core American values as shared by the writers of the Constitution.</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>74.63</td>
<td>18.97</td>
<td>360.05</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can understand what these values meant to different people groups.</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>68.72</td>
<td>23.93</td>
<td>572.62</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Post-Study Self-Assessment Results—Experimental Group Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I understand the motivations behind the Revolutionary War and the writing of the Constitution.</td>
<td>59.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>14.83</td>
<td>220.01</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can list the core American values as shared by the writers of the Constitution.</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>17.02</td>
<td>289.73</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can understand what these values meant to different people groups.</td>
<td>61.00</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>102.93</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following general observations were noted after analyzing the qualitative data of this study:

- Pre-evaluations revealed wide recognition of hypocrisy of American values favoring white, rich men before the lesson was viewed.
- There was more engagement with the experimental group participants, longer comments, and almost twice as much feedback according to word count.
- For the experimental group, almost all participants specifically mentioned each group represented in their answers to the perspective question (women, indigenous, slave/African American).
**Pre-Evaluation Findings**

Before taking the course, participants were asked to briefly describe the ideas of inalienable rights and equality and how these ideas shaped core American values. Most respondents in broad political terms, referring to terms such as ‘democracy’ and mentioning freedom from British rule and taxation. About one-third mentioned ideas of religious freedom. Other ideas mentioned included the ability to pursue happiness, own land, and seek opportunity.

Then participants were asked, how were these values applied in the early history of the country? Nine out of 21 respondents made some mention of the rights of inequality being appropriated unequally to white powerful or rich men. As one respondent noted, “These values have typically only applied to those who saw themselves worthy enough to run the government—wealthy, white men.” Going into the study, there was already some awareness of null curriculum with the acknowledgment that the freedoms heroically fought for and proclaimed for everyone were really only available for a privileged few. However, most American Civics classes at the high school level teach that the founding fathers fought for every American to have an equal right and responsibility to participate in the new democracy. Refer back to Chapter III: Methods for more detail on state standards for American government and civics education at the high school level.

**Control vs. Experimental Groups**

The most interesting thing that stood out when going over the data was the increased engagement with experimental group participants. The word count was considerably higher for written responses, and there was more indication that they were paying attention and interested. The experimental group also had more positive things to say about the course structure and how much they learned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total Words</th>
<th>Average Words per Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>2495</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td>4040</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s also noteworthy that every participant in the experimental group specifically mentioned the different people groups represented in the Perspectives sections—women, African-Americans (enslaved and free), and Native Americans. Given the limited time that participants had to view these lessons and scan over content, these sections were clearly memorable and seemed to make an impression on everyone who read them (see quotes in Table 9).

Table 9

Experimental Group Post-Study Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Participant</th>
<th>Post-Study Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Founders, such as Thomas Jefferson, explained the supposed inferior races’ and people, to try and justify the hypocrisy of the desire for an equal and free government, while owning slaves, and taking away the rights of women, Black people, Native Americans, and practically anyone who wasn’t a white man. Even today we still see these core values quoted, revered, and called back on, when in reality, our government was built by white men, for white men, with many hypocritical, racist, and discriminatory ideas and laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It's important to see the events of early American government because not everyone had the same experience in its development. Women, Blacks, and Native Americans were still oppressed and lacked proper representation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Providing specific examples of individuals and their sacrifice or struggles helps develop empathy and appreciation for those that did not have equal rights at that time. Many of the leaders owned slaves. Leaders used academic and scientific fallacies that claimed some races were inferior to others in an attempt to justify the use of slavery and mistreatment/enslavement of indigenous peoples. The leaders also did not provide equal rights to women.

*Were these values adhered consistently by those who fought for them?*

No, they fought for liberty while owning slaves, and claimed a value of equality while displacing and killing native Americans, and denying rights to women and minorities.

*Were these values adhered consistently by those who fought for them?*

No they were not adhered to consistently. Various individuals and groups fought for them, from women to African Americans to Native Americans. It (multiple perspectives) shows the full scope of the foundation of our country. Our country included all types of individuals, not just the white men who made the rules and drafted the documents.

The lesson included the perspectives of women, Native Americans, enslaved people, and African Americans, but mostly history is told from the white male perspective. It (multiple perspectives) can make the contributions of marginalized groups in the establishment of our nation clear and help us understand history as it really was, not as we wish to see it.

Several (perspectives were in this lesson), white, blacks, women, native American as well as those leaders of the American Revolution. To truly understand the origins of the American government we need to hear the various perspectives. The full story is seldom seen/heard in only one perspective.

The values of freedom and equality were not consistently adhered by the nation's founders. The established government favored white, land-owning men. Women, slaves, and Native Americans were not given the same treatment. History is written by the winners and those in power.
questionable things they may have done are often downplayed or left out entirely. Having multiple perspectives allows for a more complete understanding of what actually happened and can help prevent any of the negative aspects from history to be repeated.

Many of the revolutionary leaders were slave owners. By owning slaves, they regularly infringed upon the inalienable rights of other human beings. As far as equality, they didn't even count slaves as people; rather, they reduced them to a fraction in the Three-Fifths Compromise. This lesson included a variety of perspectives, including those of various revolutionary leaders, women, Native Americans, and African Americans.

The perspectives of slaves, women, African-Americans, and Native Americans were represented in this lesson.

Were these values adhered consistently by those who fought for them? Mostly no. Slave owners fought for the individual freedom of all men. Women were excluded from voting. Native Americans and African Americans were considered inferior. While their ideals were noble in theory, the practical implementation of these ideas was flawed.

The answer to the post-assessment question, *Were these values adhered consistently by those who fought for them?* was almost always no, stated or implied. However, there were two yeses and one “eventually yes,” and all three of these answers were from the control group.

**Focus Group**

The focus group helped create a picture of what the course experience was like with representation from both the control and experimental groups. There was positive feedback regarding adding the additional perspectives, with only varying opinions on where they should be placed in the course. Two participants who were in the experimental group felt that having the perspectives come after the main text made a significant impact:
• It wouldn’t seem as natural mixed in the content because you’re able to see the whole perspective first and understand the period and what was going on before seeing other groups affected and being able to draw inferences of what things must’ve been like for them, then the added perspectives add to what you know. New information built on the information before it.

• Learning about the known history and philosophical arguments first prepares you for understanding the impact and the conflicts that are going on following those things and also helps to understand the perspectives better. You took a list of everybody that would have a perspective as (an) argument and then you made sure that you gave them a voice in the learning and you placed it in an area where it made the understanding of those issues very coherent. It felt fluid, it had a good rhythm, but it also felt very inclusive in terms of understanding. I do feel like I understand the topic a lot better having taken that course.

In contrast, one participant who was in the control group felt that the perspectives could have been more strongly integrated into the course:

• It seems like an afterthought, especially with all four of them tacked at the end. Being preceded by the word "Perspective" also set them apart as not part of the "real meat" of the course.

This participant felt that the perspective content should be woven into the primary text and have separate objectives so students would know it was something they were being tested on. That way, they would pay more attention and it "would've also broken up the aforementioned white-male domination in the text."
Recall that I had struggled with deciding where to place the counter-story content in designing the course before placing them at the end. This research aimed to integrate counter-storytelling within the existing objectives and engage students by giving them a broader perspective, not to introduce additional assessment objectives. Therefore, I feel confident from the feedback of the experimental participants that this was the right decision. Having the perspectives at the end provided more ways for students to make connections and learn new points of view about what they had already learned without detracting from the pacing or engagement of the course experience. I felt that these would cause them to be the imposed add-ons I was trying to avoid.

There were also mixed opinions on the guided questions. There were some comments in the post-assessment feedback that the questions were valuable. Answering the question “What did you like about this lesson?” two experimental group participants indicated that they liked the reflection questions after every perspective.

However, the consensus in the focus group seemed to be that the guided questions for critical thinking didn’t remain in their memory and were maybe glanced over because they seemed like review bullet points:

- (The questions) didn’t seem as engaging as the other content, I read them but didn’t ponder them and don’t remember them. It seemed like the amount of time allotted to it compared to the interactives was just a review – maybe similar treatments, an area approaching analysis in a more engaging way to continue the trend instead of feeling like it’s just a touchpoint to skip over. (Experimental Group)
• I think it’s common if you’re asking a question that doesn’t need to be answered, you tend to look over it. I’ve always done that, even if I care about what’s going on. (Experimental Group)

• Going by how I learned in school, I don't think I would've paid much attention (to the guided questions). That would've been something I viewed as extraneous and not something I needed to complete the course objectives to satisfaction. (Control Group)

For better engagement, suggestions included introducing questions before content so that students could be looking for answers, which would underscore the importance. Another suggestion was to have students answer in discussion posts—submitted responses would reveal possible answers touching on certain points. A third suggestion was to allow students to respond to an anonymous board where they could see what other students posted. However, cross-posting would have to be disabled because of our asynchronous learning model, and because of the potential to become controversial.

Research Questions

When analyzing the results to the research questions using data from both the study and the focus group, themes emerged that counter-storytelling with, or maybe even without guided questions, helped students to make new connections in the following specific ways:

• Increasing recall and engagement

• Evoking empathy for marginalized groups

• Revealing or solidifying preconceived awareness of hidden curriculum

• Allowing them to reframe what they’ve learned previously and question things from another point of view

• Inspiring them to relate what they were learning to current events
• Helping them to recognize the value of representation for learning

*Research Question 1: In What Specific Ways Can Adding Additional Perspective(s) as Counter-Storytelling With Guided Questions Help Students to Make Connections to New Stories (Null Curriculum)?*

The focus group participants generally agreed that the subject matter itself had an inherent bias that most have become aware of through various media and supplemental educational materials. It became apparent in the differences in post-assessment responses between the control and experimental groups that knowing this does not necessarily mean that students will make connections with this knowledge in mind.

In response to the question, “How can multiple perspectives add to your understanding of the origins of the American government? most control group participants indicated this would be a good thing, but only two brought up that slaves’ or African American’s perspectives were notably absent. Twice as many thought it would be advantageous to have more perspective from the British and those outside the U.S. in response to this question, and no one brought up Native Americans or women. In contrast, as shown in Table 9, every participant of the experimental group communicated more about the value of learning the perspectives of all groups represented.

Experimental group responses also recognized the power of the counter-story to elicit empathy. Comments included thoughts such as, “Providing specific examples of individuals and their sacrifice or struggles helps develop empathy and appreciation for those that did not have equal rights at that time.”

As one focus group participant said:
• Everybody knows (the noted role players were) the white land-owning men, but there were so many more involved in this - Native Americans, people who weren’t rich, slaves, women, the English…

All participants may know before the study that there are other role players besides white land-owning men that they’ve learned about in other media or stories. However, including counter-story clearly helped bring what they already knew to their conscious thought and helped them make connections in line with the learning objectives. Counter-story alongside the explicit story allows students to reframe what they’ve learned previously and question things from another point of view. When shown this research question, another focus group participant added:

• Something I was thinking, on the one slide you had had up, about presenting information and that leading to further thought - I feel like that definitely happens when you give perspectives, because you don’t even have to take opinion or political stances, it’s just the straight facts of this is what happened to women, and this is what happened to native Americans… (etc) and it’ll then engage the ideas of people thinking about ‘How is that happening now?’ or ‘How did that happen during the Civil Rights movement?’, and it can engage all of these perspectives and social justice ideas just based on giving them facts, not leading them or telling them that’s what happened.

This participant believes counter-story has a unique role in helping students relate what they are learning to current events. We can learn so much from history and make analogies for what has happened before to help us make sense of current events. Lawyers are taught to find a precedent to argue cases. There is so much going on in the world right now that has precedent to
learn from, particularly regarding race inequalities and tensions. Why wouldn’t we give students every tool possible to help them make sense of what they see going around them? This involves a deep dive into counter-story, as minimizing the experience of marginalized groups will ensure that the same mistakes are repeated.

During the focus discussion question, participants of the experimental group were asked specifically whether perspective sections could be perceived as ‘add-ons’ with their own agenda introducing new bias, referring to the caution given in Bradshaw’s research questions that inspired this study (Bradshaw, 2018a). There were only three representatives from that group, but the consensus was that they did not:

- This subject is already slanted one way and what you’re kind of doing is bringing it almost to a center to allow all of the perspectives to be seen. It can be a gray area.. like with journalism, you don’t want to be writing an opinion piece, you want to be presenting facts. I do think that this course did a good job of that – it found a way not to exclude people. It felt like a very open-minded way of learning. I don’t think it’s biased when you’re literally defining who was a role player in all of this.

- The subject does, I think from an average standpoint, seem biased inherently, but a lot of it also comes from the fact that history classes and textbooks, etc., have just negated these perspectives all together. So adding them feels like you’re favoring them now, when really you’re not, you’re just evening it out. Even if you overcompensate a little, it’s overcompensating to make up for the lost knowledge that people don’t have or that wasn’t included or wasn’t considered. These people did exist, it’s not like you made it up… Specific experiences from there have their own
little nuances and opinions based on it, but an experience happened and it’s still legitimate.

I interpret these quotes to mean that contrary to the assertions of 1619 project critics, there seems to be room for counter-story to help students make their own connections and conclusions without steering them with a political agenda. We can tell about the facts surrounding marginalized groups and their experiences for educational benefit without editorializing.

The perspective sections representing different points of view provided new stories connecting people groups and current events, solidified preconceived awareness of hidden curriculum, and proved empathy for marginalized groups.

**Research Question 2: In What Specific Ways Can Adding Additional Perspective(s) as Counter-Storytelling With Guided Questions Help Students to Reveal Underlying Messages (Hidden Curriculum)?**

With this course, pre-assessments showed a high awareness of the hidden curriculum going into the study. However, adding additional perspectives brought it into better focus for participants and helped them to analyze it from different angles. As detailed in the results, the positive feedback from the study post-assessment revealed that additional perspectives increased engagement and helped students make connections to underlying messages that aren’t explicitly stated in the course. Before the perspectives, the ideals and core American values are described as factual motivations without bias to any people group, except by implicit inference when reading about the Constitutional Convention and the Three-Fifths Compromise. Comments in the post-assessment by members of the experimental group revealed awareness of these messages:
• Americans still like to use these quotes and ideals as a vantage point, and to try and describe the country; however, when they were written and even now, there is still a lot of inequality and not everyone is provided the right to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' successfully and fully. It was a country built by white men and for white men, and a country built for the oppression of those who weren't white men.

• Founders, such as Thomas Jefferson, explained the supposed inferior races’ and people, to try and justify the hypocrisy of the desire for an equal and free government, while owning slaves, and taking away the rights of women, Black people, Native Americans, and practically anyone who wasn’t a white men. Even today we still see these core value quotes, revered, and called back on, when in reality, our government was built by white men, for white men, with many hypocritical, racist, and discriminatory ideas and laws.

Although multiple respondents in the control group showed awareness of the core values applying mostly to white men, they didn’t question the ideals as hypocritical or bring up the oppression of other groups as often or as fully. They focused more on the fact that the founding fathers were successful in fighting against the oppression of the monarchy.

In examining the focus group members' ability to recall what they'd learned about in the lesson weeks earlier, there was clear evidence supporting the research (Ma et al., 2012) that suggests visual elements augment memory when reading a story. Even after the time that had elapsed, there was detailed feedback that the use of visuals in perspectives assisted in making new connections:

• There was one of the visuals in the perspectives that stood out to me, a flyer of slaves being for sale, and a video about how I think George Washington grew up being
served by slaves but it didn’t necessarily reflect his values later in his life when he went to fight for our liberties.

Another participant noted that one of the most memorable things from the perspectives was a table, which had no visuals:

- If I had to think about anything in that course, (the Native American table specifically) was the main thing that I remembered, because I was vaguely familiar with that information, but not so in depth, and I feel like that’s something I would say not a lot of people know and schools don’t really teach. (We learn): ‘the Colonists and Native Americans’ helped each other’ and the first Thanksgiving, but not how we basically ended up screwing them over. I remembered that out of the whole course.

As discussed in the section on visual storytelling, interactive visualization, including images, tables, and other organizational graphics, is important to communication and assists with comprehensibility, credibility, and involvement (Ma et al., 2012, p. 19). When asked for feedback on the entire course in the initial study, multiple participants wanted to see more interactives and visuals. Clearly, not only is it something that learners want, but it helps them remember and make connections in ways that text alone does not.

Bradshaw's research (2014) challenged those in instructional design technology to purposefully look for the null and hidden messages in the curriculum to facilitate discussion from various perspectives. Following this idea, I asked focus group participants if they agreed this should be a responsibility of creators of e-learning. Responses included:

- I think visuals (like the slave flyer) can be memorable and important and it should be the responsibility of instructional design to include things like that. (Experimental Group)
I believe that (creators of e-learning) have the responsibility to teach hidden/null curriculum and show students representation because where else will students learn this information? History is already extremely biased toward white men. Acknowledging different groups is key because they are part of history too. (Control Group)

Especially after analyzing the feedback and seeing the difference between the two groups, I agree that looking for messages in hidden curriculum and providing pathways to null curriculum should be incorporated into course planning as much as possible. Not only is it important from a social justice perspective, but it’s also good pedagogical practice in encouraging critical thinking skills.

Counter-storytelling itself helps students make connections by introducing viewpoints that they may not have seen. It helps them to reframe what they’ve learned previously and question things from another point of view. Visuals, figures, and tables are great tools for helping students make connections when paired with the perspectives.

Research Question 3: In What Specific Ways Can Adding Additional Perspective(s) as Counter-Storytelling With Guided Questions Help Students to Create New Knowledge and Social Justice Awareness Within Existing Instructional Goals?

The experimental group's post-assessment responses included many quotes that demonstrated creation of new knowledge and social justice awareness. Some stood out for their clarity and depth of interest, especially in contrast to the control group's responses. For the question, Briefly describe in your own words the ideas of inalienable rights and equality. How do these ideas shape core American values? responses from the experimental group included:
• Inalienable rights to me means non-negotiable. They make us more aware of societal issues like racism and how to respond to them to ensure everyone can have equal opportunities and is heard when speaking out.

• The Declaration of Independence spelled this out as 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' and that 'all men are created equal' and as such, have the right to work towards these three overarching things. Americans still like to use these quotes and ideals as a vantage point, and to try and describe the country, however, when they were written and even now, there is still a lot of inequality and not everyone is provided (these rights) successfully and fully. It was a country built by white men and for white men, and a country built for the oppression of those who weren't white men.

Compare these insights connecting inalienable rights to the rights of others and societal issues to responses to the same question from the control group:

• Rights that I have no one can take away

• The founding fathers were fighting against British oppression of their specific ideals and wanted the rights to practice outside the Church of England.

• This concept allows people--in theory--to experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and foster the idea of a self-made man who determines the path of his own life.

When asked the question, *How can multiple perspectives add to your understanding of the origins of the American government?* experimental group responses included these insights:

• It can make the contributions of marginalized groups in the establishment of our nation clear and help us understand history as it really was, not as we wish to see it.
• History is written by the winners and those in power. The questionable things they may have done are often downplayed or left out entirely. Having multiple perspectives allows for a more complete understanding of what actually happened and can help prevent any of the negative aspects from history to be repeated.

Again, compare these responses to answers to the same question from the control group:

• If there was a British view, it may make it easier to understand why they were taxing people and the goals they had.

• Multiple perspectives help reduce bias.

• Provides a richer and fuller perspective than just a single point of view.

The experimental group was also showed some interest in applying what they’d learned to current events:

• There is large rabbit hole of issues that can discussed surrounding the ideals that the founding fathers were supposedly fighting for, and the ways they prevented those same rights and ideas from being possible for anyone who wasn't a white male, and the ripple of their discrimination and hypocrisy that is still being felt presently, 200+ years in the future.

This quote shows both a reframing of previous knowledge questions from another point of view and a voluntary relation to current events without a prompt to do so. Remember that the pre- and post-assessments included the exact same questions for both groups. The lessons and objectives were the same. The only difference was that the experimental group had the perspective sections with critical thinking questions added, and they had access to counter-story. Comparing their responses, you would think they experienced a completely different course.
This would indicate that including new perspectives can create social justice awareness as an exclusive pedagogical methodology.

One last question was asked of the focus group: *What value do you think there is for our students of different people groups to see representation of their identity in the lessons they study?* Responses included:

- I think it’s good to see (representation from) different people groups because everybody wants to feel like they’re included, it’s as important as having accessibility for those who need accommodations (Section 508 requirements) or having diversity in images and multimedia (both part of our regular standards and best practices). (Experimental Group)

- There’s definitely value in representation. If someone is taking one of our programs, they think they might be good at that program obviously from a personal perspective, but feeling represented though what’s being presented to them will only increase the feeling of ‘yes, I can do this.’ (Control Group)

- Those are like the small steps to being more inclusive and progressive in moving on as a country, (with the end goal being) having equal pay, equal rights, no discrimination in jobs, housing, etc. There are small things you can do to move it that way. (Experimental Group)

It was encouraging that all of the focus group participants representing the field of instructional design recognized this in their feedback. Inequitable learning situations can arise from the failure to question dominant discourses (Öztok, 2020). Recall the experience of Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), who sought his own inspiration and truth in reading and the library while feeling shackled and unengaged by the dominant discourses of his educational experience. By
seeking to incorporate a multitude of perspectives, educators can better engage students from different backgrounds while also challenging white students to question and see things from another point of view.

The counter-storytelling with guided questions helped students create new knowledge and social justice awareness within existing instructional goals by providing a new depth of interest. It also prompted them to relate what they were learning to current events and recognize the value of representation for learning.
Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

As instructional storytelling increases in frequency, it will impact future generations of learners, making it an important topic for a thorough and collaborative study. Related research can provide critical information for developers of e-learning that can directly benefit students and learning outcomes. Multiple studies have revisited the value of storytelling as a pedagogical tool.

Narrative, storytelling, and metaphor are used to communicate and to teach in all forms of instruction. Some perspective is always guiding the rhetoric, and creators of educational content must understand this. Controlling the flow of information, what is known and learned, is an instructional technology (Bradshaw, 2018b, p. 344). Ethical practice requires that designers of educational materials engage purposefully. Not making connections between benchmarks of any historical timeline and broader social context is miseducative, since not only are connections not made, but students are actively learning not to make connections (Bradshaw, 2018b, p. 342). This study showed that the addition of counter-story helped students make connections that those in the control group did not.

Discussion

Feedback from the e-learning users of this study has shown that counter-storytelling, with guided questions, can help students make connections to new stories (null curriculum), reveal underlying messages (hidden curriculum), and create new knowledge and social justice awareness within existing instructional goals by

● Increasing recall and engagement
● Evoking empathy for marginalized groups
● Revealing or solidifying preconceived awareness of hidden curriculum
- Allowing them to reframe what they’ve learned previously and question things from another point of view
- Inspiring them to relate what they were learning to current events
- Helping them to recognize the value of representation for learning

There was a marked difference in the feedback between the control and experimental groups that support these conclusions. This difference was clear from data coded from the assessments as well as input from the focus group.

Two elements stood out as important catalysts to these results. First, the counter-stories need to be presented in a fluid and organized way. As one focus group participant said, “When I was going through the course, the structure of it, the breathing points, it felt like it had a good mixture of elements for content, and it seemed to have a good rhythm to it even, what you were learning and what you were going through, it felt very fluid.” Because of the sensitive nature of some who find adding counter-stories to be revisionist, they can’t be perceived as add-ons with a new agenda. Adding more perspectives should enrich the story, not rewrite it, which is why it’s important to note that I did not change the objectives for the experimental version of this lesson.

The second important element was the use of visuals and organizing elements such as tables. These help students to make connections and to consider facts in a new and different way. The results of this data support the research of Ma et al. (2012) that suggests interactive visualization could help with three issues of storytelling that are important to communication: comprehensibility, credibility, and involvement (Ma et al., 2012, p. 19). Feedback supported the idea that visuals, figures, and tables are great tools for helping students make connections when paired with the perspectives. Pairing these tools with the guided questions might receive a better result for recall and engagement.
Conclusions

Every student deserves the opportunity to discover a pursuit of knowledge in a way that validates their identity and awakens their unique voice. Mainstream explicit storytelling tends to replicate and reinforce dominant systems and structures that may be harmful and exclusionary to some people. Therefore, educators and instructional designers have an ethical responsibility to deconstruct them and add opportunities for implicit storytelling to empower all students to learn and grow as well as participate.

Revealing the hidden curriculum can occur with just an introduction of counter-story and a glimpse of null curriculum. This “invites a more active presence of multiple subjectivities” (Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 232). Counter-stories can allow students to make new connections, with more opportunities to identify with the different experiences represented in their studies. This study has shown that with just the addition of counter-story, students are more engaged and encouraged to practice critical thinking skills to question and assimilate new information.

This is as important for those who find representation in dominant discourses as it is for those who do not. We are all shaped by our circumstances and operate from our own schemas and perspectives. Without ever engaging with other perspectives that can help us confront our schemas and see them from a different point of view, we develop an egocentric worldview in which we may assume that different perspectives are wrong (Bradshaw, 2018b, p. 341). Unless we are exposed to the experiences of others from vastly different backgrounds, experiences, positionalities, and perspectives, learning is incomplete. Educational experiences that lack exposure to counter-story can even be miseducative, in that they could potentially “inhibit growth of further fruitful experiences, that keep us, for example, from learning to perceive “despised others” as full human beings worthy of compassion and justice” (Bradshaw, 2018b, p.
Empathy is an educational goal worth pursuing and the one thing that can connect us in our shared humanity. If there is even the potential for educational content to cultivate empathy and understanding in the pursuit of social justice, it has to be as important as any common core standard for civic responsibility and citizenship.

**Recommendations**

In her research regarding revealing the null and hidden curriculum in teaching the history of instructional design technology (IDT), Amy Bradshaw (2018a) exhorted creators of instructional content to practice looking for null and hidden messages in curriculum, particularly in regards to timeline milestones. She concluded that with mindfulness and intentionality, we can learn about and include contributions from our societies' demographic sectors that generally are marginalized or excluded (Bradshaw, 2018a, p. 232). This research supports those recommendations. Examining hidden and null curricula from a variety of perspectives should become a standard or quality of working and thinking in the creation of courseware. As designers, we are in a position to add this small step toward social justice. Storytelling as a pedagogical methodology requires an ongoing evaluation of whose stories are given the dominant place. Without critically examining point of view and allowing different perspectives in, course design risks reproducing oppressive power structures (Wånggren, 2016, p. 411).

Giving students the opportunity to listen closely to and learn from the experiences of multiple perspectives, past and present, only enriches engagement, enhances critical thinking, and empowers through more equitable representation.

As stated in Chapter III: Methods, Limitations, the participants of my study were 100% white. It would certainly add much more to the conversation to have different groups represented in all of the questions presented in this research. I was limited by not having access to a student
population for this study. Further research with a sample that better reflects an online student population regarding racial identity, gender, and age is recommended.

One of the most important benefits of counter-storytelling may be the power to create empathy and reach affective learning objectives not procedurally taught. I would like to see more research on the use of story and counter-story to promote empathy. Does higher exposure to written and visual media from a variety of perspectives create more community and compassion? If so, then mainline teaching of majoritarian ideology and a decrease in focus in world literature and humanities is contributing to a divisive world with polarized and narrow worldviews.

To be clear, I am not advocating revisionist history that seeks to change the dominant point of view. Nor am I suggesting teaching equality as if these power structures do not continue to exist. The point is to enrich the learning of all and make learning equitable by seeking truth from a wider variety of sources. According to Öztok (2020), “Equity isn’t about providing a point of sameness among individuals but about enabling them to become agents of their own learning by appropriating the learning repertoires they need in order to fulfill their potential.” (p. 21). The addition of counter-story and multiple perspectives can help create equitable learning conditions in which individuals can build on prior knowledge, find new avenues of identification and engagement, and develop an understanding for different points of view.

Educators cannot represent every perspective in instructional content. But they can empower students to analyze the history they are learning for explicit and implicit stories. This can be done by showing examples of other perspectives, stimulating curiosity around concealed stories, and providing a means of engagement leading to discovery.
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Appendix A

Primary Evaluation/Survey

The topic of the lesson for this study is: Origins of the American Government.

Please rate your level of confidence regarding your knowledge of this subject on a scale from 0-100.

Scale:

0 - You may have learned it at one point but don’t remember much

50 - You know the basic facts that would be taught in a standard high school course

100 - You could teach a course on the subject or have done extensive research

Consider the following aspects:

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<td>I understand the motivations behind</td>
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<td>the Revolutionary War and the writing of the Constitution. ()</td>
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<td>I can list the core American values as shared by the writers of the Constitution. ()</td>
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<td>I can understand what these values meant to different people groups. ()</td>
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</table>
What is your gender?

☐ Male (1)

☐ Female (2)

☐ Other (3)

Where have you accumulated the knowledge you currently have on the subject: Origins of the American Government? (check all that apply)

☐ Reading (Non-Fiction—Biography)

☐ Reading (Historical Fiction)

☐ Watching Documentaries

☐ Watching Movies (Period Drama)

☐ Watching Television (Period Drama)

☐ Other Media/Popular Culture

☐ High School Studies

☐ College Studies

☐ Research- Master’s level or higher
How would you rate your interest in the subject matter: Origins of the American Government?

- Very interested (1)
- Moderately interested (2)
- Somewhat interested (3)
- Not very interested (4)

The remaining questions are to collect voluntary demographic information. The purpose is only to determine whether different groups are represented in the study and answers will not be attached to any identifying information. If you are not comfortable answering any of these questions there is an option to select ‘Prefer not to answer.’
What is your age?

- Under 18 (1)
- 18 - 24 (2)
- 25 - 34 (3)
- 35 - 44 (4)
- 45 - 54 (5)
- 55 - 64 (6)
- 65 - 74 (7)
- 75 - 84 (8)
- 85 or older (9)
Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to answer (3)

How would you describe yourself? Please select all that apply.

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (6) ________________________________
- Prefer not to answer (7)
Education What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- Less than a high school diploma (1)
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED) (2)
- Some college, no degree (3)
- Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS) (4)
- Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS) (5)
- Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd) (6)
- Doctorate or professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, Ph.D.) (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)
Appendix B

Pre-Evaluation

No identifying information will be attached to any of your responses.

To begin, please select a number between 1 and 1,000 and type it in the box.

Remember this number (you might want to write it down), as you'll be asked to enter it again at the end of the study. This is only to compare before and after responses while keeping all of your answers private.

For control purposes, please enter the 4-digit number that appears in your course after the title Origins of the American Government. (Hover over the course tab.)

This evaluation will be used as a baseline to compare with your responses at the end of the lesson. It consists of three short answer questions. Please answer them all as best as you can.

1. What motivated the leaders of the American Revolution and what were they fighting for?

________________________________________________________________

2. Briefly describe in your own words the ideas of inalienable rights and equality. How do these ideas shape core American values?

________________________________________________________________
3. How were these values applied in the early history of the country?
Appendix C

Post Evaluation

At the beginning of this lesson you were asked to choose and enter a number between 1 and 1,000. Please enter that same number here.

Control For control purposes, again please enter the 4-digit number that appears in your course after the title Origins of the American Government.

You will recognize some of these questions as those you answered before viewing the course. There are no right or wrong answers and you are not being evaluated. If you're answer hasn't changed, that's OK. Please each question and answer as completely and honestly as you can.

1. What motivated the main leaders of the American Revolution? What were they fighting for?

________________________________________________________________

2. Briefly describe in your own words the ideas of inalienable rights and equality. How do these ideas shape core American values?

________________________________________________________________
3. Were these values adhered consistently by those who fought for them? Please explain your answer.

________________________________________________________________

4. Whose perspectives are represented in this lesson?

________________________________________________________________

5. How can multiple perspectives add to your understanding of the origins of the American government?

Just as you did in the initial survey, please once again rate your level of confidence regarding your knowledge of this subject on a scale from 0-100.

Scale:

0 - You may have learned it at one point but don’t remember much

50 - You know the basic facts that would be taught in a standard high school course

100 - You could teach a course on the subject or have done extensive research

Consider the following aspects:

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
I understand the motivations behind the Revolutionary War and the writing of the Constitution.

I can list the core American values as shared by the writers of the Constitution.

I can understand what these values meant to different people groups.

The purpose of the remaining survey questions is to collect your general impressions. There are no right or wrong answers and you are not being evaluated.

Did you learn anything in this lesson that didn’t already know? If yes, what did you learn?

________________________________________________________________

What did you like about this lesson? What would you change, if anything?

________________________________________________________________
Do you have any other questions or comments you’d like to make regarding this experience?