Critical media literacy in social studies: a case study

Lauren Collet-Gildard

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CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY IN SOCIAL STUDIES: A CASE STUDY

by

Lauren J. Collet-Gildard

A Dissertation Submitted to the University at Albany,
State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Educational Theory and Practice
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ABSTRACT

There have been many efforts to address the importance of media literacy in schools, but little research has focused on critical media literacy (CML) in social studies curricula or classrooms. This is the first case study to examine the planning and implementation of a school wide CML lesson designed by teachers, and it traces this process from inspiration and collaborative conception of the lesson through its enactment within the classroom. In addition, this research provides unique insight into how teachers arrive at CML as a means of empowering students in the face of widespread disinformation and political polarization. In my analysis of social studies frameworks, standards, and curricula, I found that CML skills and practices appeared frequently throughout the secondary grade levels. In addition, teacher participants expressed the need to incorporate CML throughout their curriculum, and this aligned with their academic objectives as well as their goals for students beyond the classroom. Findings also indicated that with even limited exposure to CML skills, teachers can help students develop a more critical stance towards media consumption. Regarding student perceptions of CML, findings suggest that students value these skills and see them as an important part of social studies education. Finally, this case illustrates the point at which teachers’ CML efforts and a community’s values intersect, and how the resulting tension may impact those efforts. This research demonstrates the importance of CML practices and highlights the possibilities of more focused efforts towards these goals.

*Keywords*: critical media literacy, media literacy, social studies
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my incredible family.

To my parents, Hai-Ping and Denis, who have always demonstrated the meaning of hard work and the importance of continued curiosity about the world. You have always inspired me.

To my wonderful in-laws, Pat and John, who have taken me in and shown me the love and support any daughter-in-law would envy. This would not be possible without your willingness to provide countless hours of childcare for your adoring grandchildren!

Finally, I dedicate this work to my loving husband, Nicholas, whose endless support has sustained me along this long and arduous road, and to our two amazing children, Tobie and Elliot. This work has taken me away from spending time with you all, and I hope to make up for it soon and in abundance.
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In addition, I’d like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Alandeom Oliveira and Dr. Alex Kumi-Yeboah for their support and guidance while serving on the committees for both my pilot study and dissertation. Thank you for all of your feedback and advice along the way. Your thoughtfulness and kind delivery has truly made a difference in my approach to this work, as well as in conversations with my own students.

My greatest debt is owed to Dr. Brett Levy, who reached out to me in my first year during the program at UAlbany. In taking me on as his assistant he undoubtedly changed the trajectory of my career, and put me on a path towards truly appreciating the process of becoming a researcher. Without his mentorship, I would not have gained the hands-on experience and confidence that it takes to persist in an endeavor such as this. I can’t thank you enough for all that you’ve done for me.

Finally, I’d like to thank all those who volunteered for this study. I have no doubt that your words and insight will provide new understandings about how we interact with the world. Thank you so much for being an essential part of this conversation.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACME</td>
<td>Action Coalition for Media Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARS</td>
<td>Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness, and Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CML</td>
<td>Critical Media Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Culturally Relevant Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
</tr>
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<td>NAMLE</td>
<td>National Association for Media Literacy Education</td>
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<td>NCSS</td>
<td>National Council for Social Studies</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As our reliance on technology and use of social media grows, we experience a constant bombardment of information. The messaging in our media culture, whether obvious or subversive, needs closer scrutiny. Our ability to critically evaluate information has not developed in congruence with our increasing access to such information. In fact, research indicates that young people struggle to distinguish between high and low quality information (Wineburg et al., 2016), revealing clear deficits in the field of media literacy. In addition, there have been many examples of misinformation going viral on social media only to be taken at face value by a widespread audience (Maheshwari, 2016). In some cases, these fake news stories have had frightening consequences; one example being the Hillary Clinton “Pizzagate” conspiracy of 2016, which culminated in an armed North Carolina man storming a restaurant during what he believed to be a personal rescue mission (Kang, 2016).

Despite fake news developing as a growing problem for students, teachers, and the general public, this is not a new phenomenon (Bois, 2017; Burkhardt, 2017). Historians can recount a slew of examples dating back as early as the 6th century. In one example, political opponents attempted to smear the reputations of co-rulers Justinian and Theodora of the Byzantine Empire; enemies of the emperor spread false claims while hoping to delegitimize his rule (Burkhardt, 2017). With this, we see that disinformation has historically been used for political gain, making it no different than the situations students face today when evaluating information in the media.

As a result of this increase in misinformation (unintentionally inaccurate or misleading information), and disinformation (intentionally inaccurate, false, or misleading information), the
public has suffered greatly. Adding to this, “fake news,” which uses disinformation for political
gain (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020), has become a term even more frequently used in mainstream
media. Many people have not acquired the skills to tease apart what’s “real,” resulting in
society’s overall distrust in the news. In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2016),
32% of participants across the nation reported often detecting news that was “completely made
up,” while 51% reported that they often observe news stories which are “not fully accurate.” Of
those same respondents, only 39% reported being “very confident” in their ability to identify
fake news, and yet 64% believe that fake news had been causing “a great deal of confusion about
the basic facts of current issues and events” (PEW, 2016). Therefore, with society’s growing
distrust of information and overall confusion about what to believe, fake news becomes an
important topic for educators to address. The definition of “fake news,” is one grounded in
intent. Taken directly from Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), fake news is defined as, “news articles
that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers” (p. 213). In other words,
fake news specifically refers to news that is intentionally meant to steer the reader in the wrong
direction. This type of news can appear in traditional media outlets, or on social media platforms.
But now more than ever, students need to develop the skills to evaluate the veracity of
information throughout a variety of contexts. Whether in classrooms at school or at home in front
of a screen, media literacy can assist students in analyzing and decoding information while they
navigate the world. In addition, media literacy is the key to developing students’ ability to
evaluate the usefulness and relevance of information, and help them to become more civically
minded (Martens & Hobbs, 2015).

However, in addition to more traditional media literacy skills becoming important in
today’s classrooms, critical media literacy also demands more attention. As students have
constant and indiscriminate access to information on the internet, they often overlook the complex motivations behind the messages. Through a more critical approach towards literacy skills and pedagogy, public schools can help prepare students for the barrage of text and images that plays a huge part in how they understand the world. Critical media literacy tools help students to uncover systemic inequities in our media culture, and encourages students to draft more authentic and empowering reflections of their lived experiences. However, critical pedagogy is a complicated task involving the careful examination of contextual forces that inform our daily lives. As Kincheloe (2008) states, “A critical pedagogical vision grounded as it is in social, cultural, cognitive, economic, and political contexts understands schooling as part of a larger set of human services and community development” (p. 6-7). With this, a more critical education uncovers the contextual forces that impact student understandings, but also invites those students into the world as agents of social justice.

In addition, critical media pedagogy not only acknowledges the relationship between students, the media, and their perceptions, but also values student identity, teacher identity, and the formation of curriculum. As Giroux (2006) explains, “As a critical practice, pedagogy’s role lies in not only changing how people think about themselves, their relationship to others and the world, but also in energizing students and others to engage in those struggles that further possibilities for living in a more just and fairer society” (p. 200). Education has the ability to develop students’ critical awareness and ability to read the world, and by empowering them in this way, those students can help shape the future in a positive way. In addition, critical media literacy involves the evolution of students’ self-awareness as they become more mindful of socio-political constructs in the media. As a result of this, students grow into active civic
participants, capable of drafting a new narrative, and critical media literacy becomes an important device in shaping students’ engagement with media culture.

Though there have been many efforts to increase media literacy (Hobbs, 1998, 2004) and critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007a, 2007b) in schools, there has been little research on how these programs have been implemented by entire departments within larger districts. In addition, there has been little research concerning teachers’ understandings of critical media literacy before interventions designed by experts. Few scholars have looked at how teachers are already implementing media literacy skills as they create and design their own curriculum. Therefore, the present study begins to fill this gap. Here, I studied a large department of social studies teachers who organically turned to media literacy and critical media literacy as a way to solve the tensions in their building. My work will provide new insights and highlight the potential benefits and challenges when attempting to integrate these lessons into an existing social studies curriculum.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

I frame my study at the intersection of critical media literacy and social studies education. In the following section I will explore how approaches to media literacy have laid the foundation for critical media literacy theory. In addition, I examine efforts to bring critical media literacy into classrooms, and how it has been understood by teachers across the disciplines more broadly, in addition to social studies in particular.

Foundations and Initiatives in Media Literacy Instruction

There have been several media literacy organizations which have cropped up in the last twenty-five years, perhaps as a result of the explosion in internet use. Scholars have called for an increase in media literacy education as a means of cultivating a healthy democracy (Kahne & Bowyer, 2016, Kellner & Share, 2007, Martens & Hobbs, 2015, Morrell et al., 2013, Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, Stoddard, 2014). I will first outline several of the most prominent organizations that have been working to promote media literacy, and emphasize the unique aspects of each.

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), formerly Alliance for a Media Literate America, has a foundation in teaching skills that are closely related to the more traditional literacy aspects of media analysis. Its origins began in 1997 with the Partnership for Media Education (PME), which “was conceived and established by four leaders in the US media literacy movement who formed a public/private collaboration in order to stimulate professional development in the then-fledgling media literacy field” (NAMLE, 2017). Changing names and evolving over time, NAMLE’s current position highlights critical thinking, and its mission statement reads, “As the leading voice, convener, and resource for media literacy education,
NAMLE aims to make media literacy highly valued and widely practiced as an essential life skill” (NAMLE, 2021). Despite their efforts to make explicit connections to Common Core, NAMLE hopes to reach beyond traditional public schools, and instead targets all “lifelong learners,” while providing different resources for a variety of audiences. The organization promotes their official tenets of media literacy on their website, titled the “Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States” which follow:

1. Media Literacy Education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.

2. Media Literacy Education expands the concept of literacy to include all forms of media (i.e., reading and writing).

3. Media Literacy Education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice.

4. Media Literacy Education develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society.

5. Media Literacy Education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization.

6. Media Literacy Education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

(NAMLE, 2007)

These six core principles demonstrate the overarching goals and values of media literacy education. In general terms, they also describe how media literacy engages people in critical thinking across various platforms for information. NAMLE mentions the importance of this in
creating “engaged participants essential for a democratic society,” and this will become further emphasized as I walk through additional calls for media literacy in the curriculum of schools.

Another key organization in the field of media literacy is the Center for Media Literacy, created by Elizabeth Thoman in 1989. Their mission statement asserts that they aim to “…help children and adults prepare for living and learning in a global media culture by translating media literacy research and theory into practical information, training and educational tools for teachers and youth leaders, parents and caregivers of children” (Center for Media Literacy, n.d.). With an emphasis on linking theory to practice, the Center’s website offers a *CML MediaLit Kit™* for educators to download for a fee, while offering several free resources as well. What is perhaps most useful for this study, are their “Five Key Questions of Media Literacy,” which I’ll draw upon at various points throughout the study. These key questions include:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent? (Center for Media Literacy, 2005)

Here we see that the focus is primarily on the perspective or point of view of a given source, and students are asked to consider multiple audiences, as well as the overt *and* hidden messages. Asking these questions of students encourages them to think critically about their interaction with media sources, and they are particularly useful because there are no limits to such questions. For example, when we take the first question alone, and ask students “Who created this message?”—the conversation does not simply stop at a person’s name, but instead has the
potential to continue beyond the individual author or organization, moving into the contextual background of the point at which the message is being created. From there it can easily flow into other key questions such as, “Why is this message being sent?”—and then back again to the start of the inquiry. With this, the teacher can decide the point at which the question has been fully answered for the purposes of the lesson at hand, and therefore each of these questions can be differentiated to suit the age and abilities of one’s students. Though these key questions are simple at first glance, they create a multitude of opportunities for media literacy in the classroom.

In another effort to build media literacy in public schools, and more directly in social studies classrooms, Project Look Sharp (from Ithaca College) provides guidance and resources for educators across grades K-12. Their emphasis is similar to NAMLE’s in its ties to more traditional literacy practices, and focuses primarily on text and image analysis. Here, students should develop their capacity to “read” the media and find hidden messages. In essence, broader critical thinking skills are developed through lessons focused on the analysis and evaluation of different forms of media (Sperry, 2012). They define media literacy as, “…the ability to access, analyze, critically evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of forms. It is similar to information literacy and involves many components of technology literacy as well” (Project Look Sharp, 2017). The Project’s website lends itself to educators looking for tools to engage their students in basic lessons on media literacy, and also offers professional development workshops. Geared towards a practice-based approach, Project Look Sharp also offers “kits” which teachers can access free of charge, designed to help them work through their state mandated curriculum whilst teaching students to “decode” messages found in media. By working closely with the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), the goals of Project Look Sharp
seem most directly aligned with New York State’s Social Studies Frameworks and the C3 Frameworks designed for all fifty states. As a result, this site provides the most guidance for social studies teachers in particular, and most directly reflects media literacy efforts within the curriculum.

The organizations mentioned above provide a lens into what traditional media literacy proponents consider as their core values. Though students are asked to think more critically about a source in that they should consider concepts such as *point of view* and *bias*, these principles do little to push students beyond the text itself. Therefore, the expression “media literacy” alone becomes the first part of students’ evaluation of information, but we must add the term *critical* to look at the larger picture of how information plays a part in perpetuating existing institutions of power. In the next section I will highlight the theoretical underpinnings and practical possibilities of a newer branch of this field, *critical media literacy*.

**Critical Media Literacy: Beyond an Analysis of Information**

In their discussion of the need for greater media literacy education in the United States, Kellner and Share (2005) propose methods, models, and concepts related to *critical media literacy* (CML). They outline the way in which *literacy* as a concept has shifted over time, expanding from traditional definitions of text comprehension to new forms of media and technology. Building on feminist theory and critical pedagogy, the scholars describe CML as “...analysing media culture as products of social production and struggle and teaching students to be critical of media representations and discourses, but also stressing the importance of learning to use the media as modes of self-expression and social activism” (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 372). With this, we see that CML moves beyond a simple evaluation of information for ideas such as credibility and point of view; it extends to encompass the role of media culture as the
product of a dominant group’s control over information. Thus CML becomes a tool for students to push back against those narratives, ultimately creating their own (more uplifting) expression of identity.

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, Kellner and Share (2005) clearly articulate their “Five Core Concepts of Critical Media Literacy” (table 1). These concepts become the principles for understanding how CML unpacks the social constructs which affect both media production and media reception. Extending beyond the text itself, CML brings in the otherwise hidden forces that affect our media culture. In providing students with CML skills, Kellner and Share (2005) offer a means of social activism; as students move through representations of a contrived world, they are empowered to generate personal representations of their lived experiences. Students can generate these representations in any form of media that they relate to, and thus social media and other digital platforms become part of the conversation, in addition to more traditional text and image expression.

Table 1

*Kellner and Share’s Five Core Concepts of Critical Media Literacy*

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<th>Core Concept</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Principle of Non-Transparency</td>
<td>All media messages are “constructed”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Codes and Conventions</td>
<td>Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Audience Decoding</td>
<td>Different people experience the same media message differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Content and Message</td>
<td>Media have embedded values and points of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Motivation</td>
<td>Media are organized to gain profit and/or power</td>
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*Note.* This table demonstrates the key concepts that are drawn upon for the conceptual framework for this study and are the primary focus of Phase 2 which has been identified within Critical Media Literacy theories.
Similarly, Morrell et al. (2013) make the argument that activism is something attainable through focused CML instruction, stating “[s]tudents who desire social justice must be critical consumers and producers of texts across multiple genres of both traditional and new media” (p. 6). The researchers discuss how youth are indeed already creating the space to explore ideas on their own terms, explaining, “[y]ouths’ curiosity to know and their desire to change unjust conditions propels them to use whatever tools are at their disposal, including social networking sites, to engage in the fight for social justice” (Morrell et al., 2013, p. 24). Thus in order to develop students’ capacities to critically consume and produce media, they argue for critical media pedagogy in both ELA and social studies classrooms. Morell et al. (2013) further emphasize this need while drawing connections to media studies, and ground their argument in the experiences of high school students both in and outside of the classroom. Focusing primarily on urban youth, the researchers describe the benefits of CML development as a way to engage students in authentic practices and increase motivation. In doing this, teachers bring students’ outside experiences into the classroom, and as a result increase students’ academic success.

Building on a similar framework, Leggett and King-Reilly (2020) introduce the simultaneous need for culturally relevant teaching (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) in CML pedagogy. Taking a direct look at the proliferation of fake news as a threat to democracy, they argue for the development of CML as a tool for students of color and other traditionally marginalized groups when they experience hurt from the media. In particular, Leggett and King-Reilly’s (2020) work centers around students’ experiences with disparaging representations of their communities in news. They acknowledge how some educators might experience discomfort in addressing controversial issues such as racism, but they argue that these moments should in
fact be highlighted. In doing so, educators cultivate their cultural responsiveness while reflecting their students’ needs and develop the capacity to engage in emotionally difficult conversations.

One important departure from the prior discussions of CML, are Leggett and King-Reilly’s (2020) exploration of the *threshold concept* (Meyer & Land, 2005). Related to CML in that it develops students’ ability to see information in a new light, the *threshold concept* allows students to make a transformative shift in their mindsight while opening up new ways of thinking. With this, the tools of CML allow students to change their relationship to information, breaking through previously established modes of media consumption while dismantling fake news in a new and empowering way.

With similar concerns around the experiences of students of color, Baker-Bell et al. (2017) examine how Black youth are vilified in the media, and how social media becomes a space for them to grapple with the trauma of such exposure. The researchers meticulously detail the ways in which the Black community is represented as *other*. Baker-Bell et al. (2019) argue that these media portrayals commit further injustices to the racial violence that plays out in the “real” world. As they state, “[c]onstructing images that promote racial inferiority contributes to a lack of empathy for Black life. Because of this lack of empathy, society becomes desensitized to Black suffering and Black humanity” (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, p. 136). Therefore, in searching for a safe space to express a reaction to these injustices, social media becomes what the scholars refer to as a “counterspace” for Black youth. Here, students use different platforms to express messages of activism in an effort to counteract the harm being done in mainstream media — social media allows them to take part in generating media culture when such opportunities are not traditionally afforded to them.
In order to develop the tools necessary to process and produce these types of information, Baker-Bell et al. (2017) argue for more CML in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. Here, students can identify, break down, and counter the negative depictions of Black people perpetuated in the media. However, it should be noted that Baker-Bell et al. (2017) agree with Leggett and King-Reilly (2020), in that CML lessons which focus on the experiences of Black people in America may inevitably be uncomfortable to some educators. Despite this, they proposed a set of practices with the hope of offering insights and inspiration to increase social justice in schools. Included in their paper, the scholars provide four possible CML lesson plans complete with step-by-step directions. With this, they too attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering concrete ways in which ELA teachers can bring CML into their classrooms.

In their efforts to expand the discussion around CML and social activism, Robinson et al. (2021) draw from Black Feminist theory, as well Paolo Freire’s (1974, 2000) concept of conscientização or the raising of critical consciousness. These scholars explore how Black females in particular are portrayed in the media and propose the ways in which CML can be a useful tool in building more positive understandings of identity. More specifically, they state, “[c]ritical media literacy serves as a tool that supports the deconstruction and rejection of inaccurate images, personas, and caricature representations of Black Females” (Robinson et al., 2021, p. 85). Ultimately building on these ideas and tying CML back to the classroom, they propose a “conceptual framework for positive Black Female Identity” that integrates: critical consciousness, Black feminist theory, and CML. They argue that this framework could be implemented as early as preschool, with a deepening of the concepts and practices as students mature throughout the higher grade levels. As they move through their years in school, students
would further develop their conscientização (Freire, 1974, 2000), and in implementing this framework early on, “[b]y the time students have entered middle school, they may have had repeated and sustaining practice utilizing The Critical Media Literacy Framework for Positive Identity Formation; young Black females being the prime benefactor” (Robinson et al., 2021, p. 85). Though the scholars provide a clear breakdown of how these concepts work together to develop girls’ more positive identities, they stop short of providing concrete examples of what this would look like.

Without focusing primarily on people of color, Kersch and Lesley (2019) also consider how CML must draw from students’ lived experiences, as they argue this aspect becomes essential in the process of meaning-making. As part of this, the researchers examined media literacy traditions in both Brazil and the United States, and argue that new technologies utilized by youth today call for CML now more than ever. In addition, they propose a unique pedagogy centered around CML, that include their own six key facets: “(1) multiliteracies and new technologies, (2) equity and access to technology, (3) examining multiple viewpoints and representation from the perspective of nondominant groups, (4) student-centered inquiry, (5) testimony and healing (telling one’s story as part of the pedagogy), and (6) production/shared productivity and transformation” (Kersch & Lesley, 2019, p. 40). This outlook stands apart from prior research in that they include equity issues around access to technology in their discussion. Advocates of both traditional media literacy and critical media literacy acknowledge the growing use of digital information and social media by students, and yet this is the first analysis drawing our attention to these literacies and the relationship to socioeconomic issues. Therefore, as part of CML pedagogy, educators must consider both their students’ identities and the extent of their prior experiences with technology.
Moving on from this, Kersch and Lesley (2019) look to CML and prescribe not only critical analysis and evaluation of information, but also that students should draw upon their own stories to make meaning from information. Asking that students counter existing narratives in established media culture is perhaps similar to the argument made by Leggett and King-Reilly (2020), who stress the importance of culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Tapping into the lived experiences of students is necessary for creating a personal vantage in CML development. In addition, Kersch and Lesley (2019) draw directly from the work of Baker-Bell et al. (2017), connecting their proposed frameworks to a pedagogy of healing, where teachers assist students in dismantling the messages of institutions which harm them, thereby liberating themselves from further oppression. With these ideas, CML holds the possibility of not only changing students’ perceptions of media culture, but also creates opportunities for students to create a more socially just portrayal of the world around them. Ultimately, CML reflects issues that are relevant to students’ lived experiences.

**Media Literacy and Critical Media Literacy in Practice**

**Media Literacy Skill Development**

As a result of the increasing need for media literacy education, there have been quite a few studies related to these efforts published in the last decade alone. In one example, Moore (2013) looked at an initiative within the Philadelphia area that promoted media literacy education in K-6 schools. Through a blended approach that combined both traditional educational settings as well as after-school instruction, the study focused mainly on the experiences of educators, and the ways in which their values shifted over time. Moore’s (2013) findings concerned the need for teachers to be able to illustrate the “messiness” of controversial issues. Even at these lower grade levels, teachers reported students’ ability to move away from a single point of view —
demonstrating the capability of critiquing and evaluating information presented by different authors. However, despite these teachers’ successes, Moore (2013) found that there was still a “blind spot” when considering the assessment of student learning goals. In fact, very few studies have focused on student perceptions of media literacy in order to gauge the success of such initiatives. With this, I turn my attention to the work of several scholars who attempt to do just that.

In one study focusing on student results after a media literacy intervention, Hobbs and Frost (2003) compared the skills of two sets of eleventh graders in Concord, Massachusetts: a “treatment group” of students enrolled in a yearlong class focusing on media literacy and ELA, and a “control group” taking a traditional ELA class in separate, demographically comparable district. The researchers explored how media literacy instruction impacted students’ ability to comprehend and analyze messages in nonfiction texts. Hobbs and Frost (2003) analyzed responses to open-ended questions regarding current events issues from print news, National Public Radio (NPR), and television. In addition, they looked for statistical significance in the two groups’ ability to identify key media literacy aspects in the information such as: main idea, point of view, omitted information, purpose, audience, etc. In contrast to the control sample of students at the same grade level, those who participated in the year-long media literacy instruction were better able to identify and articulate the contextual factors influencing information (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). In addition, as a precursor to what later research will demonstrate (Choudhury & Share, 2012), Hobbs and Frost (2003) found that as students developed media literacy skills, they also demonstrated higher success rates in meeting broader academic goals. With this, Hobbs and Frost (2003) argue for teachers to embrace critical inquiry alongside their current curriculum,
while their study demonstrates the tangible benefits of media literacy instruction in public schools.

In a more recent study, Kahne and Bowyer (2017) examined students’ ability to evaluate political claims, as they argue this skill is vital to a healthy democracy. Drawing from a nationwide survey of youth ranging from ages 15 to 27, data revealed that media literacy education, rather than political education, can positively affect students’ ability to assess the accuracy in politically controversial online posts (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). The investigators explored both direction and accuracy motivation as two key factors that influence young people’s ability to evaluate claims in the media. Within this survey, respondents were confronted with three types of arguments in online posts: emotive, evidence-based, and misinformative. Across political party lines, participants were more likely to judge a post as being accurate, so long as it aligned with their pre-established political views on the issue. However, Kahne and Bowyer (2017) found that respondents recalling increased experiences with media literacy were more likely to correctly identify the level of accuracy in posts, whereas increased political knowledge had little to no effect on this aspect. In addition, though students with political knowledge and those with media literacy knowledge were equally affected by directional motivation, the latter group were much more likely to be influenced by accuracy motivation (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017, p. 26). With these findings, the researchers argue that rather than focusing primarily on political content, educators should in fact focus on media literacy development which plays a more substantial role in enabling students to accurately judge the validity of information.

In addition to ELA classrooms, research has highlighted the natural fit of media literacy within social studies curriculum. In his work with high school social studies students, Sperry
(2006) argues that media literacy is a pathway towards improved teaching of the existing content, rather than something “extra.” He outlines “key questions” and describes how online resources such as Project Look Sharp, of which he co-directs, can provide educators with the necessary media literacy tools to unpack controversial issues with students. Focused primarily on practice, Sperry (2006) provides concrete examples for teachers, and includes possible sources to analyze while linking them to specific media literacy questions for students. However, Sperry’s (2006) emphasis is on media “decoding” — rather than using media literacy as a means of social justice, and his goals are limited to shifting the ways in which students view sources. Stressing that they “need to understand multiple perspectives, to recognize bias, to assess credibility, to probe for accuracy, and to be self-reflective about their own beliefs. We need to teach our students how to think” (Sperry, 2006, p. 43). By focusing primarily on the text, these examples would be considered a jumping off point for the more critical stance of CML. From a more critical standpoint, students should continue their inquiry, and aim to understand how the media shapes the way they are already thinking.

**Critical Media Literacy in Practice**

In an extension of traditional media literacy efforts, CML is a practice that occupies a distinct space with regard to both methods and goals in education. Looking at K-12 programs both nationally, and internationally, we see that educators across disciplines have supplemented their existing curricula with critical media literacy efforts in a variety of ways. However, there are often conflicting ideas regarding both goals and best practices for CML in the classroom. Drawing from aspects of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995), critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008), critical consciousness (Freire, 1974, 2000), and critical race theory, the following studies illustrate the ways in which CML can be developed with teachers and students.
In an attempt to reveal the differences between media literacy curricula at different academic levels and across settings, Fedorov et al. (2016) obtained survey responses from 65 CML experts amongst 20 different countries back in 2015. Their findings reveal that most media literacy specialists support the aims of: socio-cultural, educational-informational, and practical models of media literacy education, over the more traditional and perhaps one-dimensional model of critical thinking development (Fedorov et al., 2016, p. 326). More than half of their respondents agreed that at the secondary level of schooling, students should understand the role of media and media literacy as part of a democracy (Fedorov et al., 2016, p. 328). However, they found that students were not being challenged at the secondary level, arguing that the bar had been set rather low. Instead, teachers reported that students were already aware of different forms of media, and that secondary lessons should focus on critically evaluating information and analyzing the contextual forces around media production. Some respondents discussed the challenges of teaching media literacy with regards to administrative support, but they were not from the United States. Instead, the American CML curriculum experts cited professional development as one of the biggest challenges for educators (Fedorov et al., 2016, p. 331). With this, we should consider what opportunities there are for teachers in the U.S., and whether professional development supports the growing need for CML pedagogy.

In another study exploring international efforts in CML, Harshman (2017) and a team of researchers monitored online discussions amongst 120 teachers in International Baccalaureate (IB) programs from around the world. The discussion forums included questions of how teachers used film in their approach to Harshman’s (2017) “6 C’s” of critical global media literacy, which include: colonialism, capitalism, conflict, citizenship, and conscientious consumerism (p. 77-78). The most significant findings were differences in the focus of CML instruction between
teachers of the “Global South” (e.g., India, Brazil and Colombia) and those of the “Global North” (e.g., United States, Canada, and England). IB teachers located in countries who were negatively affected by imperialism were indeed more likely to focus on issues related to this, such as colonialism. However, those operating in the “Global North” were more likely to address issues such as poverty, conflict, and human rights (Harshman, 2017, p. 76). In doing so, teachers from more economically advantaged countries drew from film material that was both created by voices in the “Global North” and also perpetuated the gaze of these nations. However, these same teachers also reported a new awareness of how film might be more critically evaluated with students, as this was a reported result of their online discussions with IB teachers in the “Global South.” Harshman (2017) posits that educators must go beyond the content of a film to teach about the “6 C’s,” and ultimately employ more critical strategies to examine (alongside students) key aspects regarding the complex motivations behind what appears in film.

In one study focusing on critical media literacy and social studies instruction, Orlowski (2006) discusses the importance of understanding how political identity is socially constructed. In working with preservice social studies teachers, he began by locating teachers’ positionality along the political spectrum of Canada in order to frame their thinking at the start of a course (Orlowski, 2006). While reflecting on his prior work with high school social studies students, Orlowski (2006) describes taking a full year to develop this concept, using CML as a means of unpacking newspaper articles and other media during class. Illustrating the success of his methods he explains, “[t]hese assignments offer students a framework in which to critique the article in terms of the ideological influences on the journalist, and in the process, allows them to develop an awareness of the ideologies influencing their own thinking, as well as how mainstream media often reflects the views of powerful interests” (Orlowski, 2006, p. 189). Here,
we see how CML can be used as a way of developing a self-reflective political awareness most suitable for social studies classrooms. In careful examination of mainstream media, CML helps to inform students of what shapes political identity.

In another study focused on social studies classrooms and CML, Nowell (2019) provides an overview of how commercials can be used as the content of students’ media analysis. In drawing from the key questions proposed by NAMLE, Nowell (2019) created CML lessons to walk students through a process of analysis, thereby revealing the hidden messages and motivations behind advertisements (both in print and television). Nowell’s (2019) examples include using travel advertisements reflecting a geography curriculum, as well as film trailers and their depictions of historical content. In addition to providing lesson examples, Nowell also proposes how teachers can evaluate students’ CML skills; in assigning and assessing student-generated commercials students “sell us on their content knowledge and understanding.” (2019, p. 96). Just as other studies demonstrate, students’ ability to generate media is part of the process of CML. Therefore, this study adds yet another example of how CML can be incorporated into the existing curriculum, and can help simultaneously engage students in social studies content.

In a final look at how CML can be the topic of social studies instruction, Pimentel and Busey (2018) draw on a critical framework similar to those outlined by previously mentioned scholars (Baker-Bell et al., 2017; Kersch & Lesley, 2019; Leggett & King-Reilly, 2020; McArthur (2019); Robinson et al., 2021). Here, the researchers explore the intersection of CML and the portrayal of Black males in the media, specifically Hollywood films. Using the lens of “Black cultural projection,” Pimentel and Busey (2018) argue that social studies is exactly the forum where students can challenge negative depictions of Black people in film and text. The study highlights tropes in the film *The Blind Side*, to demonstrate how,
critical media literacy helps us understand and bring attention to how racist ideologies, and in this case racist ideologies that apply to Black males, are often produced implicitly, and as such, are often not discernible by the passive, uncritical consumer of texts. (Pimentel & Busey, 2018, p. 3)

In light of this, by engaging students in critically evaluating stereotypes in film, educators can help students identify systemic racism and racist ideas that are present in society and perpetuated by cinema. By identifying four main representations of Black males in the social studies curriculum alongside Hollywood film, the researchers draw students’ attention to racist devices in the media. Within their work, Pimentel and Busey (2018) model what teachers and students can do with CML, and argue for more efforts towards using film as an object to critique, rather than a means of delivering content alone.

In addition to CML work in social studies classrooms, we see efforts in other areas as well. In one example, McArthur (2019) examined the effects of a CML intervention with students during an early college program’s ELA instruction. Here, the researcher created a program called, “Beyond Your Perception,” where she worked with eight Black girls after school. Framing it within a CRT positionality, McArthur (2019) provided ELA enrichment through CML instruction, and her program emphasized the production of what she calls “counterstories.” Students met twice a week for several months, and unpacked stereotypes of Black women in the media through sociohistorical understandings, media analysis, and counternarratives. Drawing from her experiences with this program, McArthur (2019) provides a clear method for CML development outside of the traditional classroom setting. Although she worked with just a small group of students, one could imagine these methods being scaled up to accommodate larger classes. The crux of her argument is that the content of what we do in
schools, CML included, should be culturally relevant to our students and reflect their lived experiences. Thus McArthur’s (2019) argument echoes the sentiments of other scholars pushing for CRT and CML alignment (Baker-Bell, 2017; Leggett & King-Reilly, 2020; Robinson et al., 2021), with this being what she ultimately attributes to the success of her program.

In an earlier study also considering traditionally marginalized groups, Yosso (2002) draws directly from critical race theory and Freire’s (1974, 2000) *conscientização*, to implement CML lessons in an effort to challenge existing stereotypes of Chicanas/os in the media. In her work with community college students, Yosso used film as the focal point of discussion around the representation of Latinas/os as “criminal, lazy, and oversexed” people. The researcher found that students’ critical consciousness (Freire, 1974, 2000) successfully developed during the semester-long course. However, this budding consciousness stalled at the point at which students encountered systemic or structural inequities, as they held firm to the belief that it was solely up to an individual to change their behavior and impact their future (Yosso, 2002, p. 59). In her final thoughts, Yosso (2002) argues that CML must start with younger students, as mass media is something one experiences from birth. With this, we turn to an investigation couched on a similar theoretical framework engaging younger students.

In a study of high school students and CML, Vargas (2006) examined the relationship between Latino/a students’ media consumption habits and the cultural capital of their families. What she suggests is that little research has been done with respect to the experiences of immigrant students, or those who come from families of immigrants. In order to fill that gap, Vargas (2006) created an action research project aimed at developing CML skills in transnational high school students. The researcher argues that media literacy pedagogy should be “grounded on the specific, hybrid media experiences of the students,” which she found to be based in both
the cultures of Latino/a groups as well as representations of Black people in the media (Vargas, 2006, p. 269). Focusing on the multiple identities of students with transnational backgrounds, Vargas (2006) draws from research on globalization to propose a “transnational critical media literacy” (TCML). With this approach to CML, educators can foster students’ positive identity development and help them to gain cultural capital.

In addition to after school programs and other CML interventions, much of the research concerning CML in classrooms has been conducted in more traditional ELA settings. Looking at early efforts to examine the potential benefits of CML in public schools, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002, 2005) explored the benefits of infusing hip-hop songs and culture into more traditional academic literacy instruction. The researchers argue that students feel connected to their academic practices when given opportunities to critically examine artifacts that are authentic to their socio-cultural identity, namely, hip-hop music and culture. More specifically, by bringing hip-hop into the ELA curriculum, teachers made students feel more culturally represented and recognized whilst meeting the needs of literacy instruction (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005). In their study from 2002, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade designed a unit which allowed students to explore the connections between hip-hop songs and poetry. In carefully scaffolding a unit that allowed students to draw parallels between their academic practices and those of their outside lives, they engaged students in CML. Their findings revealed that students could transfer skills that they already possessed, and could therefore increase their engagement and academic performances related to similar practices in the classroom (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). With this, see yet another example of how CML can be utilized to boost student achievement in the classroom.
Similarly, looking at CML and ELA instruction, Elmore and Coleman (2019) explored an eighth-grade action research project in Alabama. With the project spanning two weeks, students analyzed political memes through rhetorical analysis. Teachers built their students’ CML skills gradually, guiding three eighth grade classes through the analysis of: political speeches, debates, and finally, political memes. Within their paper, Elmore and Coleman (2019) provide concrete tools and examples for practice such as a graphic organizer for students to apply their CML skills. Ultimately, the researchers reported success with their “rhetorical analysis method,” highlighting student work that illustrated CML skills related to uncovering power issues with regards to marginalized groups. In sum, the researchers found,

Students’ responses are evidence that secondary students can and should be taught CML skills because they live in a world where social media has connected humans at unprecedented levels, saturates our lives, provides platforms for marginalized voices, and influences and bears consequences on real lives. (Elmore & Coleman, 2019, p. 39)

Here, we see how Elmore and Coleman (2019) argue for the incorporation of CML into existing curricula due to the fact that students are already consuming an abundance of information. In effect, social media becomes a space for teachers to explore and critically evaluate with students, and rhetorical analysis can provide a possible framework.

In an isolated look at CML instruction within business classes, Kelly and Currie (2021) explored the ways in which lessons centered around the analysis of gender stereotyping can be a useful, but somewhat limited practice. The researchers worked with one high school teacher in Canada, and assisted in co-designing a lesson for her high school class. The focus of this CML lesson asked students to identify and analyze marketing strategies in pop culture as they related to gender stereotypes. What Kelly and Currie (2021) discovered was that often this method of
stereotype analysis led students to recognize and ultimately reinforce media portrayals of gender.

Therefore, what they argue for is a deeper dive into CML practices by first giving students the opportunity to explore what they experience in everyday life, rather than beginning with images on the screen. Kelly and Currie (2021) argue that this “gives ontological status to experiential knowledge rather than the text” (p. 681). Furthermore, this CML lesson lacked the necessary “counter-frames” that would have provided students with alternatives to pop culture representations of gender expectations. In addition, the researchers found that students were not able to recognize the “intertextuality” of various media sources, and were therefore unable to reveal the hidden meanings behind social constructs. Finally, students failed to recognize the ways in which gender stereotypes reinforced systemic inequality. In general, this study provides a thorough explanation of some of the challenges to CML when using media stereotypes as a starting point, rather than first drawing from students’ personal experiences.

In a study focusing on students’ more localized representations in media, Choudhury and Share (2012) created a CML inquiry approach for ESL students. As part of this project, the teacher-researcher, Mohammad, used a newspaper photo analysis activity to engage students in critically evaluating the portrayal of people of color in media. In order to create a “counternarrative” (Kelly & Currie, 2021, Kersch & Lesley, 2019, McArthur, 2019), students were introduced to community members and taken on field trips around their neighborhood. With structured activities involving detailed documentation, students began to draft new representations of their community and its members. The project culminated with student presentations during an educational conference at UCLA, where students were able to increase awareness of their community’s struggles while also highlighting its strengths. With this, students engaged in the final task of CML: social justice activism. What further bolsters
Choudhury and Share’s (2012) argument to provide more CML instruction, is perhaps found in the improved academic performance of the students in this case. The researchers reported that students exceeded the norms for language proficiency at their grade levels, demonstrating the added academic benefits of CML instruction in ESL classes.

In summary, the existing research demonstrates how media literacy, and critical media literacy efforts have highlighted various strategies developed by experts and delivered in classrooms. This study builds on these efforts, and will fill a gap in our understanding of how CML practices are implemented by social studies teachers within a typical public school, who have received no prior training in such practices. Thus, the following research examines social studies teachers who have organically arrived at CML as a means to empower students during an era of widespread fake news.

**Conceptual Framework**

Drawing from aspects of critical media literacy pedagogy and the work of prior scholars, my conceptual framework will rest upon the central tenets of CML as described by the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME). ACME is oriented towards action and social justice and suggests that the primary focus of media literacy education should be on the context within which messages are produced. As part of their “Vision and Values” they state, “[i]ndependently funded media literacy education plays a crucial role in challenging Big Media’s monopoly over our culture, helping to move our world toward a more just, democratic, and sustainable future” (ACME, 2017). Considering these complex goals that integrate social justice and media literacy, the definition of CML to be used throughout this study encompasses pedagogy beyond critical thinking about one particular text or piece of information. Therefore, my stance on what constitutes CML is best stated by Alvermann & Hagood (2000) as, “engaging students in the
analysis of textual images (both print and nonprint), the study of audiences, and the mapping of subject positions such that differences become cause for celebration rather than distrust” (p. 194). Though all of the organizations reviewed here mention critical thinking in media literacy, this is perhaps the most critical of media culture as a whole. Therefore, this concept of media literacy which encompasses most, if not all aspects, of what may be considered “media,” and our critical evaluation of these various concepts will be what the present work is built upon.

In light of these values and goals related to CML, I set out to better understand how teachers arrived at CML in order to help their students process a politically polarized climate. In addition, these teachers hoped to empower students with the ability to counter harmful messages cropping up in social media and in interactions with peers. I examined how participants aligned

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework for CML Case Study*

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Critical Media Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
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| Media Literacy: Recognizing Systemic and Factors | Fostering Student Development and 
| Evaluation of Information | Empowerment towards Social Justice, Activism, and 
| for: | in New Media and Culture |
| Credibility, Reliability, Purpose, etc. | Shaping Media Culture |

Social Studies Education

- Teaching and Learning
- Curriculum Design
- Standards
- Frameworks
- Engagement
- Relevance to Students' Lives

Research Questions

1. How do teachers understand the role of critical media literacy in secondary social studies curricula?
2. How do teachers bring critical media literacy into social studies classrooms?
3. What are student perceptions of Critical Media Literacy?
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their goals with those of both critical media literacy and culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, my conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study integrates aspects of: Kellner and Share’s (2005) “Five Core Concepts of Critical Media Literacy” (Table 1), CML as activism, and CML as an expression of CRT.

**Research Questions**

Building on both prior research and my conceptual framework (Figure 1), the following questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers understand the role of critical media literacy in secondary social studies curricula?
   1a. Where does CML appear in the social studies curricula and standards?
   1b. How do teachers view the alignment of CML and curricular goals?
   1c. What are teachers’ perceptions of CML beyond the classroom?

2. How do teachers bring critical media literacy into social studies classrooms?
   2a. How do teachers plan for and engage in the teaching of CML in secondary social studies classrooms?
   2b. What are the challenges of teaching CML in social studies classrooms?

3. What are student perceptions of Critical Media Literacy?
   3a. What are students’ views on media consumption?
   3b. How do students understand and identify key CML terms, such as bias?
   3c. What are student perceptions of CML beyond the classroom?

Though prior research has explored existing efforts in media literacy as well as CML, and perhaps focused on the efforts of at most several teachers in a similar setting, this study will look at the efforts of an entire social studies department in a large public school. In addition, these teachers had no formal training in media literacy, or in CML for that matter. In following the planning and implementation of a collaborative CML lesson, I reveal new understandings of what challenges teachers face when attempting to teach a single lesson to an entire student body,
as well as some of the issues around CML as a controversial issue in and of itself. With this, I hope to enhance our understanding of both the possibilities and limitations of teaching critical media literacy in schools.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In late 2016 and early 2017, the social studies teachers of Valley High became acutely aware of the ways in which fake news stirred controversy in their community. Donald Trump began using this term more frequently in the press briefings following his election, and both teachers and students struggled to find “truth” in the news. With this, the social studies department set out to design and implement a single lesson on media literacy, and I was invited along to follow the process. As a fellow social studies teacher at Valley High, I am immersed in the culture of the school, and here I attempt to create a cultural portrait (Creswell, 2013, p. 96) of my research participants and the community. I do this by weaving together both the emic (views of the participants) and the etic (my views as the researcher) perspectives to create an understanding of the supports and challenges of teaching critical media literacy to secondary students.

At the time of this study, I was on leave for two years and therefore attempted to limit my involvement as a participant researcher, trying my utmost to embody an objective view of the events that unfolded. Though theorists warn against backyard research with regard to possible confusion about the roles of researcher and participants (Glesne, 2016, p. 48-49), my position as a social studies teacher within the district was an important part of conducting this study. In my relationship to the participants and the school, I was able to observe, record, and follow up on questions regarding the more nuanced occurrences. Though my position within the school and present study is important, I do not intend to paint an absolute picture of “reality.” However, it should still be considered in its relation to each aspect of this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers understand the role of critical media literacy in secondary social studies curricula?</td>
<td>Observations of meetings related to planning a department-wide media literacy lesson (315 min)</td>
<td>Open and Axial coding (Corbin &amp; Strauss, 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1a. Where does CML appear in the social studies curricula and standards?</td>
<td>Artifacts related the planning and implementation of the media literacy/fake news lesson.</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis (Corbin &amp; Strauss, 2007)</td>
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<td>1b. How do teachers view the alignment of CML and curricular goals?</td>
<td>Classroom Observations (595 min)</td>
<td>program-level logic model (Yin, 2013)</td>
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<td>1c. How do teachers perceive the importance of CML beyond the classroom?</td>
<td>Semi-structured teacher interviews (359 min)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How do teachers bring critical media literacy into social studies classrooms?</td>
<td>Observations of meetings related to planning a department-wide media literacy lesson (315 min)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. How do teachers plan for and engage in the teaching of critical media literacy in secondary social studies classrooms?</td>
<td>Classroom Observations (595 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. What are the challenges to teaching CML in classrooms?</td>
<td>Semi-structured teacher interviews (359 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured student interviews (101 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are student perceptions of Critical Media Literacy?</td>
<td>Semi-structured student interviews (101 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. What are students’ views on media consumption?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. How do students understand and identify key CML terms, such as bias?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c. What are student perceptions of CML beyond the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My investigation is a case bounded by the social studies department at one school, with embedded units being the individual teacher and student participants. Therefore, the design and analysis of my case study (Table 2) employs methodology from both case study research (Yin, 2013) and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

Site Selection and Context

The case of the Valley High lesson was identified as a result of teachers’ experiences with classroom climate during a pilot study concerning controversial issue discussions in social studies classrooms.\(^1\) Tensions between students began during the presidential primary season, and reached its apex on the cusp of the 2016 election, with teachers reporting fights based on racism and students shouting, “Build that wall!” throughout the hallways. This study will include the context of these events as it relates to the inception of a critical media literacy lesson designed as a teacher-led response to political turmoil within the school.

The demographics of Valley High are important in understanding how political and racial tension within the school may have emerged over time, as the socio-cultural landscape has shifted away from homogeneity and towards a more diverse student population. For example, the percentage of White students decreased by ten percent within a decade (approximately 2005-2015), and the number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch increased by twenty percent during the same period. In 2017, there were approximately 3,000 students enrolled at Valley High, identifying as 75% white, 10% Hispanic, 9% African American, 4% Asian, and 1% identifying as Multiracial. In addition, 26% of students were considered economically disadvantaged. Most schools across the nation have populations where the majority of students

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\(^{1}\) The pilot study was conducted during the presidential primary season, in March of 2016, and involved interviews conducted with four social studies teachers in Valley High.
are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), and therefore this school can be viewed as a “typical” American school.

Teacher Participant Selection

I employed purposeful maximal sampling (Creswell, 2012) in order to gain multiple perspectives regarding: school climate, the goals of the common lesson on media literacy, and individuals’ evaluation of the lesson and strategies used. I hope to tell a broader story of what participants experienced in this school at a time of political turmoil; one that will resonate with readers from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the eight teachers selected were chosen based on several key factors: the age and grade level of students they taught, academic “track” of classes (Honors, Advanced Placement, Regents, or Remedial), years of experience, gender, and race (see Table 3 for individual participant attributes).

Table 3

Teacher Participants and Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Participant</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
<th>Grade Observed and Level</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number of Years Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Gale</td>
<td>9, 10</td>
<td>10 Global 2 (R)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Barre</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
<td>11 US History (R)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wallace</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
<td>11 US History (R)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 R&amp;R (LL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Crowley</td>
<td>9, 10</td>
<td>9 Global 1 (R)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hayes</td>
<td>9, 11, 12</td>
<td>11/12 Social Issues (E)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Martin</td>
<td>9, 11</td>
<td>9 Global 1 (H)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Silver</td>
<td>10, 11</td>
<td>10 Global 2 (H)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Faber</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *AP (Advanced Placement), H (Honors), R (Regents), E (Elective), LL (Lower Level)
At Valley High only 3% of staff identify as people of color, and the one African American teacher within the department did in fact volunteer for this study (Miss Gale). However, it should be noted that the racial demographics of the faculty do not proportionately reflect those of the student body, which research has demonstrated as an ongoing national issue (Hansen & Quitero, 2018). The disconnect between the racial makeup of the student body and faculty was even highlighted by a local newspaper article in 2017. This fact made it impossible to include a more diverse array of teacher participants. Nonetheless, I attempted to continue broadening my view by selecting teachers of varying levels of experience. Several teachers had nearly 20 years of experience (Mr. Silver), while others had only completed their first year of teaching at the time of this study (Mr. Crowley).

**Student Participant Selection**

Obtaining student participants became harder than I had anticipated, but I still attempted to employ *purposeful sampling* (Glesne, 2016) in order to understand the political climate in the school as experienced first-hand by students, as well as their perceptions of media literacy. Therefore, the six students were selected based on race and ethnicity, and political views (if any were openly expressed in class and identifiable by their teacher). I consulted with several of the teacher participants in order to identify possible volunteers, and though many students were initially open to being interviewed, many failed to return the parental consent form necessary to participate in the study. Therefore, student participants reflected a *convenience sampling* to some degree, and only one male student was interviewed in contrast to his five female counterparts (see Table 4 for student participant attributes). This issue will be further discussed in the section on limitations. Despite this small sample, the six students who did volunteer *and* submitted consent forms represent a diverse set of experiences within the building.
Table 4

Student Participants and Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Race or Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Political Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Republican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. A limited number of student volunteers resulted in an overrepresentation of female participants.

Two of the female students are African American, with one self-identifying as a straight ally of the LGBTQ community. There are also two Latina student participants, both falling under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, and one also identifying as bisexual. The fifth female student is White, and described her social circle and family as avid Trump supporters, but she considers herself “undecided” about politics. The final student participant is a White male, who openly supported Trump and voted for him in the school-wide mock presidential election.

It is my belief that the diverse views of these students will shed new light on the political tension that was reported in this school, and in research on schools across the nation (Rogers, 2017). In addition, with these different perspectives, we may better understand the role of critical media literacy in these students’ lives.
Data Collection

For construct validity and triangulation (Yin, 2013) this study draws from multiple sources of evidence. The data will be described in regard to their acquisition, frequency, and total amount to be analyzed (see Table 2 for alignment of RQs, data collection, and analysis). In order to maintain each participant’s anonymity, all audio files of interviews and classroom observations were coded using initials relating to a participant’s pseudonym, abbreviations for the course taught, date of collection, and type of data (i.e., INT for interview or OBS for observation).

Planning Meeting Observations

The first phase of data collection consisted of my observation of the media literacy lesson planning meetings. This included a combination of both small committee meetings attended only by those department members who volunteered to help design the lesson, as well as full department meetings where feedback was offered by the entire social studies faculty in order to collaboratively shape the lesson. There were a total of six meetings used to plan the department lesson, in addition to one prior meeting which I was unable to attend; I was invited to observe this process slightly after it had already been initiated. In addition to planning meetings, I observed a final department meeting that was held after the CARS Lesson was enacted, in order for teachers to discuss their reflections on the lesson as a group.

Each meeting was approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length, and in total I observed 315 minutes of meetings between department members. All planning meetings were recorded with an audio device, while department meetings were recorded using field notes taken on my personal laptop. In addition, case artifacts include materials distributed throughout the meetings which documented the phases of lesson planning; these were collected and catalogued by date.
These various observations and materials traced the introduction of the lesson by the planning committee to the larger department, as well as drafts and revisions between December of 2016 and March of 2017.

In addition to face-to-face collaborative discussions, teachers also compiled resources on a shared network folder, and sent emails throughout the planning period. I had access to these materials and emails as well. These were referenced throughout the analysis phase of my study and helped to triangulate the data collected in teacher interviews as they described the process of planning and collaborating with a shared goal.

**Classroom Observations**

All classroom observations were audio-recorded, and field notes were taken with my personal laptop, with the exception of one lesson taught by Mr. Silver. In this case, I took extensive field notes, and referred to them during our interview immediately following the lesson.

In total, I observed seven teachers enacting eight lessons that varied in time from 45 minutes during one class period, to 90 minutes over the course of two class periods. I was able to observe one participant teaching the lesson twice, across two different courses (Mrs. Wallace in Participation in Government and US History). The number of minutes recorded during these observations totaled 550 min, in addition to the 45-minute lesson by Mr. Silver to be analyzed using notes alone.

During classroom observations I used an observation protocol (Appendix A) with specific questions that related to each of my research questions, and special attention was paid to student interactions, the layout of the classroom, and how the lesson itself was enacted in comparison to the way in which it was designed by the core planning team. My notes were
organized in three columns according to: time, description of the event taking place, and my personal reflections or questions to follow up on. Within the second column describing each event, I tried to fully document what I would not be able to see when listening to the recordings of each observation. I paid particular attention to nonverbal responses of students, as well as the frequency of various students’ participation during the lesson.

**Teacher Interviews**

Notes from classroom observations were used in conjunction with a semi-structured protocol (Appendix B) during teacher interviews. This allowed me to ask specific questions about the unscripted choices that teachers made during instruction. In conducting the interviews with teachers after they taught the lesson, I could ask them to reflect on specific points during their instruction and to discuss their decision-making processes. These interviews were scheduled during a time determined by the teacher that would not interfere with instruction, and each took place within a timeframe of approximately 30-60 minutes. The total number of teacher participants who were interviewed exceeds the number who were observed, as one participant (Mr. Faber) abstained from teaching the lesson but was interviewed in order to gain insight into why some members ultimately chose not to teach the lesson. Therefore, there were a total of eight teacher participants interviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded, and notes were taken during the interviews on my personal laptop. The total length of recorded responses by teacher participants was 359 minutes. In order to understand how the common lesson on critical media literacy was a collective response to growing concerns about political polarization, questions were designed with regard to the chronology of the case: the period immediately around the 2016 presidential election, the planning and implementation phase, and overall evaluation of the media literacy lesson in hindsight.
I conducted each interview with teachers in a more familiar, or casual tone, drawing this concept from Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2009) understanding of *knowledge as conversational*. They describe this in stating, “we understand qualitative interviews as having the potential of producing descriptions and narratives of everyday experiences as well as the epistemic knowledge justified discursively in a conversation” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009, p. 64). With this in mind, I followed each participant’s lead as they discussed some points within the interview protocol at length, while providing brief statements in response to others. As a result of this, I did not always follow the questions within my interview protocol chronologically, as I elicited answers to all of the questions relevant to the study at the times which seemed most appropriate within the flow of conversation. I hoped to gain an authentic understanding of each participant’s experience within the case, and I made it explicit to each teacher that I was only interested in better understanding their perceptions, rather than looking for a specific result as a researcher.

**Student Interviews**

In order to minimize my impact on students’ learning, interviews took place during periods without instruction, such as a study-hall or lunch. Each interview lasted between 10 and 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with additional notes taken on my personal laptop. There was a total of 101 minutes recorded for analysis. Each interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C), and participants were asked to discuss their personal experiences and understandings related to: the political climate in the school, classroom climate and discussion, teacher bias, key media literacy terms, and their assessment of the media literacy lessons taught in their social studies classroom.
Contextual Artifacts

For a contextual portrait of the case and a chain of evidence (Yin, 2013) that would reveal the political climate of the school during this period, I collected various artifacts from the school community and directly from teachers. Dating back to October of 2016, I collected monthly school newspapers from throughout the 2016-2017 academic year. As the department decided to teach a lesson on media literacy in order to combat the growing political polarization in the school, I believed that the student paper would reveal something about student sentiments throughout the case. In addition, I was able to obtain the results from a school-wide mock election held the week before the presidential election. Not only were students given the opportunity to cast a ballot, voicing their preference for either Clinton or Trump, but the social studies department was also reorganized into a tiny version of the electoral college.

In addition, I gathered election results from the county’s Board of Elections in order to understand how the student body may reflect broader values of the various stakeholders. Further investigating the community climate, I gathered community posts on the district’s Facebook page regarding a “teach in” on racism. This event, and the subsequent community responses to it, became a decisive moment in the way the department implemented their lesson on media literacy, and therefore the community conversation just prior to the lesson became important. Finally, any official district announcements regarding the political climate in the community, and/or controversial issues in the school were also compiled as an attempt to establish an understanding of the administrative view on the school’s political polarization.
Analysis

Memoing

A significant part of my analysis involved a continuous effort to memo. During classroom observations as well as interviews, I recorded my immediate thoughts in response to what I gathered. When each of the datum were collected, I recorded my impressions with reflective memos (Maxwell, 2013), organized by date, participant and whether it was an observation or interview. Some of these ideas would lead to follow up questions as well as potential codes to be explored during later phases of analysis. As each observation or interview concluded, I then recorded an overall summary memo (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). These two types of memos served to anchor my analysis as I moved forward with formulating codes based on the patterns that emerged. Therefore, the first stage of my analysis began while I collected the data, as a grounded theory approach to research calls for memoing throughout this phase of the study.

During classroom observations I recorded some of these memos within a table of three columns. In the first column, I noted the time; this would allow me to easily find a specific point during the audio recording of the lesson, should I need to relisten to the original sound bite at any point. In the second column, I noted the event taking place; these were the transitions between learning tasks as well as the tasks themselves. For example, during an observation I recorded “Teacher asks students to write a few sentences explaining their process. He asks students to share.” In the third column is where I recorded my thoughts and perceptions of what I was observing. Using the same observation example from above, in the text from my third column I noted,

Students are happy to volunteer their answers, smiling when they respond, showing confidence in their rationale. This seems to be a very open classroom climate, as students
are comfortable sharing with the teacher and one another. Several are talking, without just one student dominating. (Observation Memo, March 3, 2017)

Whereas my initial observation notes and memos were recorded in this three-column manner during the classroom visits, memoing for interviews took place immediately after each interview concluded, and then once I completed transcribing the audio-recording. I did take short notes as to what participants were saying during the interviews, and these ideas were incorporated into memos once I had left each participant. Minimizing my notetaking during interviews was intentional, as I hoped to maintain the conversational tone with participants.

Once all of the data were collected and the initial memos revisited, I began listening to the audio-recordings of interviews, transcribing them using the online platform, oTranscribe.com, which allowed me to easily slow down, rewind, and timestamp each transcription. After each transcription I continued to memo, summarizing key points that participants made both directly relating to my research questions, and sometimes the points that were reiterated in conversation though not directly answering my questions. As patterns or themes would emerge, I began building my codebook in MAXQDA, where I uploaded my transcriptions. This allowed me to digitally code the transcriptions of interviews, as well as my notes from observations, referring to my initial impressions of the data as documented in each memo.

Coding

My coding phase started more formally once all of the data were collected and I could revisit my memos as an array. This became part of the constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2007); looking back through the data to revise and add ideas as my theories began to emerge. When I had at least two occurrences of a similar idea, I could then build upon that
concept. Once I found several or more instances of these ideas, which eventually appeared as patterns, I developed my initial codes. In the example shared earlier, “open classroom climate” became a code used during my analysis of teacher interviews, student interviews, and classroom observations.

During this initial open-coding phase (Corbin & Strauss, 2007), I would tag “chunks” of data, pulling several sentences or the entirety of an interaction that demonstrated the main idea relating to that particular code. After this first round of coding, I would then use axial coding in order to refine and revise these codes, hoping to eventually reach the moment of saturation, or “the point in the research when all the concepts are well defined and explained” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, 145).

In MAXQDA I was able to keep a running list of my codes with notes and descriptions attached. As I moved first through the teacher interviews, I isolated areas of the data with broader codes that answered my research questions such as: school climate, lesson goals, success of the lesson, and CML beyond the classroom, to name a few (Table 5). The next phase of coding these interviews identified both the successes and challenges of planning a department-wide lesson on CML and fake news in 2017, and here I employed evaluation coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This was based on participants’ own language where they “assign judgements about the merit, worth, or significance of programs or policy” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 76). Here, my intent was to reveal teachers’ perceptions of whether the lesson met the intended goals and/or the needs of the students. In addition, this added to the larger conversation about how media literacy works in the classroom, beyond what theorists imagine, revealing the pros and cons of implementing it within an existing social studies curriculum.
Table 5

Research Questions Aligned with Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Codes and Subcodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers understand the role of critical media literacy in secondary social studies curricula?</td>
<td>● RELEVANCE IN STANDARDS/CURRICULUM&lt;br&gt; ● SEPARATE FROM CURRICULUM&lt;br&gt; ● DEFINITION OF MEDIA LITERACY&lt;br&gt; ● BEYOND CLASSROOM&lt;br&gt; ● SKILLS REFERENCE&lt;br&gt; ● VALUE OF CML&lt;br&gt; ● LESSON GOALS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. Where does CML appear in the social studies curricula and standards?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. How do teachers view the alignment of CML and curricular goals?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c. How do teachers perceive the importance of CML beyond the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do teachers bring critical media literacy into social studies classrooms?</td>
<td>● FRAMING LESSON&lt;br&gt; ○ SKILLS REFERENCE&lt;br&gt; ○ BEYOND CLASSROOM&lt;br&gt; ● ENACTMENT&lt;br&gt; ○ DIFFERENT FROM PLAN&lt;br&gt; ○ VIDEO INTRO&lt;br&gt; ○ VALUE SPECTRUM&lt;br&gt; ○ SAFE SPACE/OPEN CLIMATE&lt;br&gt; ○ NAVIGATING TEACHER BIAS&lt;br&gt; ○ SPECTRUM OF CREDIBILITY&lt;br&gt; ● COLLABORATION&lt;br&gt; ○ PLANNING/PREPARATION&lt;br&gt; ○ LESSON GOALS&lt;br&gt; ● LESSON GOALS&lt;br&gt; ● CHALLENGES&lt;br&gt; ○ SCHOOL COMMUNITY&lt;br&gt; ○ POLITICAL CONTEXT&lt;br&gt; ○ POLITICAL DIVIDE&lt;br&gt; ○ TEACH-IN&lt;br&gt; ○ NEWS AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE&lt;br&gt; ○ ADMINISTRATION&lt;br&gt; ● LESSON SUCCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. How do teachers plan for and engage in the teaching of critical media literacy in secondary social studies classrooms?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. What are the challenges to teaching CML in classrooms?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are student perceptions of Critical Media Literacy?</td>
<td>● STUDENT NEWS SOURCES&lt;br&gt; ○ NEWS AT HOME&lt;br&gt; ○ NEWS ONLINE&lt;br&gt; ○ NEWS FROM FRIENDS&lt;br&gt; ○ AVOIDING NEWS&lt;br&gt; ● PERCEPTION OF MEDIA LITERACY&lt;br&gt; ○ DEFINITION OF MEDIA LITERACY&lt;br&gt; ○ DEFINITION OF BIAS&lt;br&gt; ○ FAKE NEWS&lt;br&gt; ○ VALUE OF CML&lt;br&gt; ○ BEYOND CLASSROOM&lt;br&gt; ● IDENTIFYING TEACHER BIAS&lt;br&gt; ● SCHOOL COMMUNITY POLITICAL CONTEXT&lt;br&gt; ○ TEACH-IN&lt;br&gt; ○ POLITICAL DIVIDE&lt;br&gt; ○ PERSONAL IMMIGRATION ISSUE&lt;br&gt; ● OPEN CLASSROOM CLIMATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. What are students' views on media consumption?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. How do students understand and identify key CML terms, such as bias?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c. What are student perceptions of CML beyond the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moving to the observations of lessons I first reviewed my field notes and memos, and then turned to audio recordings. I looked to triangulate and drew from the existing codes created during the initial analyses of interviews with teachers. In a similar fashion to the interview analysis phase, new sub-codes were applied concerning issues relating to how the CML lessons were enacted; these included codes such as framing of the lesson, and credibility vs. bias. With this I attempted to deepen my understanding of what “went on” during the lesson, triangulating what I observed with what teachers’ shared during interviews following their lessons.

After analyzing teacher interviews and classroom observations, I turned to my six student interviews. I drew from some of the existing codes that had emerged from the teacher data, such as school climate, lesson goals, value of CML, and I began to refine their descriptions (Table 6). Here I also added to the code set by creating new codes that would address how students accessed and processed media, such as student news sources and news at home.

**Developing Claims**

After applying the same code to two interviews or observations, I would look with more focused attention to ideas related to these codes in the subsequent data. Once there were at least three instances of my application of a single code, I would look across the data to understand such a pattern. The similarities and differences were recorded, and these kernels became the foundations for my findings.

The final phase of my analysis looked back at all of the themes and patterns across my data including observations, interviews and artifacts, and I used these emergent theories to establish a program-level logic model (Yin, 2013). Here, I could visually represent the CML lesson process and results documenting the different factors at play when teachers planned and responded to student/community needs (Figure 6). This seemed most appropriate for this
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition/Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADMINISTRATION</td>
<td>Addressing anything related to teachers’ perceived support or pressures from administration on how and what teachers teach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVOIDING NEWS</td>
<td>Participant describes a general avoidance of engaging in current events discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEYOND CLASSROOM</td>
<td>Connects CML or related skills to students' lives outside of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHALLENGES</td>
<td>Referring to any difficulty relating to teaching CML lessons in social studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLABORATION</td>
<td>Teachers’ perceptions of working together to plan CML lesson(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREDIBILITY VS. BIAS</td>
<td>Referring to the relationship between the two, or referencing both with or without defining the two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITION OF BIAS</td>
<td>Definition, description, explanation or example of the term “bias.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITION OF MEDIA LITERACY</td>
<td>Descriptions or explanations of the meaning of “media literacy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENT FROM PLAN</td>
<td>Noting parts of the enactment of the lesson that deviated from the CARS lesson plan. Examples include: using different sources or omitting parts of the lesson such as its “hook” or “closing activity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAKE NEWS</td>
<td>Explicit reference to the term “fake news” as a concept, pervasive problem, or controversial term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRAMING LESSON</td>
<td>How the teacher introduced or presented the CARS lesson to students at the start of the class period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDENTIFYING TEACHER BIAS</td>
<td>Reference to the degree to which student participants can identify a teacher’s bias and political standpoint, as well as the process by which students arrive at these understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESSON GOALS</td>
<td>References the stated or perceived goals of the CARS Lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESSON SUCCESS</td>
<td>Teachers’ perception of the degree to which the CARS Lesson was a “success” with students; this relates to student engagement, addressing CML skills, and relevance to students’ lived experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAVIGATING TEACHER BIAS</td>
<td>Teachers’ attempts to work around or with their own biases in the classroom, including political views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Definition/Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWS AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE</td>
<td>Referring to the influence of current events on the classroom, and how news stories affect teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWS AT HOME</td>
<td>Participant refers to degrees of student engagement with the news at home either with family or through television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWS FROM FRIENDS</td>
<td>Participant refers to degrees of student engagement with the news in conversation with friends in various contexts within and outside of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWS ONLINE</td>
<td>Participant refers to degrees of student engagement with the news through online sources and/or social media such as: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL IMMIGRATION ISSUE</td>
<td>Students experiencing anti-immigrant messages on a personal level, and are directly affected by policies relating to such issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLANNING/PREPARATION</td>
<td>Referencing how the conception, planning, and revisions of CARS Lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL DIVIDE</td>
<td>Referencing the partisan divisions within the school community, specifically between students at Valley High.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELEVANCE IN STANDARDS/CURRICULUM</td>
<td>References within the data to how CML or related skills appear in standards, frameworks, and curriculum for social studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAFE SPACE/OPEN CLIMATE</td>
<td>How teachers allow for open discussion and a “safe space” for students to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL COMMUNITY POLITICAL CONTEXT</td>
<td>Issues within the Valley High or larger community that relate to the different stakeholders’ values (educational, social or political in nature).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPARATE FROM CURRICULUM</td>
<td>References within the data to how CML or related skills are a lesson outside of the “normal everyday” social studies content and curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKILLS REFERENCE</td>
<td>References specific skills related to CML including but not limited to: evaluating for point of view, purpose, audience, credibility, reliability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECTRUM OF CREDIBILITY</td>
<td>Discussion of credibility as it exists along a spectrum and appears in degrees, rather than being a finite concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACH-IN</td>
<td>Statement related to the influence of the Teach-In on Race at Valley High.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUE OF CML</td>
<td>Relating to why CML is an important or necessary part of the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUE SPECTRUM</td>
<td>CARS Lesson plan (Step 2) engagement activity addressing students’ relationship to honesty and credibility within information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIDEO INTRO</td>
<td>CARS Lesson plan (Step 1) introduced through the use of video clips.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
case, as teachers identified an underlying tension within the school community, responded to it with planning and implementing a media literacy lesson, and finally, reflected on this as a group. The prior phases of coding during my *constant comparative analysis* assisted me in identifying key events within the program, which forced both individuals and the department to make key decisions as the year unfolded.
CHAPTER 4:
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CML IN SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES

Teachers view critical media literacy as an integral part of the social studies curriculum. However, CML’s specific role within the curriculum has shifted over the last few years, and therefore the ways in which it is addressed have also changed with the times. This study was conducted during the 2016-2017 academic year, and up until that point media literacy skills within the social studies courses had been utilized as a vehicle to deepen student understandings of key historical events, and thus remained more peripheral in nature. We see this in documents such as the “New York State Social Studies Resource Guide and Core Curriculum” (1996), which was considered the foundation of grades 9-12 required social studies courses for nearly two decades. Though the use of primary and secondary sources is recommended throughout the document, any literacy skill development mentioned can be considered vague at best, as “[s]tudents should be able to interpret and analyze documents and artifacts related to global history” (p. 98).

In 2014 the new “New York State 9-12 Social Studies Framework” (2015) was adopted, and it was therefore recommended that students “may begin receiving instruction aligned to the framework in the 2018-2019 school year”. As early as this study, teachers began thinking about how CML skills had become more emphasized within the new guide, and discussed the importance of how this related to their course goals. While reflecting on targeted “life-skills” for their students, teachers described CML as an important topic that needed to be addressed explicitly, as students had developed an increasing awareness of “fake news” in the media.

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2 This excerpt was taken from an announcement made by NYSED retrieved from http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/social-studies
The Alignment of Teachers’ CML Goals with Social Studies Curricula and Standards

The teachers interviewed for this study made clear efforts to align their lessons with CML initiatives. I found an emphasis on CML skills within the curriculum at the school and district level, as well as within the social studies frameworks and learning standards for New York State.

First, the difference between the terms “curriculum” and “standards” can be understood as: what is taught from day to day, versus what students should know or be able to do by the end of the course. When considering the what and how of what is taught in their classrooms, the teachers at Valley High took into account four aspects of curriculum and standards: the department’s co-authored school-wide curriculum map, the NYS Regents Exams, the NYS Social Studies Frameworks, and finally, the Common Core Grades 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects. (Figure 2)

**Figure 2**

*Matrix of Teachers’ Considerations of Curriculum and Standards When Planning for Instruction*

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3 https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-framework
Media Literacy in Social Studies Curriculum and Standards

CML in the C3 and NYS Frameworks for Social Studies

We will first examine how CML appears in a guiding document provided by the National Council for the Social Studies. In 2013, and in concert with an array of other organizations designed to support social studies education, the NCSS published its “College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards.” Since its release, this document has become a paradigm for states to design their social studies standards, which places great emphasis on what is called the “Inquiry Arc.” This concept is illustrated in four dimensions which “...focuses on the nature of inquiry in general and the pursuit of knowledge through questions in particular” (NCSS, 2013, p. 12). With this, the path of creating “rigor” in the social studies follows students’: development of questions, pursuit of answers to those questions, and finally, their ability to communicate those findings.

Within this four-step inquiry process, “Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence” is dedicated to CML practices. Here, in order to meet the ultimate goal of presenting and communicating an argument based on their own research, students need to develop the necessary skills of deciphering and evaluating information. This document encourages CML skills from the earliest grade levels, and sets the expectation that students will develop more sophisticated methods of evaluating and analyzing sources as they progress through each academic stage. Clear targets are set for CML skills at the end of 2nd, 5th, 8th, and 12th grades (Table 7).

Considering the ideas of Dimension 3 relating to evaluating sources for facts, opinions, and credibility, the C3 Frameworks encourage students to consider concepts reflective of the “Five Key Questions of Media Literacy” as stated by the Center for Media Literacy (2005).
Table 7

Suggested K-12 Pathway for College, Career, and Civic Readiness Dimension 3, Gathering and Evaluating Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEPENDENTLY AND WITH OTHERS, STUDENTS...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D3.1.K-2.</strong> Gather relevant information from one or two sources while using the origin and structure to guide the selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D3.2.K-2.</strong> Evaluate a source by distinguishing between fact and opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Though the language is not explicitly labeling these skills as “critical media literacy” per se, they engage students in the common practices of analyzing sources for common CML themes such as: audience, purpose, language, bias, and perspective. Ultimately the goal of this dimension is to prepare students to make a claim by using relevant and credible information. Though the C3 Frameworks do not include examples of how this would be enacted in the classroom, its emphasis on media literacy is evident in its obvious placement within the inquiry arc.

CML in New York State Social Studies Standards

When considering the social studies curriculum specific to New York State, there are several key documents and resources that speak to whether media literacy lessons align with existing curricular goals. In my analysis, I examined the “New York State Common Core Social
Studies K-12 Frameworks,” as well as the two NYS Regents exams in social studies. While the NYS Frameworks provide both the content as well as the desired skills required of students, the Regents exams are the ultimate summative assessments of whether students have achieved those goals. As former Regents exams were heavily based on historical facts and time periods, more recent iterations of these exams are linked directly to the C3 and NYS Grades 9-12 SS Frameworks, and thus we see an emphasis on skills rather than content. Within the Frameworks, the document is broken down into three main categories: *practices* for all grades 9-12, *common core standards* in reading, writing, speaking and listening for 9-10 and then 11-12, and finally, *key ideas* (or historical content) for each grade level. What we find are CML ideas are primarily embedded throughout the prescribed practices and standards for social studies, rather than the key ideas. These practices are not limited to text-based analysis and evaluation alone, but include additional modes of information such as “works of art, photographs, charts and graphs, artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary and secondary sources” (NYSCCSS Frameworks, 2015, p. 2). Students are expected to develop and employ these skills throughout their coursework (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*NYS Social Studies Practices from 9-12 Related to Critical Media Literacy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Studies Practice</th>
<th>Skills Related to CML</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A. Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence | 1. Define and frame questions about events and the world in which we live, form hypotheses as potential answers to these questions, use evidence to answer these questions, and consider and analyze counter-hypotheses.  
2. Identify, describe, and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, photographs, charts and graphs, artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary and secondary sources).  
3. Analyze evidence in terms of content, authorship, point of view, bias, purpose, format, and audience.  
4. Describe, analyze, and evaluate arguments of others (p. 2) |

*Note.* Adapted from New York State Education Department. (2015). *New York State Grades 9-12 Social Studies Framework.*
and while CML is absent from the key ideas, we see it referenced through an emphasis on weighing different perspectives through historical inquiry.

When we move to consider the different standards that are outlined specifically for grades 9-10, we see that the CML skills become more focused. In the Reading and Listening Standard titled, “Craft and Structure” students are asked to, “Compare the points of view of two or more authors in their treatments of the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts” (see Table 9). Here we see a common theme

Table 9

NYS Social Studies Standards Grades 9-10 Related to Critical Media Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Skill Related to CML</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies | **Key Ideas and Details** | 1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.  
2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.  
3. Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them. (p. 5) |
| | **Craft and Structure** | 5. Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.  
6. Compare the points of view of two or more authors in their treatments of the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts. |
| | **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** | 9. Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources. (p. 5) |
| Speaking and Listening Standards | **Comprehension and Collaboration** | 2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.  
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence. (p. 7) |

Note. Adapted from New York State Education Department. (2015). New York State Grades 9-12 Social Studies Framework.
of looking at one event from a variety of angles, parsing apart the author’s purpose, and finally determining how that source can become evidence to support an argument.

Similarly, these standards ask students to consider the way in which sources utilize language and tone in order to persuade the audience to “believe” a particular version of an historical event. These skills are indeed key media literacy practices, and students begin to recognize and analyze the contextual details around the creation of a source. In a similar treatment, the standards for grades 11-12 emphasize multiple perspectives (see Table 10). In the section titled “Key Ideas and Details,” the language used is identical when comparing the first two points: these items are related to comprehension and central ideas. However, when comparing what students are expected to do from grades 9-10 to grades 11-12, we see that the level of analysis is elevated to evaluation of information.

One CML term that is not clearly addressed with regard to visual or textual sources is credibility. Within several of the standards, students across all four grades are expected to evaluate different sources of information for ideas related to credibility including: reasoning, evidence, fact vs. opinion, point of view, and corroboration. Here, it is possible that the intention behind the term “evaluate” may be directed at the issue of credibility and reliability, but it is not yet clear. The term “credibility” itself is only mentioned in the “Speaking and Listening” standards, which are addressed for grades 9-10 as, “Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source” (Table 9), and for grades 11-12 as, “Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies between the data” (table 10). Here, the
### Table 10

**NYS Social Studies Standards Grades 11-12 Related to Critical Media Literacy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Skill Related to CML</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies | **Key Ideas and Details** | 1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.  
2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships between the key details and ideas.  
3. Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain. (p. 29)  
**Craft and Structure** | 6. Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence. (p. 29)  
**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** | 7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, and in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem. Distinguish between fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.  
8. Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.  
9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies between sources. (p. 29) |
| Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects | **Research to Build and Present Knowledge** | 8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and over-reliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation. (p. 31) |
| Speaking and Listening Standards | **Comprehension and Collaboration** | 2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies between the data.  
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links between ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used. (p. 31) |
“Listening” standards. The idea of *rhetoric* directly reflects issues of language and how it may be used in order to attract and persuade an audience — something that many CML initiatives regard as an important piece to the puzzle when evaluating a source. In addition, there is mention of faulty reasoning or application of information, as well as evidence that could be taken out of context. Though these practices are complex and may be considered whole skill-based lessons in and of themselves, they are not included as part of the curricular content (key ideas) of this document, but rather a means to an end. From this point of view, students need CML skills in order to better understand what happened in history. Through the examination of differing perspectives on a single topic, and different authors’ treatment of the same topic, students practice identifying contextual clues in order to gain a more complete picture of how information can be skewed to support a particular point of view.

As stated in the Frameworks, it is expected that students are able to employ these practices by the end of their high school career. However, it is not articulated in the scope and sequence of their courses that time should be allotted with the sole purpose of developing such skills until their senior year. For the Participation and Government Course, there is indeed a key idea that addresses CML skill development directly. Item 12.G5d states,

> Active and engaged citizens must be effective media consumers in order to be able to find, monitor, and evaluate information on political issues. The media have different venues, which have particular strengths and serve distinct and shared purposes. Knowing how to critically evaluate a media source is fundamental to being an informed citizen.

(NYS Grades 9-12 Social Studies Frameworks, NYSED, 2015)

Here we see that as seniors, students should come away with the ability to be actively engaged citizens, capable of critically evaluating a variety of media sources. With this finally becoming a
clear priority when it comes to civic participation and preparedness, the ultimate goal of CML
skill development is not made apparent until students exit their high school career.

In transitioning from the practices of CML in the curriculum to how these skills would be
measured, we turn now to an examination of social studies assessments that are designed and
required by NYSED.

**CML in State Assessments**

While the NYS Frameworks stress the importance of CML skills in their practices and
standards, the new frameworks-based Regents exams (required by all students seeking a Regents
diploma) also put media literacy skills at the forefront. The final assessments for 10th and 11th
grade in NYS result in these exams. Though past exams required students to demonstrate literacy
comprehension skills, in June of 2019 New York State administered the first frameworks-based
Regents exam for Global History and Geography II. According to this new format, students are
required to demonstrate mastery of several key CML skills. In the section titled “Constructed
Response Questions,” students are given two sets of primary or secondary sources (or some
combination of the two) and are asked to form a short response (several sentences in length) that
demonstrates some level of “sourcing,” or an evaluation of the source. With this, they are
required to demonstrate an understanding of one of the following: bias, point of view, audience,
or purpose.

Just before this new state exam was to be administered, NYSED provided several
documents to help teachers prepare students for the new format. In order to better understand the
alignment between the state’s frameworks/standards and the Regents exam, I examined one
particular document titled, “Understanding the CRQ,” which provides a guide for teachers with
regards to CML practices and terms and explains the process of “sourcing” in a nuanced manner.4 When considering the term bias, it is defined and described as:

one-sidedness. It always implies the opposite of objectivity. Instead of presenting facts in a neutral way, without inserting one’s particular slant or opinion, bias is usually expressed in one of several ways:

- Through the use of “loaded” language, including appeals to emotion, exaggeration, or propaganda designed to frame a person, event, group, or institution in an overly positive or overly negative manner...

- Through the deliberate inclusion or deliberate exclusion of certain facts to support a particular interpretation, including a lack of balance or an argument where only one side is presented and specific details are overemphasized, downplayed, or omitted

- Through character attacks and slurs, including subjective statements against a particular race, nation, or group within a society. (p. 6)

With all of these details explaining what the term bias entails, students are expected to have a full understanding of the term prior to the exam, where no definitions are provided. As stated in this supporting document for educators, when students are asked to identify bias, they receive full credit only if they are able to illustrate the point at which the author demonstrates their “one-sidedness,” but they must also explain what the author has not included. In other words, we see an emphasis, not unlike that which appeared in the NYS Frameworks, on differing perspectives; here students are asked to demonstrate an understanding of two perspectives when only one is

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present. Therefore, this task requires that a student not only understand the nature of bias and how it is employed by an author, but also, what the alternative to a biased representation of something might appear to be. In this regard, the third phase of CML illustrated in my conceptual framework, where students begin to construct counternarratives is built upon this skill. Ultimately, students are required to imagine alternative versions of what is presented to them on the final assessments given at the end of 10th and 11th grade.

**Teachers’ Efforts to Align CML with the Broader Curriculum**

**CML in Teacher-Authored Social Studies Curricula**

In addition to national and state-wide social studies frameworks and standards, the social studies department in this case study worked collectively to streamline their broader curricular goals, and in doing so drafted CML skills into their course curriculum maps.

The ongoing work of writing the social studies curriculum maps is completed by volunteers who are allotted a stipend for their additional professional service. I analyzed the existing maps for each of the year-long courses in social studies (Global History I, Global History II, and US History). Curriculum maps for electives were not yet addressed, and the maps for both the Participation in Government and Economics classes were not fully completed at the time of this study, and therefore were not included in my analysis. The following section reveals how the social studies department envisioned CML practices across grades 9, 10 and 11.

All of the curriculum maps for the aforementioned courses were organized into approximately ten units that follow an academic year; those ten units are then broken down using a template based on Wiggins and McTighe’s (2005) *Understanding by Design*, and the “backwards” approach to lesson planning. Each section included both “enduring understandings” and “essential questions” among other things, and were digitally linked to the corresponding
standards found in the “Common Core Grades 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects” (2010).

In a chronological examination of CML skills as they appeared by grade level, I began with the curriculum map for the 9th grade course, Global History I. The opening unit for the course included what teachers titled, “Historical Analysis and Writing Workshop.” Here, as one of the bulleted *enduring understandings* of this unit articulated, “students will know that critical evaluation of media sources leads to greater understanding.” Directly related to this idea, the *essential question* asked of students read, “How do you determine the validity of a media source?” With this, teachers made CML skills a priority, and clearly placed them at the forefront of their social studies curriculum with this being one of the first lessons in ninth grade.

Within this introductory unit, the Common Core standards mapped to the lessons confirmed the importance of these skills, as I found under the standard “Research to Build and Present Knowledge” students should be able to, “Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.” Here, teachers linked students’ ability to better understand the content of media sources with their ability to critically evaluate and determine such sources’ validity. Though the remaining bulk of the curriculum map for ninth grade focused on historical content rather than skills, these teachers made efforts to include CML skill building as the actual content of their lessons, rather than a means to an end. Therefore, these teachers took a step further than what the various frameworks suggested, and highlighted lessons directly focused on CML.

There were also several additional aspects of CML within the final unit of the Global I course. In their “Review Unit” teachers wrote that students should be able to demonstrate a
variety of skills, such as “distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information,” as well as “interpreting political cartoons” (District/School Curriculum Map for Global History & Geography I, 9th Grade). These ideas speak directly to CML in that they require students to analyze information in a way that will help them to understand its value, as well as its purpose and perspective. Here, “relevant” is something that helps students to better understand a historical topic which could then be used as evidence to support a claim. Echoing the “inquiry arc” of the C3 Frameworks (2013), teachers designed lessons around CML that would help deepen students’ ability to analyze, evaluate, and then synthesize information related to history.

Though the treatment of CML appeared similarly across the curriculum maps for 9th and 10th grade, Global History II did not include an introductory unit addressing these skills as their own lessons outright. Instead, students were launched directly into the historical content, beginning with the time period known as the “Enlightenment” in Western Europe. However, within all of the articulated course units, just as differing perspectives in history are valued, teachers drafted one of the required skills for students as, “Analyze evidence in terms of content, authorship, point of view, bias, purpose, format, and audience.” We again are able to see that teachers prioritized students’ abilities to critically analyze historical documents as a means to deepen their understanding of past events.

Similarly, in U.S. History, teachers focused primarily on the historical content through extensive lists of enduring understandings and related questions, while weaving CML practices into the required skills for each unit. At the end of each unit students should be able to, “critically analyze text, evaluate sources, interpret political cartoons, and extrapolate conclusions from data,” among other things. Though skill-based lessons did not appear apparent in this curriculum
map, CML skills were repeated with this language throughout the scope of the course as something that students should be continually practicing.

The curriculum maps at Valley High serve as a way for teachers across the district to refer to their common goals, as they were drafted by colleagues. In addition, these maps provide initial guidance to new teachers entering the district. We can see that teachers aligned their department and course goals with the broader goals created by the National Council for the Social Studies as well as the New York State Frameworks. At each of these levels I found there was the desire to build students’ CML skills throughout their high school experience.

*Teachers’ Individual Considerations of the Curriculum, Standards, and CML*

When teachers were asked whether media literacy skills fit within their existing courses, all of the participants shared that they were indeed a part of the traditional iterations of their classroom lessons. When this study began, teachers had not yet seen the new Regents exams, as the launch date was still two years out from the time of these interviews in 2017. However, NYSED had released a series of statements informing educators that there would be a new emphasis on skills and practices in future state exams. During these interviews, teachers expressed an urgent need to adjust their teaching and embrace lessons in CML in order to meet the impending shift from the state.

When asked about lessons in media literacy and how they fit into their overall course goals, several of the teachers discussed the need to teach these skills in direct connection to the state standards and curriculum. For example, Mr. Crowley, a fairly new teacher, explicitly stated that there was a true need for these types of lessons in social studies. He said,

> With the changes in the process, in terms of N.Y. State Standards and curriculum, addressing the credibility and reliability of sources, and questioning sources is one of the
pivotal skills that we’re shifting towards as being one of the focus of the social studies curriculum across the board. The new Regents exam that is going to be rolled out in the next few years, there is so much more of an emphasis of working with documents and those skills of sourcing, corroborating, and providing historical context. (Interview, March 9, 2017)

In understanding that the curriculum and standards were changing, this teacher recognized the importance of incorporating CML skills into his classroom and found that the department-wide lesson was a natural fit. Though teachers had not yet seen the CRQ portion of the test and could not have known the precise tasks that would be asked of students on the new exam, they still began to prepare and develop students’ capacity to critically evaluate sources.

Though Mr. Crowley expressed a need to start incorporating CML skills into his lessons more immediately, not all of the department shared the same sense of urgency. In reflecting on the departments’ deliberations around the lesson, Ms. Barre, a veteran teacher who is also seen as a leader within the department, shared how the new state initiatives helped build the CARS Lesson’s momentum. She shared that what encouraged the majority of the department to agree to the CARS Lesson was indeed a new emphasis on skills at the state planning level. In reflecting on the push for the social studies department as a whole to “buy in” to department-wide she stated,

I think what helped us also, is that the skills that we were looking to teach the students are in line with the way the new Regents exam is set up — and the push in social studies where it is now, instead of just feeding them content, it’s evaluating sources and being able to determine which sources are credible and not credible and what do you look for? So I think that that really helped out a lot. That it’s not this thing out of left field that
we’re teaching, but it’s something that we’re all trying to do more of in our classroom.

(Interview, March 17, 2017)

While some teachers were reluctant to make the space in their courses to teach CML skills outright, the impetus to adjust to the new state standards provided enough pressure to get all of the department members “on board.”

In some instances, teachers indicated that even with the new exams pending, CML skills were a familiar part of their course curriculum. In one example, Ms. Wallace discussed the skill of “being able to evaluate sources” as “nothing that is really new” (Interview, March 9, 2017).

Working primarily with seniors, this teacher referenced an existing strategy known as “SOAPSTone,” where students use this acronym to remember how to evaluate a piece of writing. With this method, students attempt to identify: speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, and tone. This strategy was adopted and publicized by the College Board and posted as a strategy to prepare students’ reading and writing for Advanced Placement exams. Though the acronym is different from the CARS Lesson that these teachers used, the message is in fact the same; students have been asked to evaluate texts by considering the key questions of media literacy.

In addition to CML fitting within the existing skill set of their classrooms, several teachers also noted that the department-wide lesson itself was not treated as a “stand alone” lesson in their classrooms. Instead, the CARS Lesson was a continuation of their established practices and woven into the current content, as Ms. Wallace noted,

What was perfect was just the day before, we had read two totally non-political accounts of the Homestead Strike, and one was from the worker perspective, and one was from the boss perspective. So right there, what source do you believe? ...It couldn’t have been better... (Interview, March 9, 2017).
In this case, the teacher described the timing of the CARS Lesson as fitting seamlessly into the historical content she was already teaching, and therefore it became a continuation of the adjacent unit. Drawing inspiration from different frameworks, state standards, and the department’s curriculum map, this teacher had students grapple with differing perspectives regarding one historical event, and encouraged students to practice CML skills in evaluating those different accounts.

Similarly, Mr. Silver considered how the department’s lesson reflected skills that he incorporated throughout his Global II curriculum. Mentioning several of the atrocities that have been committed throughout history only later to be denied, Mr. Silver discussed the importance of CML skills related to our collective understanding and recognition of the past. In one of his interviews he shared,

We’re not just marching through history... So to be able to make connections it’s higher order thinking skills and it makes it meaningful. Not, “This is just in a vacuum, we’re learning this.” [instead] “It’s relevant to things we’ve done before, it’s relevant to things we’ll do in the future, it’s connected to our lives.” So it didn’t matter to me so much exactly when I did it… It’s come up before, we’ve talked about the different things we’ve read, omission versus emphasis. “What do we emphasize when we talk about events? What do we omit?” I give examples of what’s going on in this classroom right now — “Mr. Silver is talking and talking and talking. That’s probably not wrong. My friend and I are having a conversation about X, Y, and Z. Omission and emphasis.” Anyway, we do it all the time, and how it’s ok, but you have to be aware of it. And you gotta understand that it can affect what’s being presented but it’s different from true or false. And I think the distinction has to be made clear. (Interview, March 23, 2017)
Though the initial impetus for the CARS Lesson was grounded in the zeitgeist of fake news and disinformation of late 2016, Mr. Silver found clear connections for his students in the conversations that commonly take place in his classroom. These CML skills were part of many discussions he’d had with students, such as evaluating the arguments of those who deny historical events including: the Holocaust, Belgium’s crimes against the Congolese, and Columbus’ treatment of Native Americans, to name a few. With this, CML lessons can be placed within the existing curriculum, but also serve to shine light on efforts to erase the experiences of entire communities. In giving students the skills that would help them expose faulty arguments and a lack of evidence, Mr. Silver found that students developed a deeper understanding of the hurt that emanates from past events. Though the department’s lesson asked that teachers use current articles to engage students in CML practices, most of the teachers drew connections to other lessons they had taught in similar fashion.

Whereas several teachers found the transition in and out of the CARS Lesson to be smooth, one teacher found it necessary to modify the lesson quite drastically in order to better suit his broader curricular needs. As a veteran teacher of the ninth-grade honors course, Mr. Martin found that the lesson was something he was compelled to enact as a result of external pressures, rather than an intrinsic desire to teach CML skills explicitly. As he stated, “I was trying to do it to meet that need [department coordinator’s request], and also trying to do something that I would see as productive and useful and conforming with the curriculum as I saw it” (Interview, March 13, 2017). In response to this conflict, he was the only teacher to find his own sources that would draw from historical content rather than current events. In doing so, he used the method designed by the department, in the form of the CARS document, and asked students to evaluate a series of secondary sources concerning the fall of the Roman Empire.
Though he ultimately rejected the sources recommended for the lesson, Mr. Martin supported the overall CML goals, and gave several examples of how students would continue building their skills in later units during the course. In reflecting on how this lesson fit into the overall scope of his course he stated,

They’re going to do a research paper, and I guess they could pick the fall of Rome, but anything we’ve done all year... And they’re pretty much going to do that same exercise. They’re going to google it, “Mongol battle tactics,” and they’re going to find ten websites, and they’re going to have to figure out which are the two best, and justify it. Actually write it up, why is this the best, and why is this reliable. ...We’ve been doing this project for a long time, and people always say, “I use this source, because I know it’s reliable because it has a lot of accurate information.” And we try to get them away from just asserting that and say, “Well, it’s written by this person” — and write down that this person actually teaches a class on Asian history, and has written two books on the Mongols and has won these awards. We try to get them to actually produce that information and think about it. So this was kind of a first step in that. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

Therefore, despite his reluctance to teach the CARS Lesson alongside his department members, Mr. Martin agreed that these were valuable skills that should be taught and would be revisited throughout his course. Of the eight teachers interviewed for this study, he was the only teacher who revealed reservations about teaching the department-wide lesson. Even so, he was consistent with his colleagues in expressing an overall satisfaction with both the CML initiative as well as the results of the planning committee’s efforts.
On the Need for CML Early in the School Year

Several of the participants expressed a desire to change the placement of the CARS Lesson within the scope and sequence of the academic year similarly, stating that CML skills should be addressed at the start of the year, and revisited throughout the course. During planning sessions, the teachers involved in crafting the CARS Lesson discussed the possibility of the lesson being taught and re-taught every year in this manner. However, they ultimately created this lesson as an immediate response to widespread disinformation and fear amongst students, and it was therefore implemented in March of 2017. Even so, there were a handful of teachers who expressed that this lesson would be more effective in the future if it were taught at the start of every social studies course.

In one example, Ms. Gale shared that she would indeed teach the CARS Lesson again, but in the future, it would appear in her course as early as September. When asked to describe what this would look like she stated, “When you do your intro lesson, and just sourcing and how do you read maps, I think I would just put that skill in the very beginning and then try and do pieces of that throughout [the year].” She went on further to explain how she would then reintroduce these skills through new topics stating,

“Remember this lesson that we did in September? Well here are two sources, get out your phones, find out which one’s the right one.” ...And then tie that into World War II, and you have points of view… “Well how do you know which is the right source, because they’re both primary sources? Which one do you listen to? Which one is more accurate?”

(Interview, March 13, 2017)

In introducing CML skills at the start of the year, this teacher believed that a foundation could be laid for students to return to and build upon throughout subsequent lessons during the
course of the entire school year. Though the ninth-grade curriculum map designed by the department included such a lesson in their introductory unit, the tenth grade curriculum, which Ms. Gale taught, did not. Here she expressed the desire to reintroduce CML skills as their own lesson at the start of Global History II, mimicking what happened with students in the beginning of Global History I.

In some cases, teachers thought about whether the CARS Lesson should in fact be an early department-wide effort in future years. In thinking about how initial CML efforts each year could benefit all students Ms. Barre stated,

I think it would be great. I know for US history, we do current events to start off the year. I know in Global I this year they did a lot of sourcing work and in Global II this year for the new Regents exam. So I think that would be awesome to do. But it’s always hard when we say “We’re going to do this as a department.” So I’m curious to see if that’s something that we’ll really do. But yeah I think it would be cool.” (Interview, March 17, 2017)

All of the teachers interviewed for this study agreed that CML work was something that already existed within the social studies curriculum. Whether they would continue with teaching the CARS Lesson as a joint effort at the beginning of the year was unclear. However, all of the teachers shared that these skills were important for understanding the historical content, and that the practices encouraged by the frameworks and standards were something to be continuously woven throughout their existing curricula.

**Teachers’ Perspectives on CML Beyond the Classroom**

In addition to being a key component of social studies curricula, CML skills can be transferable to students’ lived experiences beyond the classroom. Several of the teachers
expressed a desire to assist students in evaluating media that would not be considered academic content. These teachers saw critical media literacy as a means to help students evaluate information, both in their use of traditional sources, such as newspapers and other textual information, as well as emerging news sources such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, for example. Teachers expressed a hope to help students evaluate and analyze media outside of the classroom, and during several observations the CARS Lesson was framed in precisely this light.

In one example, Mr. Crowley introduced the lesson to his ninth-grade students by stating, “We are going to be looking at some skills that can be used in a social studies classroom, or in life…to determine the credibility and reliability of info—Instagram or primary documents” (Class, March 3, 2017). Here, students were encouraged to start thinking about the ways in which they could transfer the day’s lesson to their lives outside of the classroom. After making this statement, the teacher shared a short video clip to introduce the lesson; in it we see NBC’s Tracie Potts discussing media sources such as Instagram and issues of reliability. Here, Mr. Crowley attempted to “hook” the students into the CARS Lesson by making clear connections to their media consumption outside of the curriculum. In his interview he further supported this choice to frame this lesson in terms of “real life skills” stating, “…from the very beginning we’ve worked with sourcing, and this was just more, let’s look at sourcing in a real-life situation, when you’re using media and information in that way” (Interview, March 9, 2017).

In a similar sentiment, Ms. Barre discussed the desire to have students develop their CML skills and be able to rely on them throughout their lives. With constant exposure to news and media outside of school, she hoped that students would develop the capacity to evaluate information as part of an automatic response to new information. In part of her interview, she
explained this desire as, “[w]e want them to have that innate skill in a sense... and I feel that they’re seeing it more and more now, that it’s something that they should have, just from everything that they come across, even outside of school” (Interview, March 17, 2017). Aside from CML needs within the curriculum and standards, these teachers expressed a belief that these skills were also an important part of developing students’ ability to navigate information beyond the classroom.

This need for teachers to develop CML skills in students was not always a welcome task, as some teachers indicated that it increased a burden they had already struggled with. As Mr. Faber, a veteran teacher of U.S. History shared,

Your goals every year seem to expand and get to be more and more and more. So whereas ten years ago I wouldn’t have even thought about fake news or distorted media, I wouldn’t have thought that students have needed that ability or that skill. The more I go, the longer I teach the more I’m convinced that this is a skill that they do need to have.

...And it’s weird, you notice as a history teacher, or even just as a teacher in general, you see your roles and your goals expanded each year. You see more and more deficiencies…and I don’t know if it’s because we as individuals are constantly reading and learning these things…and kids should know about this, or because of the technology today, they’re just not getting these skill sets that maybe your generation or my generation were taught. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

With this statement, we see that a teacher with nearly twenty years of experience considers this to be part of his obligations but struggles to understand why this is coming up at this point in his career. Though Mr. Faber expressed an interest in the CARS Lesson and was in fact on the planning committee; he was the one teacher interviewed who admitted to not teaching the lesson
at all. Sharing that he would have liked to have taught the lesson with his colleagues, he stated that he had not found the time to fit it within his curriculum. As a teacher of AP U.S. History, the desire to fit the entire curricular content into a shortened year is perhaps problematic, as these exams are administered in May, rather than at the end of the year in June. In the future, Mr. Faber expressed an interest in teaching the CARS Lesson at the start of the year, stating, “I wish I had done the lesson. I’m definitely going to do it next year....but it’s going to be early” (Interview, May 24, 2017).

Ultimately, critical media literacy skills have clear connections to: existing frameworks for social studies, New York State standards, and teachers’ course goals for students within and outside of the classroom. During the CARS Lesson, some teachers relied on current events articles to focus students’ skill-building, while others looked to historical accounts to draw connections to practices they’ve already addressed. In either case, teachers in this study found value in CML skills and expressed a desire to integrate similar lessons into their future coursework with students.
CHAPTER 5: HOW SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS INTEGRATED CML INTO THE CLASSROOM

This case study examined the ways in which a group of social studies teachers responded to the needs of their students by planning a department-wide lesson focused on Critical Media Literacy. What follows is a chronological description of how the “CARS Lesson” was planned and enacted, and an exploration of teachers’ reflections on the success of this process. Figure 3 illustrates the timeline of the planning and teaching process, and points to key events throughout this extended period.

The Need for Critical Media Literacy

In a desire to respond to their students’ needs, teachers arrived at CML skill building as a means to mitigate the political and racial divide in the building. By creating a lesson on CML, teachers expressed their primary aim as being one of student empowerment in the face of harmful and negative disinformation. Beginning as early as the primaries in the spring of 2016, a series of events within Valley High alarmed students and teachers alike, and throughout the following fall, increasing hostility between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds became even more concerning. The social studies department discussed these incidents openly during department meetings, and that conversation eventually led to the creation of the CARS Lesson on CML skills.

In teacher and student interviews, as well as community Facebook posts and district statements, I found that there was a heightened sense of political polarization following the 2016 spring primaries, which grew worse after Trump’s election in November and continued to escalate after his inauguration in January of 2017. The location of this case study is unique in that the local region is politically split, with county records reporting nearly half of the
Figure 3

Timeline of CARS Lesson Planning Process

- **2016 Election Season**
  - High School political climate intensifies and conflict between students increases.
  - Nov 2016

- **Dec 2016**
  - President Trump Elected
  - Teachers gather for monthly department meeting and brainstorm on ways to help students process the political tension.

- **CML Committee Forms**
  - Dec 2016 the committee is formed, and continues to meet through March, 2017. Teachers hope to empower students with CML skill development.
  - Jan-Mar 2017

- **Teach-in on Race**
  - In school field trip was offered for students to hear a panel discussion on several related topics such as refugee solidarity and the sociology of race. This results in community backlash.
  - Feb 2017

- **CML Lesson Enacted**
  - Approximately half of the SS department at Valley High teaches the CARS Lesson on the same day in early March.
  - Mar-Jun 2017

- **CML (CARS) Reflections**
  - Teachers and students reflect on the success of the CARS lesson, and the need for CML lessons in the social studies.
  - Mar 2017

*Contextual Factors*
- Political Climate
- Teacher Fears of Stakeholder Backlash
- Administrative Pressure
- Politicization of "Fake News"
population voting for Republican candidates, and the other half for Democrats. In regard to this, the student body of Valley High illustrated a similar bipartisan split. The social studies department held a mock election, and in the contest between Clinton and Trump ultimately Trump won with 44% of the students’ popular vote, while Clinton only received 39%. These divisions spawned larger issues within the school community, and teachers looked at CML as a way to help cope with emerging problems related to this.

**Teachers’ Reflections on Increasing Tensions**

In reflecting on the moment when they noticed a strain between White students and students of color in the building, teachers recounted instances dating back to the previous school year. As Miss Gale noted, “…there was tension in the building especially at the end of last year because there were fights between the Black kids and the White kids, and there was a whole bunch of stuff that was happening at the end of the year…” (Interview, March 3, 2017). That sense of tension increased during the 2016-2017 school year and the conversation around race and politics continued amongst the social studies department. In another example Miss Gale remembered one of her students confiding in her that she had heard rumors about the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) coming to the school. She remembered,

A girl came in and said that the immigration police were coming to the school and that she wasn’t going to be in for next week because she heard that they were coming… I was like “I’m not going to lie; I really don’t know much about it but let me find out.” And I talked to people and was like “No, legally they can’t come on the property.” But because

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5 Reports indicated that 48% of votes cast for Trump and 47% of votes cast for Clinton during the 2016 presidential election.
in her community, that was the rumor that was spread and that was the information that she received… (Interview, March 13, 2017)

Though this teacher dealt with students’ confusion on an individual basis, others struggled to keep their students informed with facts regarding different policies. As a veteran teacher of over twenty years, Ms. Wallace struggled with the unprecedented treatment of students of immigrant families. In recalling what she witnessed in her own classroom, she summarized what she observed as,

What seemed to be the breaking down of how kids were treating one another, and how they thought that it was ok to say or do… That maybe they had never felt so confident to do. The speculation… Like kids saying to a Mexican student, “Well now that he’s president, I guess you’re leaving the country…The connection they were making to what they were hearing and the platform [Trump’s campaign], I had never… that had never been a conversation that I’d heard kids talk about before like that—And specifically to the Mexican kids! (Interview, March 9, 2017)

To trouble-shoot a wave of misinformation and anti-immigrant feelings that reportedly multiplied during the late fall of 2016, Ms. Wallace tried to build empathy with her students. In a project centered around the experiences of “Dreamers,” she asked students to critically examine the language around “illegal immigrant” versus someone being described as “undocumented.” Directly relating to Phase 2 of CML skill building, students began to consider how their understandings of immigrants were directly shaped by the language that we use. In unpacking the contexts that come along with using either “illegal” or “undocumented,” students were later asked to consider how media shapes the narrative around immigration in the United States. With this attempt at building CML skills in her classroom, Ms. Wallace became frustrated as students’
politics overshadowed their ability to understand the goals of the lesson, and to ultimately empathize with the experiences of immigrant students. She stated,

They were headstrong about, “These are illegal people, they’re here illegally, they should not be allowed to stay.” And I was like, “How did you miss their story?”...But the videos and the stories made no difference at all in their understanding of why we don’t say illegal. And their concept is just that, “Well they broke the law!” (Interview, March 9, 2017).

Not only were anti-immigrant feelings present within the classroom, but teachers and students witnessed acts of aggression towards students in the hallways as well. As Mr. Crowley shared, “You have students yelling things that they’re not thinking about, they’re not thinking about how it’s making other people feel… You know, ‘Build a wall!’” (Interview, March 9, 2017).

Jackie, a senior student, recalled similar experiences following the election, as she remembered,

There was a lot of, not that there were Trump supporters, but there were a lot of people that used that as a way to preach hate...And, I remember the day after the election people were shouting “Build a Wall!” to our Hispanic students. It was actually really sad...They were doing that in the cafeteria, in the hallway...Yeah I witnessed it. They were coming out of the cafeteria during senior study time just yelling and people were shocked and surprised that someone who was that old would do that. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Ultimately, the social studies department discussed possible solutions to the growing problems in the building and began brainstorming openly in department meetings.

Mrs. Barre remembered the general concern for students struggling with these issues in the period immediately following the election, and the beginnings of group-led effort:
It actually was right after election day and I know a number of people in our department shared concerns over students not dealing with news in a way that was helpful to them. So they would hear things in the news, or they would hear their peers saying things, and they would become so upset. Sometimes because it was not true, and sometimes because what they were hearing, they really felt unsafe or in jeopardy. Students who maybe had ties to illegal immigration based on their ethnicity, religious… things that they were hearing...And whether it was true or not true, especially from the teenage mind, I think that it was really raising a number of concerns, and teachers picked up on it. (Interview, March 17, 2017)

From this, we see that there was an overall feeling of uneasiness amongst the teachers in the building when thinking about how students were processing information coming from both their peers and the news. Though these tensions began during the presidential primaries of the prior school year, in the time between the election itself and inauguration day there was a distinct shift towards issues of misinformation and fake news, with an intense concern for students of immigrant families.

In addition to teachers’ reflections on the increasing strain between groups of students, I interviewed students who recounted similar experiences during the 2016-2017 period in Valley High.

**Students’ Reflections on Increasing Tensions**

Confirming what teachers shared as the impetus for the CARS Lesson, students disclosed similar experiences of racial and political tension in the building during the period following the election. Of the six students interviewed during this study, five of the participants confirmed that
the period following the election was tense, and several shared personal accounts of how these tensions affected them directly.

One student, who was not directly involved in inter-student conflict, reflected on this period in a more general way. When interviewed, Crystal summed up her observations and experiences stating,

It was kinda heated, like everyone, especially with Trump and stuff so everyone was kinda heated about it, like had their opinions.... especially with some people and their culture or whatever how they live, they were very opinionated about it.

(Interview, May 24, 2017)

Though this student did not recall any altercations that she was directly involved in, others had more vivid details to share. In one example, Tiffany shared that her boyfriend had been targeted by a group of White students when walking down the hallway towards the back of the building (Interview, May 23, 2017). Though she didn’t elaborate on the details of the altercation, Jackie, a friend of hers who was also interviewed for this study, shared the details of what escalated into a full-blown fight between students. She shared her memory of this conflict stating,

It got to the point where one week there was nothing but nonstop fights... they [White students] would just mess with people. They would mess with Black students in the hallway... And what really broke the camel’s back was, there was this one student who’s really big and tall, he’s huge, and the kids just threw a water bottle at him... didn’t even know him, just started saying racial slurs and threw a water bottle at him... and it put the whole school in a lockdown… (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Both Tiffany and Jackie viewed this incident as racially motivated, and cited language that pointed to this. Jackie in particular described a lack of concern on behalf of the staff, and so she
personally reached out to administration. Emailing the Superintendent of schools, she demanded change. Jackie explained, “...the next day I wrote an anonymous letter to the Superintendent stating this is what is really going on and it happens in the eyes of teachers sometimes and sometimes teachers don’t do anything…” (Interview, May 24, 2017). In reaction to her email, Jackie stated that there was an announcement made to the student body that racial discrimination wouldn’t be tolerated. From her perspective, teachers were aware of the tensions and discrimination against students of color, but had been turning a blind eye to such problems.

In looking back at these incidents mentioned by participants, one of the tipping points which ultimately led to the CARS Lesson seemed to be centered on students’ understanding of immigration issues. When it came to misinformation and uncertainty in the news, student participants also remembered the struggle to understand how different immigrant groups would be impacted by Trump’s presidency. Discrimination against the district’s Latino/Latina population reached younger students as well, as a Mexican American student, Laura, shared her family’s experiences as, “Dealing with the Trump election, it was a lot of racial discrimination… Well, we had actually an incident with my little brother just recently, that his friend told him to go back to Mexico…and he’s only 8 years old” (Interview, May 22, 2017). When asked to discuss her own experiences at the high school, Laura shared that she had not experienced any acts of discrimination personally, and attributed her brother’s experiences to immaturity of younger students.

Another Latina student interviewed for this study recalled conflict within the high school stemming from this political divide over immigration. Senior student Sabrina shared, “I heard a lot of stories about people saying that Trump supporters were rubbing it in the other people’s faces basically, and some people started getting threats. And it was kinda scary...” (Interview,
May 30, 2017). Going on to share her personal experiences with immigration, Sabrina disclosed that she had moved to the United States from Mexico around the age of 6, and that she was part of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Expressing a level of uncertainty with regards to her family’s fate she revealed, “Well, everyone is just kind of holding tight and watching...and we’re trying not to do anything to draw attention to us basically…” (Interview, May 30, 2017). In this instance, Sabrina was hopeful that her status would remain secure, though her uneasiness with the political climate became apparent.

Other students also recalled this turning point in the school, where students of Latin American origin or descent were specifically targeted after the election. As Tiffany stated, I feel like the whole election brought out like, the worst in people, the racist part in everybody. Because your neighbor might not like Mexicans, but now your neighbor can publicly not like Mexicans because Donald Trump doesn’t like them. Ya know? (Interview, May 23, 2017)

In addition to verbal threats experienced by students in the hallways, threats over immigration status extended to social media as well. Jackie recounted these attacks, as well as her classmates’ misunderstandings of such issues stating, “People on snapchat were like, “Oh we’re gonna get them, and go back to Mexico, go back to where you came from!” –and there’s people who were born in America. They’re just Hispanic, they’re not even Mexican!” (Interview, May 24, 2017). Here, Jackie identified one of the primary issues that teachers became aware of which led to the CARS Lesson; students on one side of the political aisle slingling threats of deportation towards other students, regardless of their ethnicity or status.

Interviews with both teachers and students revealed that the period following the 2016 presidential election was marked by interpersonal conflict amongst students, and these issues
were based around racism and anti-immigrant feelings. Ultimately these issues would become the impetus for social studies teachers to pursue critical media literacy skills in a more focused way.

**Teacher Collaboration in Planning CML Lessons**

The social studies department in this study used collaboration as a means to identify what students needed in a time of great community conflict and design the CML lesson that would fit that need. In working together, teachers designed a critical media literacy lesson for their entire student body as a means of empowerment. Monthly department meetings became a place for teachers to start the planning process. As a person who would eventually sit as a member of the lesson planning committee, Miss Gale shared her understanding of the early stages of this process stating,

> When we talked to other teachers in the building, it became clear that this was coming up the most in our social studies classes. We teach about other cultures, we teach about the U.S. government, so it’s the natural place for students to ask questions, or say things, where it would kind of come to light. So we discussed as a department, how we could deal with this — in a way that’s not partisan, that would support any student, no matter which candidate they supported, which political party. Just kind of tell them how to process things, and how to go about dealing with things in a constructive manner that was helpful — And that’s pretty much how we came up with the idea of a lesson. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

Eventually, after much deliberation and discussion, in December of 2016, volunteers were asked to join a small committee that would craft a school-wide lesson around teaching students evaluative skills in media literacy. When considering the problems they had witnessed in the
building, and contemplating the concerns of students, teachers concluded that a productive, non-partisan way to develop students’ capacity to navigate the volatile political climate of 2017 would be in developing their media literacy skills. With this, they believed that students would then be able to sort fact from fake news, and in doing so could protect themselves from harmful information, thus ultimately feeling empowered to take a stand against false claims.

The planning team for the CML lesson consisted of four teachers in the social studies department and one librarian from Valley High. Though this smaller group crafted the final lesson to be taught department-wide, the collective social studies faculty provided feedback on iterations of the lesson along the way. Most participants found this process valuable due to both the organic way in which the lesson was conceived and the continuous opportunity for feedback and revisions. At the start of the planning process, twenty-nine teachers held the intention of teaching this lesson to the entire student body on the same day.

The department’s consensus around planning the lesson sparked enthusiasm from a few participants in particular, who volunteered to be on the lesson planning committee. Mr. Crowley shared his initial reaction to this endeavor by stating, “To hear that there was going to be an organized lesson where other educators in the department would be able to kind of come together and help us all through this process was very exciting to hear” (Interview, March 9, 2017). Other teachers also embraced this opportunity, but quickly realized their goals might be somewhat unrealistic. Miss Gale shared explained her initial reactions to these efforts stating,

Not as many people wanted to jump to be a part of it, but once I did it I was like, “Oh God what did I just do?” Because that is a huge responsibility to like, fix the race problem with one lesson. That’s not realistic, but I think that that was the original big
overarching goal, but we realized very quickly that you’ve got to start with something really small, like skills, and sort of build up to the conversation. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

In addition to Miss Gale’s uncertainty around the broader goals as they were connected to the more targeted, skill-based literacy goals of the lesson, Mr. Martin found the department lesson planning somewhat abstruse. Though he reported being generally supportive of the lesson, he shared his confusion by stating,

When it started out it was basically, these kids are saying offensive things in the hall, and they are saying offensive things in [Miss Gale’s] class, and that was the anecdotal impetus for it. And at some point it evolved into this fake news thing. And I’m not sure how it went from one thing to the other. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

With regards to CML skills themselves, other department members were unsure of whether the lesson would be successful from the start, as Mr. Hayes considered this aspect sharing,

It is strange all this type of stuff, even this lesson, even the idea that something like—Hey, we’re going to go in and, in a day, do what it is in a way a lifelong skill. I mean adults don’t even have it, and even maybe I don’t have it either. (Interview, March 12, 2017)

Despite the hesitation expressed by various department members, the lesson came together, and the committee members invited voices from the entire department to weigh in on the evolving drafts.

The lesson planning process began with four social studies teachers and one school librarian who worked together during meetings and communicated through email. The first committee planning meeting was held on January 17, 2017, at the end of the school day, and the group discussion focused primarily on what topics should be addressed when developing CML
skills with students. The members eventually reached a consensus to gather news sources that addressed controversial issues and were political in nature, but remained somewhat unknown to students. For example, the committee discussed the topic of climate change as a possible topic to explore while evaluating different sources for validity. As Miss Gale stated in the meeting, “I don’t think kids know how Trump’s feels about climate change… gun laws, yes, but this I don’t know” (Committee Meeting, January 17, 2017). As they grappled with a desire to address controversial issues without igniting parent backlash, Mrs. Barre voiced her concern, stating,

The only thing, and this is totally me coming from a conservative family… Do you think that this [climate change] is an issue that would automatically get parents and everyone’s backs up if they hear that we’re doing it in class?” (Committee Meeting, January 17, 2017)

At this point in the conversation the committee turned their attention to how different sources would treat the issue of climate change, and they ultimately decided that this topic would be a “safe” controversial issue to address, rather than something such as gun laws or a woman’s right to have an abortion (Committee Meeting, January 17, 2017). The rest of the meeting was spent brainstorming on what other topics might be appropriate for the lesson, and the members left with the intention of finding possible sources during subsequent days.

At the following planning meeting on January 20, 2017, Mrs. Barre led the discussion as the goals and structure of the lesson began to take shape. In going over different objectives, one point that she stressed as being the most important was that students should be inspired to take part in social justice efforts and activism, phase 3 of CML skill building. As she reiterated this to her colleagues she stated,
We need to have a set time so that we get to number three, ‘What could you do to either stand up against something that is false or untrue, or something that’s true, but you happen to take issue with?’ I feel like the informed action part is really key, otherwise we’re just teaching a media literacy lesson, and that’s not really what we came together for. (Committee Meeting, January 20, 2017)

Here, though committee members did not have the theoretical lens of established CML research, they discussed the same methods and goals that have been promoted by scholars such as Kellner and Share (2005). Mrs. Barre even made it a point to distinguish the department’s lesson from traditional media literacy lessons which would have stopped at the evaluation of sources, rather than moving on to spark action with students.

In the following department meeting, on January 23, 2017, the planning committee presented the first draft of the lesson to the rest of the social studies faculty, and its title read, “Being an Informed Citizen” (Department Meeting, January 23, 2017). During this meeting, department members were invited to provide feedback on the lesson, and several teachers shared their views on controversial topics as content, as well as teaching the lesson on the same day. Those who spoke up were in favor of the lesson, though most of the department did not share any thoughts, instead nodding their heads in agreement that they would be comfortable with teaching the lesson in unison. At this point, the committee stated that they would share a digital folder with the group. Here, they compiled possible sources for the lesson, and the rest of the department was invited to either contribute to the folder or provide suggestions through email before the next department meeting (Observation, January 23, 2017).

In interviews, some of the committee members shared the importance of including the larger social studies team in collaborating on the CML lesson. In one example, Mrs. Barre stated,
We sent out a couple of emails saying “Oh there’s going to be another meeting, if you have anything you want us to consider…” So we tried to keep it as open and honest as possible. So this way if there was any feedback or concerns, or something, people would have different avenues where they could insert them. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

Although some department members didn’t recall being offered a seat on the committee, such as Ms. Wallace and Mr. Hayes, the planning team made deliberate efforts to include everyone in the planning process through emailing between the department meetings in January and February of 2017.

The social studies department at Valley High had historically enjoyed a certain level of autonomy with regard to their day-to-day lessons. The idea that they would now teach a single, uniform lesson on the same day was not something that was entirely accepted from the start. Mr. Martin shared his hesitation, explaining,

I’d say that my initial reaction is always to avoid tying us down into doing certain things.

So any attempt on the part of admin or even the department saying Hey I want you to teach this lesson, on this day...I’m usually not a supporter of that. (Interview, March 2, 2017)

Despite the committee’s efforts to include the wider department in the planning process, this reluctance may have led to a lack of feedback in the days leading up to the lesson’s implementation. Both Mrs. Barre and Miss Gale described a distinct absence of communication from their colleagues in the weeks between department meetings, when members were not face-to-face. As emails went out with the lesson’s iterations attached, committee members assumed that the department was in agreement. However, the committee discovered that the wider faculty
had late suggestions, which then led to last minute changes to the final CML plan. Mrs. Barre discussed the abrupt shift from the absence of input to requests for revisions, stating,

No matter how many times we sent out the lesson, nobody really expressed any concerns. So when we had the meeting where we all sat down and relayed the lesson, I was really scared. Because I had no feedback. So I went in, almost psyching myself out thinking, Oh my God if they say “I have an issue with this.”—Where were you the weeks before? But nobody did. The issues that they had were extremely constructive, that we could work with. Which was really good. But nobody sent any feedback forward, up until then. It was like this hidden thing. (Interview, March 17, 2017)

Similarly, Miss Gale shared her memory of what led to these last-minute changes stating, “It would have been nice if we had more help throughout the entire process. Like, looking up sources. It was at the eleventh hour when people said, ‘Oh here, try these sources.’ — and we’re teaching this tomorrow” (Interview, March 13, 2017). Here we see that both Mrs. Barre and Miss Gale expressed the desire for more participation from the whole department in the planning process.

Despite the frustrations expressed by some of the committee members interviewed, other teachers shared positive views of the planning process in their involvement from the periphery. Mr. Silver lauded the group’s efforts, stating, “... the way that she [Mrs. Barre] includes everybody and respects everybody, and she doesn’t have all the answers, and the way this lesson came together...and gave us multiple opportunities to weigh in... That was really great” (Interview, March 23, 2017). Similarly, Ms. Wallace praised the planning committee stating, “I think that they did a phenomenal job of putting a lesson together...When I first saw it I thought, this is very very practical, very well thought out” (Interview, March 9, 2017).
Collaboration amongst teachers was perceived as a key aspect of the planning process, despite differing perspectives as to whether it was achieved. As the date to implement the department wide CML lesson approached, there were increasing concerns on behalf of the department and administration. As a result, the lesson changed quite drastically in the days before its rollout, and these issues will be discussed in the section exploring challenges to teaching CML lessons. However, I will first discuss the final design and enactment of the lesson itself.

The CARS Lesson Plan

The final draft of the department lesson on CML skills used the acronym “CARS,” which represented the different lenses students would employ to evaluate sources and detect “fake news.” This acronym stood for: credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support (Appendix D). The stated goals of the lesson were as follows: “Help students analyze, digest and take informed action on news and information presented to them. We would like to teach students media literacy skills and help them understand how one can take a stand against false news or negative/hurtful messages.” Therefore, the CML lesson (Appendix E) was intended as both a way to develop students’ skills and as a means of empowerment — providing methods for students to advocate for themselves in the face of misinformation and discrimination.

The framing questions for the lesson were articulated as:

1. What should you do when you hear/see something that is new/alarming?
2. What process should you follow to determine if the information is true?
3. What could you do to either stand up against something that is either false or true but hurtful/negative?
Teachers would begin the lesson with either a quote or video on the importance of being an informed citizen. Suggestions were provided, but teachers were also encouraged to find a quote or video clip of their own choosing. This lesson opener would be followed by a “hook,” where students would physically place themselves somewhere along an imaginary “value line” in the room, thus identifying how important honesty was to them. Teachers had the option of using any of the provided questions to engage students in this activity (Figure 4).

This activity was intended to engage students in thinking about the validity of information, and to “buy in” to the task of identifying fake news both within, and outside of the classroom setting. Following this was a “warm-up” sorting activity, where several headlines from the text set would be provided such as, “Jason Pierre-Paul Blows Off Other Hand After His Samsung Galaxy Note 7 Explodes” (Oliver, 2016), and “Bees Can Learn to Play ‘Soccer.’ Score One for Insect Intelligence” (Handwerk, 2017). Students would be arranged in small groups, and work with those same classmates for the duration of the lesson.
Referring to the headlines on the board, students would sort them into three categories: credible, credible but biased, and fake. After students made up their minds about each of the headlines, teachers would go around the room and have students volunteer to share their processes, and describe how they arrived at their conclusions.

For the majority of the period, and for the main learning task, students looked at a single article with a critical media literacy lens, referring to the CARS handout in order to determine that article’s value and credibility. There were ten article links provided to teachers within the digital lesson plan. These articles were pre-grouped for teachers into categories labeled: untrue/fake news, biased news, or good news. In addition, these were all described as “possible resources,” as teachers were given the choice to find their own materials as well. The exercise would conclude with students providing their assessment of the source, while the teacher would either verify or challenge their findings. After completing the evaluation activity, the entire lesson would close with the teacher asking students to brainstorm and consider what one could do in the face of: (a) information that is found to be untrue, or (b) factual information that is troubling. Finally, an op-ed writing assignment was included as a possible extension activity for students to further apply their CML skills. This option was prescribed as:

Have students construct an Op-Ed piece (150-200 words) that address misrepresentation of information or an issue of their concern based on true information. In their piece, students must use reliable source(s) to disprove or prove their point of view. Students must use at least 3 different sources to fact check. Perhaps offer suggestions in your class as to possible topics/issues.

Ultimately none of the teachers observed or interviewed for this study assigned the extension activity to their students. In addition, only Mrs. Barre completed all of the tasks outlined in the
lesson plan, including the brainstorming activity at the end (Classes, March 3 & March 6, 2017). With this, teachers found ways to incorporate pieces of the CARS Lesson into their own teaching style and needs of each course.

**The CARS Lesson Enacted**

In bringing the CML lesson into their classrooms, teachers taught a single lesson in several different ways. Teachers made decisions to place the lesson at different points in their curriculum, as well as changing key components of the plan itself.

In March of 2017, I observed seven teachers enacting the CARS Lesson, with six of those lessons implemented on the intended day, March 3, 2017. One teacher participant, Mr. Silver, taught the lesson later in the month, on March 23, 2017. I observed that three teachers chose to follow the lesson plan almost faithfully, one teacher followed most aspects of the plan (while changing the order of its elements), and three teachers utilized the CARS handout while omitting three or more aspects of the lesson plan altogether. Areas of the original plan were altered when considering issues of time and how each teacher believed this lesson would best fit within their curriculum.

When the day came for all of the social studies teachers at Valley High to teach the CML lesson, there were many adjustments that had been made to the original plan in the week before its rollout. Despite their best efforts to design a lesson that would be approved and implemented by every social studies teacher, contextual forces would result in the involvement of administration and resulting changes in: the language teachers used, the sources students evaluated, and finally, with the abandonment of a simultaneous enactment of the lesson. These issues will be discussed further in the section titled *Challenges to CML in the Classroom*. Here, I will examine the similarities and differences of each teacher’s approach to the same lesson.
Framing the CML (CARS) Lesson for Students

There were two distinct ways in which teachers discussed the need for CML skills with students. In classroom observations, teachers introduced the CARS Lesson to students framing it as either (a) an extension of their existing academic work in media literacy, or as (b) something they could apply to their non-academic lives.

The two teachers that I observed framing the CARS Lesson as an extension of prior academic work were Mr. Martin and Mr. Silver. Both teachers referenced research projects that students were to complete as part of the course, and drew their students’ attention to the idea of applying the CARS Lesson to their academic work. In his ninth grade Honors Global History class, Mr. Martin introduced the lesson to students as a “step away” from their current unit on the Middle Ages, and as something to use for a research project appearing later in the year. He stressed the lesson’s goal stating, “The single most important aspect of this is, how do you find good sources?” (Class, March 3, 2017). Mr. Martin then went on to describe it as the “core” of a future project. Similarly, Mr. Silver referenced a research project for his Global History II Honors students, but in contrast they had already completed this earlier in the year. In his introduction, he framed the lesson as being an extension of the media literacy skills that students had already begun developing within their existing coursework (Class, March 23, 2017).

Whereas these two teachers were engaging students in honors courses and had research projects built into their course, the remaining five teacher participants chose to describe these skills in a somewhat different light.

In contrast to the two honors teachers’ classrooms, all of the Regents or lower-level teachers framed the lesson in the context of developing skills that students would need beyond the classroom, in addition to their academic work. For example, in his introduction to the lesson
Mr. Crowley juxtaposed the topic as something separate from their normal curriculum. As he stated to students, “We are going to be looking at some skills that can be used in a social studies classroom, or in life...to determine the credibility and reliability of info—in Instagram or primary [source] documents” (Class, March 3, 2017). In addition, he reiterated the importance of applying CML skills within the context of students’ outside lives by closing the lesson with,

This is something when you’re going through your social media feeds and receiving information, I don’t expect you to take out your CARS sheet and ask yourself “Is this credible?” but this is a process that if you integrate it into your daily lives, you should question the sources of your information casually, when you’re going through social media. It’s useful in life, it’s useful within a social studies classroom... we’re definitely going to be using this later in the year, especially with documents, because the source is very meaningful in extracting the truth. This is what it’s all about. (Class, March 6, 2017)

In a similar tone, Miss Gale began class by talking about the skills-based lesson as being both outside of what students had been learning, but necessary for work that they do later in the year. In her Global History II Regents class, also co-taught with a Special Education teacher, Miss Gale revealed the motivation behind a “break from Global” by stating to students, “We’re not sure you know exactly where information is coming from, blogging, etc...Where do you get it [news] from?” (Class, March 3, 2017). In response to this prompt, students volunteered their preferred news sources, which included: Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, and another unnamed news app on a student’s phone (Class, March 3, 2017). In having students consider where they obtained their news, Mr. Crowley, Miss Gale, Mrs. Wallace, Mrs. Barre, and Mr. Hayes all began to engage their students in the CML lesson by drawing their attention directly to their non-
academic lives. By framing the lesson this way, students could begin to see the relevance and necessity of developing these skills, and thereby “buy in” on a more personal level.

This first difference between the two “tracks” of classes was notable in that CML skills were framed differently for different groups of students. Whether pursuing academic skills or life skills, all of the classes observed were engaged in a critical evaluation of information. Therefore, despite these differences in entry points, teachers found ways to weave CML into their coursework.

Grappling with a Spectrum of Credibility

In classroom observations, four teachers used common language around validity of sources and openly discussed a “spectrum of credibility.” Though this was not a point made anywhere in the lesson plan or handout to students, Mr. Crowley, Mrs. Barre, Mr. Martin, and Mr. Hayes all discussed this sliding scale of credibility with students openly in classroom discussions.

Despite several teachers omitting one or more of the introductory activities in the lesson plan, all of the observed classes spent the majority of each period (25 minutes or more) applying the CML skills found in the CARS handout to selected texts. Students examined articles for: credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support. All of the teachers allowed students to work in small groups or pairs, and by the end of each lesson there were whole class discussions based on what texts students found to be more or less credible. In some classes, students looked to teachers for a “yes—no” answer as to whether a source could be trusted. Though several teachers tiptoed around providing a finite answer, some made it apparent to students that there were in fact degrees of credibility and reliability.
In one example, Mr. Crowley walked students through the articles, determining where they should fall on what he described as a “spectrum of credibility.” With this, rather than making a definitive judgement about some of the articles, he stressed several times across two days (Classes, March 3 and 6, 2017) that the sources appeared somewhere along this spectrum of credibility. Instead of giving his ninth graders a concrete answer, he continued to draw students’ attention to the different characteristics to look for when evaluating sources. In a similar fashion, Mrs. Barre was one teacher who placed an actual line on her board for students to physically map out the articles, ranking them from “most credible” to “least credible” at the front of the room. At the end of the lesson, she wrote on the board where she believed the different articles should land on the spectrum of credibility, and students were left with a clear picture of their ranking, according to her judgement (Class, March 3, 2017).

Whereas several teachers satiated students with their answers as to which articles were more or less credible, Mr. Martin’s critical standpoint never rested on a definitive answer for students. He provided no clear remarks about whether or not you could trust one website over another, and instead pushed students to continually reconsider their sources. In an example of this, a student volunteered that Wikipedia was a faulty source by stating, “Well it can always be edited, and what it might say one day can be changed the next” (Class, March 3, 2017). Rather than affirming this student’s point, Mr. Martin pushed back, asking whether that aspect of the site should be considered “an inherently bad thing.” Further challenging students to consider what they understood as fact, he posited, “history and collective knowledge is always changing” (Observation, March 3, 2017). After his students worked through the process of applying the CARS method to different historical websites on the Roman Empire, Mr. Martin discussed their findings in the context of what you may or may not want to avoid in your research. With this, he
discussed the same spectrum of credibility as his colleagues, and left students with the task of placing information at varying points along that line.

With similar ambiguity, Mr. Hayes positioned himself from a critical standpoint by asking his sociology students whether they could ever really “know” something as true. During his CARS Lesson he stated, “In a way this is what we’ve been talking about since day one…perception, reality, this has been going on—people have been trying to know about the world for a long time” (Class, March 3, 2017). Though students were given the CARS handout prior to the day’s lesson, the class mainly focused on questions of: information, misinformation, disinformation, truth, bias, and reality. Here, as was the case with Mr. Martin’s class, when students offered an idea, Mr. Hayes most frequently responded socratically; he asked additional questions while pushing students to reflect on how they had come to know or trust information (Class, March 3, 2017).

Whether clearly taking a critical standpoint on the reliability of knowledge or discussing a spectrum of credibility as something clear and more static, teachers found ways to engage students in CML practices in their social studies classrooms. In questioning historical information or news outlets and other contemporary media, students were able to apply the CARS principles to a variety of texts as teachers guided them along the way.

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Successes and Challenges Related to the CARS Lesson**

In interviews following the designated CARS day, teachers reflected on the general success of planning and enacting a department-wide CML lesson. Overall, there was a sense of satisfaction with several key aspects of the department lesson, such as: the opportunity to collaborate, the structure of the lesson, and overall value of CML skills in students’ lives. However, there were also significant themes that emerged as challenges to teaching the original
CARS Lesson, including: bias and its effect on credibility, community and administrative values and pressures, “fake news” as a politically loaded term, authentically connecting CML skills to students’ lives, and content driven curricular demands (see Table 11).

Table 11

*Themes Related to Teachers' Perceptions of the Successes and Challenges of the CARS Lesson*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Collaboration</td>
<td>Teachers value the opportunity to collaborate on curricular goals and lesson designs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARS Handout</td>
<td>CARS handout gave students concrete practices to apply when consuming information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Media Literacy Skill Building</td>
<td>Teachers and students engaged in important CML skills (either newly introduced or building on prior lessons).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection of Bias and Credibility</td>
<td>Bias is a difficult concept for students to fully understand and identify. The connections between bias and credibility therefore become problematic in CML skill building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Context</td>
<td>Political climate can lead to changes in how CML is addressed with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Pressure</td>
<td>Administration may interfere with what teachers feel are best practices when addressing CML.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Demands</td>
<td>CML skill building competes with the demand to cover existing social studies content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Teacher Bias</td>
<td>Teachers struggle with pressures to appear “neutral” whether from internal motivation, fear of parent backlash, or administrative pressure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apolitical Sources</td>
<td>When using apolitical sources for CML skill building, there may be a lack of engagement and/or relevancy for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting CML Skills to Lived Experiences</td>
<td>Despite being able to apply CML practices in academic settings, there may be a lack of connection to students’ lives outside of school.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The Successes of CARS

When asked to “rate” the level of success of the CARS Lesson, teachers most frequently began noting the positive aspects of the lesson. In interviews, they discussed common themes regarding the perceived benefits of the CARS Lesson, which included: an opportunity for teachers to collaborate and design a concrete lesson geared towards developing CML, which they all cited as being a necessary skill set for students to possess.

Teachers Value Opportunities to Collaborate

As the social studies department in this case consisted of almost thirty members, the CARS Lesson provided a unique opportunity for the entire department to contribute to a school-wide lesson, and the discussion between department members in itself was seen as an important benefit of the planning process.

A sense of enthusiasm for the lesson and overall comradery amongst the larger group was noted by the department’s coordinator, Mrs. Barre, as she stated, “I feel like the honesty of everyone is what made it even a possibility. Knowing our department, we have very passionate people in our department…. But this is a hard sell and so if they didn’t believe in it, I don’t think that it would have gone over” (Interview, March 17, 2017). Mr. Crowley shared his own initial thoughts about being part of a department-wide collaboration, as he stated,

For me, I was very excited to hear about a department-wide lesson… To hear that there was going to be an organized lesson where other educators in the department would be able to kind of come together and help us all through this process was very exciting to hear. (Interview, March 9, 2017)

The respect for one another as professionals, and the desire to work together was also noted by Mr. Silver. In thinking about how this was a unique and valuable opportunity he noted,
We have a great department and everyone just contributed to it nicely. It was a great process and I hope we can do more stuff like this...For PLCs [Professional Learning Communities] all we want is to share. Let’s talk about lessons. (Interview, March 23, 2017)

How this lesson came together provided value in and of itself, as this was something clear from the interviews with teachers across the study. Thus, the experience of planning the CARS Lesson was an added benefit to social studies teachers beyond providing students with CML skills alone, as this was the organic product of authentic conversations amongst department members.

**CML Skill Building**

Most significantly, teachers cited the importance and success of building CML skills through the use of the CARS Lesson. The value of this was discussed in the context of either introducing important strategies to students who have not otherwise practiced CML skills in the past, or extending the practices that have already been established for others. Mr. Martin shared how the lesson fit seamlessly into his ongoing CML skill building within the course, as he stated,

"They’re [students] pretty much going to do that same exercise. They’re going to google it, “Mongol battle tactics,” and they’re going to find 10 websites, and they’re going to have to figure out which are the two best and justify it. Actually write it up, why is this the best, and why is this reliable...We try to get them to actually produce that information and think about it. So this was kind of a first step in that. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

In this example, Mr. Martin described how the CARS Lesson served as an introduction to practices that would become a cornerstone in later academic work.
Whether teachers would return to these practices in a deliberate way or not, others cited their satisfaction with having a clear starting point towards CML skill building. Miss Gale discussed the CARS Lesson as a first step for her students to evaluate information. In her reflection on the lesson’s success she shared,

   I feel like at least with this, we gave them some tools. They may not remember them all, but we gave them the tools. So that’s why I think that it’s important to do it every so often to remind them of those skills, because if you just do it once, and don’t do it again, they’ll be back to where they started. So at least you have a piece of paper for the things that they have to check, every time they look at a source. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

The concrete skills that students could return to were something that teachers described as both valuable life skills, as well as an important part of teachers’ broader curricular goals.

   In making a concerted effort to address CML with students, teachers also described how they took steps towards better preparing students for the shifts in state mandated assessments.

Mrs. Barre shared such sentiments, stating,

   I think what helped us also, is that the skills that we were looking to teach the students are in line with the way the new Regents exam is set up, and the push in social studies where it’s now, instead of just feeding them content, it’s evaluating sources and being able to determine which sources are credible and not credible and what do you look for. (Interview, March 17, 2017)

Similarly, Mr. Crowley noted, “I think that it fits perfectly, even with the test this year, if you’re just focusing on that, just working with documents and understanding sources. It fits in really well” (Interview, March 9, 2017). Therefore, the CARS Lesson was seen as an additional success
in how the skills fit into both teachers’ course goals as well as future shifts in social studies practices.

The two main benefits to teaching the CARS Lesson centered around opportunities for authentic discussion and collaboration amongst teachers, and the ways in which this lesson provided concrete skills for students to carry throughout their coursework. Despite these positive points in teachers’ reflections, there were many different areas where teachers expressed that the lesson itself could have had a greater impact on students as a whole.

**Challenges to the Success of CARS**

Despite the successes of this singular lesson on CML, there were notable challenges identified by teachers across the board such as: confusion around the identification and intersection of key terms such as bias and credibility, navigating teacher bias alongside administrative pressures, using apolitical sources for CML and the feasibility of connecting these lessons to students’ lived experiences, and creating time for CML while negotiating teacher autonomy and curricular demands.

**The Intersection of Bias and Credibility**

One issue that became evident in my observations centered around the use of the terms bias and credibility in discussion. Teachers and students often used these terms without explicitly stating how one might affect the other, despite both terms being used frequently in discussion, and connected on the CARS Lesson handout (Appendix D). Teachers discussed the problems around student understandings of bias, and how these would in turn affect their ability to evaluate credibility (Figure 5).

This issue was raised in the initial planning phase of the CARS Lesson by Mr. Silver, who voiced his concerns during a large group department meeting but those thoughts failed to
gain much traction. Though he raised the question of how teachers would handle the conversations with students around bias and credibility, other department members were less concerned, as he recalled, “I think a lot of people just felt that the distinction… That it wasn’t a big deal and that we could just talk about the two together…” (Interview, March 23, 2017).

However, in his iteration of the CARS Lesson, Mr. Silver was in fact one of two teachers who did make this distinction for students and attempted to discuss the relationship between bias and credibility. He stated to the class, “Bias is something we need to be aware of, it doesn’t necessarily disqualify us” (Class, March 23, 2017). In a similar vein Mrs. Barre’s co-teacher, Mr. Doyle, summed up this sentiment for students, stating, “Bias is not a bad thing, she’s [the author] just showing her view” (Class, March 6, 2017).

Further demonstrating how difficult it may be for students to understand bias and credibility, while walking through the CARS handout with students Mr. Martin stated,
“Everything is biased… and that one is often tough to find” (Class, March 3, 2017). Similarly, Mrs. Barre reflected on the difficult and elusive nature of developing such skills with students. In her work with juniors and seniors she shared,

We’ve done a little bit in terms of primary source reading and bias. But they’re more apt to pick up on things that are totally false as opposed to bias. I think that bias for students is extremely hard for them to recognize. (Interview, March 17, 2017)

With these examples we see that bias as a term becomes problematic for students, as they are familiar with it as an adjective, but have trouble truly identifying and defining it. Furthermore, the ambiguity becomes compounded when applying it to evaluating for credibility.

As teachers noted how difficult identifying bias was for students, Miss Gale discussed the need for more explicit instruction on the matter. She shared,

The focus of the lesson is whether or not something is credible. But if something has bias it does not necessarily make something not credible, but you have to look at it through a different lens. And if they don’t understand the evidence piece and needing evidence, then they won’t understand bias. (Interview, March 17, 2017)

Here, bias is described as something of a lens to apply towards the evaluation of information’s credibility. Miss Gale connected evidence to credibility and identified it as a step in the direction of evaluating a source. The teacher sees a consideration of bias coming after this first step without negating the source’s overall credibility.

In order to make these points clearer, some teachers discussed the need to revisit bias in later lessons. As Mr. Silver stated,

I’m hoping we can tease it out tomorrow a little more. But I think that on some level a lot of the kids get it. I kind of said it before, when we were reading through it…it’s not
exactly right the way it’s done… “How truthful it is, you look for bias.” So I said, “You should be aware of bias, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s not truthful.” And so maybe that sunk in, as I said we have looked at things before with regard to that.

(Interview, March 23, 2017)

In this example, the teacher shares his desire to explore the significance of bias, but similarly to Miss Gale, makes it a point to state that the appearance of bias does not automatically discredit a source. In reflecting on the language of the CARS Lesson where bias is mentioned as, “Goal: A source that is truthful and unbiased” (Appendix D), Mr. Silver finds the connection between bias and credibility problematic, and thus would like to further discuss the issue with his students in subsequent lessons.

Whereas teachers discussed how difficult bias was for students to grasp, we will see in later sections that students confirm their struggle to define and identify bias in sources. With bias being a necessary part of a CML discussion, teachers and students struggled to tease apart its relationship to credibility.

**Community Context and Administrative Pressures**

A slew of external challenges cropped up during the final days leading up to the CARS Lesson. The community’s political climate would ultimately put pressure on administration to in turn put pressure on teachers to change the nature of their CML lesson. At the request of administration, teachers made several significant changes to the plan, and the perceived effectiveness of the lesson was diminished as a result.

For better understanding of the final lesson’s context, it should be noted that in the two weeks prior to the rollout date, a department member helped to organize a student-led teach-in on race. The event itself had mixed reviews from community members, and pressure mounted for
the social studies department to become “less political.” The teach-in event had been run as an “in school field trip,” where teachers could choose to bring their entire class or individual students could obtain a permission slip from parents, thereby being excused from their normal schedule. The results of this included a wrath of community scrutiny; critics made claims about teachers’ liberal views being forced onto children, and declared school was not the place to discuss issues of racism. In comments gathered from the school’s Facebook account, reactions to the teach-in included statements such as, “Mentally ill school system” and “Nothing fosters understanding like indoctrinating kids with anti-White, anti-American and anti-Semitic speakers.” The community reaction was such that several local news outlets covered the story, and in response to this “bad press,” the district released an official statement providing more information about the intentions behind the teach-in and their “no tolerance” stance on racism in schools. Ultimately, this development taking place just two weeks before the CARS Lesson would result in a clear shift away from the social studies department presenting a unified message on “fake news.”

At the final department meeting before the CARS Lesson on February 27, there was an open conversation concerning the risks of using the expression “fake news” with students, and in an unusual occurrence, the building principal sat in on the meeting. Mrs. Wallace described the atmosphere at the last meeting before the CARS day sharing,

I think the climate... that there’s a lack of trust between the faculty and the administration. If there’s something that were to go wrong, how far and how deep would they back us up? And then I got the impression that they didn’t even want us to do the lesson... Because they kept asking us at the department meeting, because they didn’t want to deal with the backlash. (Interview, March 9, 2017)
Within the meeting, the building principal chose not to share anything openly, but instead sat quietly at the front of the room. After discussing how to avoid further backlash from community members, there were distinct directives given by Mrs. Barre: teachers should not use the term “fake news” with students, teachers could choose to teach the lesson on the designated day or teach the lesson on a day of their choosing at any point through the end of the year, and finally, they would not use articles that could be perceived as political in nature (Department Meeting, February 27, 2017). Ultimately these three changes were most frequently discussed by teachers as having a negative impact on the effectiveness of the CARS Lesson.

“Fake News” as a Loaded Term and Avoiding Teacher Bias

Evaluation of information’s credibility is a cornerstone of critical media literacy, but when using a term like “fake news” becomes controversial in itself, new challenges to teaching CML skills arise. Teachers found it difficult to remain unbiased when the very mention of fake news exposed them to student and/or parent backlash.

In the final meeting before the CARS Lesson day, it was determined that “fake news” would not be a part of the CARS Lesson. Mr. Crowley remembered the initial impetus for this change, stating,

There was a two-week span in the media where fake news was the term to throw around and both sides accusing the other of pushing fake news and encouraging spreading fake news stories… Trump really started to condemn major media sources, like the New York Times and CNN. He had been doing that for a while, but there was a time when it really escalated. You have Trump supporters being able to discredit all mainstream media. And so with that I think it definitely, a lesson like the one we were constructing, could easily be twisted as a political agenda. (Interview, March 9, 2017)
Participants indicated that Trump’s adoption of the term “fake news” gave leverage to their students on the right and could leave teachers vulnerable to backlash if they pushed forward with the lesson being framed in its original form. The CARS Lesson itself was initially designed to parse apart “real” from “fake,” and would ask students to weigh news articles concerning important social and political issues, such as climate change and immigration. However, the first roadblock for the CARS Lesson was the omission of the term “fake,” and teachers shared that avoiding this term altogether became a difficult task when building CML skills with students. Miss Gale, also a planning committee member, reflected on the shift in language stating,

It all was about to explode — and I didn’t want to lose what we were about to do. So it wasn’t the original plan but I think if I had said the word “fake news” immediately it would have been, ‘Well Trump said…’ and ‘The media…’ they would have just word vomited and it would have been lost. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

Here, Miss Gale illustrated her hesitation with the term “fake news,” describing how her students digressed from the lesson’s goals should it be used in class discussion.

Not only had “fake news” become problematic for teachers, but the overall tension between students continued throughout the 2016-2017 school year, and made it difficult for teachers to navigate their own biases in the classroom with regards to a variety of issues. In some cases, this resulted in an avoidance towards discussing different issues with their classes. In the case of Mr. Silver, he recalled his hesitation in discussing CML skills and current events with students before the CARS Lesson, as a new ban on Muslim immigrants became official policy. He recalled,

[M]ost recently, the Muslim ban. I thought a lot about how I was going to... not to make it a debate, that particular one, but to educate. So for me to say, show them, what’s in it,
what’s not in it, as objectively as I could, then ask it to them, solicit it from them, what do you think the pros and cons of the policy are? And so, [I] wrote them on the board, different kids were saying different things...And so I think that worked well in all of the classes just in terms of, they can see that this is controversial. They can see how different people think about it. But we’re not going to get into it, it just didn’t feel right, because of that kind of [political] rift in the class. (Interview, March 23, 2017)

In addition to feeling an internal pressure to stay away from hot button topics, other teachers reported a sense that students themselves did not want to broach certain issues. With the heightened tension within the local community, and nation as a whole, Mrs. Barre described how her students seemed fatigued by social and political issue discussions that were so important to the CARS Lesson, stating,

Like I said, it’s weird. I’ve taught through I don’t know how many elections, and it’s never been like this before. This is 18 years. So, ya know, there’s been contentious things before, but it’s totally different...They’re really not into talking about politics, and many other teachers have said that also. It’s almost like they’re overwhelmed with everything, so they don’t want to talk about it. But it’s just this feeling of, constant, “Oh are you teaching this way, or that way?” And it’s not from the students, I feel like it’s more the community and the media... (Interview, March 17, 2017)

Finally, in order to avoid being labeled “biased” themselves, some teachers reported difficulty in creating the knowledge base that they described as being necessary to successfully address political issues with students. In order to navigate their own biases, teachers discussed the ways in which they needed to understand multiple perspectives regarding issues, and that this in itself requires a great deal of effort. Miss Gale shared,
To be factual, I need to be ahead of the curve. Because when they ask me things, I need to make sure that I know the answers to it. And a lot of times I don’t, and I say that I’ll look them up. And then that means I need to do more research watching CNN and Fox news, and I have to watch both, and it becomes time consuming to make sure that you stay neutral. Because if I only watch one or the other then I’m giving them biased information. That’s what we’re trying to stay away from. (Interview, March 17, 2017)

Because of these difficulties in keeping up with multiple perspectives and navigating different stakeholders’ perspectives, teachers ultimately described the ways in which it was difficult to discuss political or social issues with students, and therefore the chosen texts for the CARS Lesson changed drastically. The department’s final decision was to use apolitical sources, and several teachers discussed the challenges associated with this change.

**Connecting the CARS Lesson to Students’ Lives While Using Apolitical Sources**

Despite their best efforts in “hooking” students through questions about social media and the importance of truth, some teachers shared that using apolitical sources challenged their ability to make the CARS Lesson truly relevant to students’ lives. In addition, they conveyed that the leap between seeing CML as academic skills and personal skills was too great.

Mr. Martin reflected on the lesson’s failure to ameliorate the issues originally voiced by the department, as he recalled,

> We did this lesson about what’s a reliable website and how can you tell? But I’m not sure any of the kids make the connection between that and ‘Alright I saw something on Facebook, how do I know if it’s true or not?’ Which I think was kind of the intended point of it, right? (Interview, March 13, 2017)
This disconnect was also mentioned by Mr. Crowley, who shared his dissatisfaction with the ultimate product explaining,

Although I think sourcing is a really important skill and I think that the lesson went well and they understood why sourcing is important, there was definitely some lapses in just understanding that and what they experience in real life...There’s no way that someone is seeing a meme on Instagram, even if it’s political, and saying ‘What’s the story? Let me pull out my CARS sheet.’ (Interview, March 9, 2017)

The tenuous relationship between students’ academic and personal experiences was further stressed by perhaps the most substantial change to the CARS Lesson. In the last department meeting before the lesson’s launch date, the department coordinator, Mrs. Barre, made clear that teachers were not permitted to use any articles that could be perceived as “political.” The sources that were recommended in the final lesson document included sources that addressed more “lighthearted” topics such as: celebrity gossip, sports, human health, and animal science, to name a few. Because of this change, several teachers reflected on a lack of substance that had once been the driving force behind the lesson. Mrs. Barre questioned whether this was a major threat to the lesson’s success, stating, “Can you do a lesson like that without being political? I think we could, but I’m not sure that it was as effective” (Interview, March 17, 2017).

In thinking about how the overall goals of the lesson had shifted with the last-minute changes, Miss Gale shared, “I’m surprised that they were like, ‘No politics. Be neutral.’ But I know why they did. The goals of the lesson had changed, and I think that if we had brought in politics then it would have been lost” (Interview, March 13, 2017). In this instance, teachers appeared to feel pressure coming from above to avoid a political debate with students, and/or
parents. The majority of these teachers expressed some level of fear regarding accusations of indoctrination. Teachers were divided on whether politics should be used in the teaching of critical media literacy at all. Some teachers, such as Mr. Martin, believed that neutrality was an impossible goal, while others stood firm that by not vocalizing their opinions explicitly, they were maintaining neutrality in the classroom. Mrs. Barre expressed her frustration with the potential misperception of her impact on students, sharing,

It’s almost like you can’t mention politics and not have someone feel that you’re biased. I will say that talking about politics in my classroom is extremely difficult this year...It’s such a tense environment. So I feel that the lesson was not as effective because there’s that, I have to stay neutral. Not even neutral but I can’t even address or tie in politics.

(Interview, March 17, 2017)

In her account of the unique atmosphere of the 2016-2017 school year, Mrs. Barre described a heightened sense of pressure to stay away from hot-button topics in classroom conversations.

Mr. Crowley also noted that if the original lesson had been taught using articles that addressed social or political issues in the news, teachers could have opened themselves up as targets stating, “A lesson like the one we were constructing could easily be twisted as a…political agenda” (Interview, March 9, 2017). As a result, he concluded that in using sources that failed to address deeper social or political issues, the lesson lost its ability to engage students in more meaningful CML skill building. He explained,

I felt restricted...and I also felt disappointed because I felt that by taking politics completely out of it you also lose a certain level of engagement with the students and an opportunity to really resonate with what they are really experiencing outside of school.

(Interview, March 9, 2017)
This sentiment, along with those cited before it, illustrates a major problem that teachers identified within the final version of the CARS Lesson. In taking politics out of the lesson, teachers surmised that it failed to engage students and was unsuccessful in connecting to students’ non-academic experiences outside of school.

Teacher Autonomy and Curricular Demands

The final challenge to teaching the CARS Lesson centered on teachers abandoning the unified message of teaching CML skills on a single day. As teachers wanted to avoid accusations of indoctrination, they were given the choice to teach the CARS Lesson on the predetermined date, or at a convenient time within their curriculum. Not only did some teachers fail to incorporate the CARS Lesson into their curriculum, but some also noted that students failed to see the importance of CML skills as more than a “one off” exercise in sourcing.

Though some teachers were relieved to hear that they could in fact choose their day to teach these CML skills, Miss. Gale indicated that this flexibility lessened the impact of the lesson. She shared,

Because we couldn’t do it on the same day, I don’t know if it had the same effect.
Because the whole point of it was everyone would disseminate the same information… and I understand why it wasn’t, because for some classes, it just didn’t fit. But I am worried that some of the teachers are not going to teach it...And maybe they do it on purpose... maybe it’s, I don’t have the time, and they don’t. (Interview, March 13, 2017)

Though Miss Gale did not know it at the time, there were in fact teachers who did not enact the CARS Lesson during that year. Mr. Faber, who was originally on the planning committee, was one such teacher who had difficulty fitting the lesson into his curriculum. In his interview, he
agreed that the lesson had lost its impact as a larger social studies department effort. He shared
his thoughts on this shift, stating,

    We should have said, “Hey we’re going to teach this lesson across the board, on such and
such a day.” I think it would’ve been better in hindsight... because then the events of the
real world begin to happen, and you feel the need to cover certain things as they
occur...And you’re running out of time, so the ability to teach it, I think kind of loses its
importance, or its immediate importance. I think it would’ve been better. (Interview, May
24, 2017)

Despite some teachers wishing there had been a stronger stance on teaching the CARS Lesson
simultaneously, there were others who enjoyed the freedom to teach the lesson at their choosing,
and in fact disagreed with the idea of being told what and when to teach something in the first
place. Mr. Martin, being one such department member shared, “I just don’t like the idea of us all
teaching the same thing at the same time... I just don’t think that will ever be successful because
we have such different personalities and different teaching styles and different relationships with
our students” (Interview, March 13, 2017). This view was shared only by Mr. Martin, whereas
the other teachers all agreed that the impact of the lesson would have been greater had they
taught it in unison. In addition, several teachers noted that they appreciated the flexibility built
into the lesson itself in terms of optional sources and learning tasks that could be tailored to suit
each teacher’s individual preference.

    In thinking about the overall success of the CARS Lesson, teachers described the two
major benefits of the process as being (a) the opportunity to work collaboratively on a common
goal, and (b) engaging in direct instruction on critical media literacy skills. However, what
became the biggest hindrance to achieving their stated goals had to do with the avoidance of all
things political. Whether the result of omitting the term “fake news” or from the absence of certain “hot button” political or social topics, teachers described how the relevance of the lesson was thus compromised, and how students failed to see the importance of using CML skills in their everyday lives.
Students indicated that CML skills were an important part of the social studies curriculum. Though several had difficulty defining terms such as media literacy and bias, all of the participants expressed a desire to develop their skills in evaluating information such as current events. Here I discuss how students reported both their media consumption habits and their key takeaways from the CARS Lesson.

**Family and Social Media: How Students Get Their News**

All six student participants indicated that they discussed current events at home with their families, and that they use social media to pursue topics of their own interests. Whereas half of the students discussed specific ways in which they directly access news, half of the participants discussed their relationship with news as being more passive in nature.

The first news outlet that students cited were their homes, in the context of family discussions. All of the participants indicated that their families talked about current events with them directly, and several were able to name specific media sources that were most often aired in their homes. As Jackie shared,

> I do talk about it [news] with my father at home. My father watches the news every day. He watches CNN...and the local ones — the local news stations, *ABC Eyewitness News*… Those are the only ones I can think of. He reads AOL News on the computer as well.”

(Interview, May 24, 2017)

Similarly, Laura mentioned that her family would often watch CNN on the television at her house and stated that she would “sometimes” discuss news stories with her parents. However, she shared, “It’s just on in the background,” revealing that she was more often not actively engaged in her family’s dialogue around current events (Interview, May 22, 2017).
Though he did not name a specific news outlet, Michael also described a more indirect relationship with news and politics at home. Sharing that his parents talked about politics “every day,” he seemed to express a similar disconnect with the news being discussed by his family. He described his treatment of the news with the following,

My relationship is very vague. I do not listen that much whatsoever. If I do it’s just to check the weather on my phone... I would say that I just let it [news] wash over me because one, it doesn’t really phase me anymore — and even if you keep up on top of it and watch people’s comments it’s just like a grain of sand that you turn into a big pile of rocks that just bothers you. Like you basically just ignore it, day by day, because you can’t do anything about it. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Though Laura’s reasons for her lack of interest in news is unknown, here we see that Michael begins to describe why he avoided politics at home or otherwise. His “vague” relationship with current events resulted from a barrage of commentary on social media and personal feelings of being powerless in the face of troubling news. Whereas some of the teacher participants speculated that these issues may be cause for their students not wanting to discuss politics, here we have one student that perhaps confirms that suspicion.

While some students played a less active role in their media consumption at home, there were others who took a more direct approach to understanding current events and engaging in family discussions. Several student participants shared how they engaged in such dialogue quite regularly with their families. Crystal, for example, disclosed that her own politics were incompatible with her parents’, and found herself debating “hot-button” issues such as the Affordable Care Act. Here she described one such discussion with her parents as:
We got into a conversation about it, how they’re cancelling — what is it called? Post-after care or whatever? Like rape and C-sections — and I was like, “Yeah. You guys voted for the guy and now we’re going to have a lot of our care taken away” — and they were kind of like, “Yeah we didn’t see that coming…” My stepmom is like, “What if we have kids and stuff and I have a C-section. I can’t get that coverage? That’s crazy!” And then I was like, “Yeah he’s taking away a lot of our stuff like, as women too, that we need.” … I think I heard that on social media. It brought up the pre-existing conditions, and what pre-existing conditions are.” (Interview, May 24, 2017).

To gain better clarity, the issue that Crystal mentions here involves the viral story concerning a bill proposed by the GOP that would classify rape and cesareans as “pre-existing conditions” in healthcare matters (Lee, 2017). Here we see that despite one perspective being held by Crystal’s family at home, she has a stance that is quite different. With her differences in opinion, she pursued different perspectives and media outlets on her own, equipping her to bring counterpoints to her parents’ views. What allowed her to do this, was the use of social media.

In addition to Crystal, other student participants discussed using social media as their primary news outlet. Sabrina described her personal impetus behind this stating,

I don’t have cable at my house so we don’t watch the news and my parents were like, “We really need to update ourselves.” And I’m like “There’s apps.” — and that’s what I’ll do. There’s social media like Instagram that’ll have articles attached and you’ll go and read the article and there’s also like Snapchat if you slide over there’s the discovery thing and there’s a story specifically for politics or an article will pop up in one of the other stories. (Interview, May 30, 2017)
Both Tyra and Jackie described similar experiences with the same social media platforms. Students would begin with social media which would then link them to the news that appealed to them. Jackie described how Facebook allowed her to keep informed, as she shared,

I usually get all of my news online. It comes off of social media when they have Facebook trending topics. It helps you when you click on them it will give you multiple sites, so you can click on whichever one you want to. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Earlier, Jackie stated that she discussed the news with her father every day. Here, we see that the internet and social media allowed her to bring her own perspective to those conversations.

With students discussing news and current events with their families, not only were they aware of the outlets that their parents prefer, but they were apt to pursue sources of their own. All six of the students interviewed mentioned that they used social media to access news and information. With this, some participants indicated a desire to form their own opinions on important issues, and thus discussed the value that they saw in being able to evaluate different sources.

**Student Understandings of Media Literacy**

During interviews, I asked students to define several key terms in CML such as media literacy and bias. However, almost all of the students struggled with these terms. When asked whether they were familiar with the term “media literacy”, only one of the students was able to describe what she thought the term meant while most of the students stated that they hadn’t heard the term before.

As the exception, Jackie described media literacy as, “Being able to get your information from multiple sites and multiple websites, multiple news stations — not just one. Because one could lean left or right… have a certain agenda, ya know?” (Interview, May 24, 2017). In her
own words, Jackie is describing one of the key media literacy practices where students may consider the perspective of a source in order to better determine its value. Despite not recognizing the term “media literacy,” Sabrina shared a similar process when evaluating sources, stating, “If it’s something that’s a hot topic it will be all over the place and you can compare different articles” (Interview, May 30, 2017). When we consider the “Five Key Questions of Media Literacy,” the practice described by students is articulated as, “What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?” (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). In pursuing multiple perspectives from a variety of websites and digital platforms, Jackie and Sabrina engage in CML practices and hope to gain a more complete picture regarding important issues. Jackie went on to describe her further use of these skills in debate with her peers, as she stated, “I will fight ignorance with knowledge. I’ll tell people — there are other factors at play” (Interview, May 24, 2017). Here, not only does the student use CML skills to evaluate sources, but she then uses that information to enlighten her peers. This participation in creating a new narrative around what she finds in media culture, speaks directly to Phase 3 of CML skill development. Although only Jackie and Sabrina made attempts to define and explain media literacy as a concept, other students were still able to express how they saw CML skills as valuable.

When asked whether students thought they should be learning how to evaluate media in their social studies classes, the participants were unanimous in their responses. All of the students stated that they would like to talk about current events more often in the classroom, and that they had the need for CML skills in their lives. As Crystal stated, “I think it’s a good subject to talk about. With everything like current news and stuff. It’s hard to distinguish what’s actually true” (Interview, May 24, 2017). Though Michael described how he let the news “wash” over
him earlier in his interview, when asked about whether he saw a place for current events and CML in the classroom he stated,

   In class I think that it should be brought up more. Especially in like U.S. [history] or something… Because I think that kids should know what’s happening. Because if they just walk around clueless they’re an uneducated person…well they’re an educated person but you’re uneducated about what you’re supposed to be aware of…Because it’s helpful. Because not all kids know — some kids don’t even know which county they live in. You’d be surprised. It’s surprising. I don’t know, because you only live in one small piece of the world, and there’s so much more to know. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

   Here we see that despite his lack of interest in discussing news at home, Michael possessed a strong desire to learn about current events and different points of view, and determined social studies as the appropriate forum for such conversations. Seeing the value in being an informed person with perspectives that go beyond one’s immediate surroundings, he stated that this is the key to becoming “educated.”

   Though the majority of students struggled to clearly define terms that are pertinent to CML skill building, they all agreed that these practices were important skills to develop, and indeed relevant to their lives. With this, students were asked to reflect on the impact of the Valley High CARS Lesson on their media literacy practices.

   **Student Reflections on CARS**

   When students were asked to share their experiences with the CARS Lesson, four of the six students could recall the lesson itself, but with varying degrees of clarity. Despite whether they remembered the CARS handout or the goals of the lesson, all of the students were able to cite the ways in which they utilized specific CML skills outside of the classroom. Some students
attributed their newfound skills directly to the lesson itself, suggesting that the CARS Lesson did in fact have a positive impact on student learning and CML development.

One student who remembered the CARS Lesson clearly was Sabrina. She discussed what she remembered from the lesson stating,

It was so that we wouldn’t be...steered wrong by bias in the media. Whether it’s text or on the internet. Because my eco teacher always likes to say that the internet has made normal people into experts all of the sudden. So there’s a lot of, I didn’t want to say it but, fake news... We did it in PIG and there were articles that were obvious that it wasn't factual at all, and then there were other ones where I actually had to use this [CARS handout] and look into it. And it ended up being the opposite of what I thought it was and it ended up being an opinion, or it was actually true or something. (Interview, May 30, 2017)

Sabrina clearly understood the concept behind the CARS Lesson, and despite teachers’ efforts to refrain from using “fake news,” as per a directive, students were able to make a connection to the ongoing onslaught of false information in the media. When asked to further elaborate on the goals of the lesson she explained,

Basically don’t trust everything everyone throws at you. Just because you don’t know who they heard it from or where they got it from or where their sources are from. There have been things like the “War of the Worlds,” that was just a radio prank and everybody took it so seriously and everybody thought it was real. Something like that could happen again and you don't really know who to trust basically, or what to trust unless you see it and read it for yourself and look for it yourself. That’s what this [CARS] was for. (Interview, May 30, 2017)
Here, Sabrina understood that the CARS Lesson was intended to change the way students perceived and consumed information. Rather than accepting all sources as true, students were encouraged to ask for questions, and dive deeper into the origins of a source for themselves.

In a similar vein, Laura, who when asked said very little with regards to media literacy and its corresponding terms, remembered the CARS Lesson quite clearly. Also using the term “fake,” she did her best to describe the lesson, stating,

We did a project in class, and we were given links, and I’ll just tell it from the URL. If it’s not a popular source that people would use or see on social media or watch on TV, I off the bat know that it’s fake. (Interview, May 22, 2017)

Here, Laura recounted parts of the lesson, as well as the issues of credibility and support as they were described on the CARS handout. Though we don’t know exactly what Crystal’s definition of “popular” is as it relates credibility, she does describe in a very loose way her practice of corroborating when evaluating a source.

In addition to Sabrina and Laura, Crystal also described the CARS Lesson goals as being tied into identifying fake news. She described them as,

To teach us, especially with everything that’s going on, to teach us what’s real and not real… Some stuff on the internet is true, but some stuff isn’t. It’s better to learn about what’s fake and what’s real so that we don’t go around saying stuff that’s not true and then it makes a whole different thing happen. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

When considering Crystal’s understanding of the CARS goals, she loosely referred to both the second and third stated goals of the original lesson plan. These goals were more formally articulated as, “2. What process should you follow to determine if the information is true? 3. What could you do to either stand up against something that is either false or true, but
hurtful/negative?” (Appendix E). Here, Crystal has demonstrated her acquisition of those objectives in the form of: (a) a CML framework with some skills, and (b) a plan of action when faced with fake news. Though her approach is less overt than the intended op-ed writing or call to action as described by the planning committee, Crystal’s version of “taking a stand” would be to disrupt the dissemination of fake news by refusing to share it.

Of the six students interviewed, Tiffany and Jackie did not remember seeing the CARS handout before, or recall having the CARS Lesson in their classes. One possible explanation for this could be that they never experienced the lesson, as we see some social studies teachers such as Mr. Faber struggled to find time within their curriculum. In spite of this, all of the students interviewed were able to discuss how CML skills, as developed in their social studies classes during the CARS Lesson or at other points during the year, were carried into their daily interactions with media culture.

**How Students Practice CML Beyond the Classroom**

Though some teachers were concerned about the ability of students to transfer their CML skills to their lived experiences beyond the classroom, most of the students described doing just this. All of the students shared that they used CML practices in their outside lives and described the ways in which they evaluate information on social media and the internet.

When asked about whether the CARS Lesson had an impact outside of the classroom, Sabrina shared, “Yeah. I’ve tried to stay away from random sources and if I want to learn more about something I will look for it myself and not just take somebody else’s word for it” (Interview, May 30, 2017). Crystal also shared similar ideas as she noted a change in her view towards media culture in the months since the lesson. She described taking a more critical stance when consuming information as,
when I’m reading stuff now I’m trying to like, I don’t think that’s true, I don’t think that could happen… — and now everything I see... I hardly think any of it is true. It has to be everywhere for me to really believe something is true. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Though we do not know what particular news sources Crystal is referencing, and what she precisely means by “everywhere,” she is hinting towards her desire to corroborate sources as a way of verifying their credibility. Getting students to reconsider their sources is perhaps the first step in developing CML, and clearly these students claim to have put some of these skills into practice. Several students indicated that the CARS Lesson shifted their mindset in that they no longer took information at face value.

Furthermore, student participant Jackie, who had been one of the two who failed to recall the CARS handout, was still able to illustrate how social studies practices in CML had impacted her media habits. She described how these skills were developed during her coursework, stating,

I believe my economics teacher… you wouldn’t have a lesson, he would just briefly talk about it. He would say, “Check where it’s from, like .com, .gov, and that, but then my sociology teacher said to go even further is to go look up who’s the author of the article and what are they about, because sometimes you can get an article and it might look like it’s a good site and then you go look at the author and they’re the head of somethin somethin, and that’s why they’re swaying one way or another...I don’t go as far as looking up the author but sometimes I look up whether it’s a company or a website, I’ll look up what are they about, where are they from. Because some of them, for example, you have a website that says GMOs are fine, and then you look at the author and they’re the head of some big ol’ company that manufactures products [with GMOs]... (Interview, May 24, 2017)
The connection that Jackie made between her social studies classes and CML skills was the most elaborate explanation of CML practices found within the student interviews. Though she employed these practices only “sometimes,” she described a sophisticated method of looking into the contextual forces that shape the information presented in a given source. Directly relating to Phase 2 of CML as developed in my conceptual framework, this is the only instance where I found a student who could report a detailed understanding of this crucial part of the skill building process.

In considering the experiences of these students, we see that both the CARS Lesson and other lessons in social studies have contributed to CML skill building. In addition, not only did students remember practicing these skills in classes, but they also indicated that these practices had become part of their non-academic lives. Whereas teachers such as Mr. Crowley and Mr. Martin failed to see how students would connect the CARS Lesson to their lived experiences, these students noted that CML skills became part of their habits when consuming information through social media and the internet.

The Problem of Bias

The term “bias” is one that became problematic for teachers, students, and the CARS Lesson itself. Teachers’ perceptions highlighted the difficulty of students to understand and identify bias in sourcing activities. In fact, there were issues relating to this observed during the CARS Lesson implementation as well. An “official” definition of bias is articulated as “an inclination of temperament or outlook. especially: a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment.”\(^6\) In light of this definition, I will detail the ways in which students struggled with

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explaining bias, whilst still being able to identify their own teachers’ hidden attitudes, outlooks, and opinions.

**Can Students Define Bias? Not Exactly.**

Though all of the students agreed that learning about the news and how to evaluate its credibility was important, they struggled to define one of the key terms that was frequently heard in classroom discussions and interviews with teachers. When asked to discuss the term *bias*, all of the students acknowledged a familiarity with the concept, yet most of the respondents struggled to define it.

In lieu of providing a clear definition, several of the participants gave examples of where or how bias might appear to them. For example, Sabrina stated, “It tries to make one political figure look bad” (Interview, May 30, 2017). Here, the student describes what bias may be used for, but fails to describe what it entails. Prefacing her response to the same question, Crystal acknowledged her difficulty with the term, divulging, “I always confuse what it really means...Yeah that’s the thing. I always feel like it means something else.” Despite her confusion, she pressed on and explained,

> I feel like it’s like... I’m not trying to say like prejudice but kinda like, if a woman or a man... a woman can’t do what a man can type thing. That’s really all I know about it. But like, I don’t really throw that word around but I’ve heard people use it in situations like with men and women. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Here we see that Crystal can recall hearing bias but fails to pinpoint exactly what the term means. We can perhaps infer what sort of conversation or context Crystal is referring to, one where men are preferred to women, yet it is clear she struggled to understand precisely what part bias played in such a discussion.
Similarly, both Michael and Laura had extremely brief and somewhat abstruse responses to the question. Michael struggled to find the words to express his understanding stating, “I guess I’ve heard it before. But do I know that much? No… Being against something that you don’t really know that much about?” (Interview, May 24, 2017). Similarly short as well as vague, Laura stated, “Having like an on and off opinion” (Interview, May 22, 2017). With these insights we see that most of the students failed to provide clear definitions of bias, and in addition, had difficulty connecting it to any CML concepts more generally.

One student that stood out from the rest was again, Jackie, who we saw earlier had taken a keen interest in news and current events. In her discussion of media literacy, she began to talk about the ways in which news could “have a certain agenda.” With that, when asked to define bias, she exclaimed, “That was the word I was looking for! Bias, I look at as you’re expressing a topic or whatever you’re trying to express, but using your own personal feelings in it, and it’s not one hundred percent factual” (Interview, May 24, 2017). With this, we see that only one of the students was able to give a somewhat clear definition of the term, while also attempting to illustrate the connection between bias and credibility.

The majority of these interviews confirmed teachers’ assumptions about students’ inability to detect and identify bias, especially as it relates to text and other information. Despite this, when asked directly, “Do you think that you could identify your teachers’ opinions on things such as politics, or controversial issues?” (Appendix C), four out of six of the students responded “yes.”

**Can Students Identify Bias in Teachers? They Believe They Can.**

Though students had difficulty articulating a definition of bias, during interviews most participants claimed they could identify their teachers’ political views and opinions. In addition
to this, all agreed that teachers attempt to hide such views from their students. In response to follow-up questions, students shared the ways in which they deduced their teachers’ viewpoints despite efforts to remain neutral in the classroom.

When asked if teachers ever shared their political views openly, Laura laughed and declared, “No. Never!” (Interview, May 22, 2017). Similarly, Michael shared how his teachers attempted to withhold their political views stating, “They mostly try to hold it in” (Interview, May 24, 2017). Describing how her teachers avoided disclosing their own views with students, Sabrina explained,

They’ll discuss things with the class but they won’t ever outwardly say what their personal beliefs are. I was having a conversation with a friend and then we asked our teacher “Hey, so what do you believe in?” (basically) — and he’s like “I don’t like to share that, and I’m not going to.” (Interview, May 30, 2017)

Though her teachers refused to explicitly share their political views, Sabrina, as well as other students, recognized the ways in which teachers approached the class, thereby demonstrating otherwise hidden biases. For example, Sabrina openly identified as being bi-sexual, and with that a member and ally of the LGBTQ+ community. She believed she had picked up on one teacher’s stance regarding sexual identity and gender inclusivity and appreciated their method of addressing the class. As she explained,

The way they [teachers] approach some topics. My last teacher is just really nice, and she’s always like, let’s try not to call people out on something. Let’s try to be acceptive of everybody and I just really like that. Because she does this thing where it’s like, instead of saying “Pick a boy in the classroom” or “Pick a girl in the classroom” she’ll say “Pick somebody wearing this certain color.” Not with a certain color hair but wearing
a certain color. And I just think that it’s very.... it makes it feel like a safer space and it’s very open to what other people might identify as. (Interview, May 30, 2017)

In this example, though the teacher did not openly state that she was a supporter of LGBTQ+ students, Sabrina was able to recognize this in the choices that her teacher made with regard to language and classroom community practices.

Similarly, Michael, who again demonstrated a general disinterest in politics altogether, was able to describe how he recognized the biases of his teachers. Despite his teachers’ attempts to hide their political views, he recounted,

They [teachers] wouldn’t share openly but if you bring something up and just bringing up all the negatives, and the negatives lead to that one person, who was Trump, it’s like you already knew. Even though they still didn’t tell us to this day who they voted for. But it’s just like you already know. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Here we see that Michael, a student who reported no interest in the news, and reported almost no familiarity with the term bias, was able to describe how he skillfully identified the biases of his teachers. Through looking at concepts such as tone as it related to Trump, Michael believed that he had found his teacher’s hidden political stance.

In a final example, Jackie explained that she relied on classroom observations for clues when discerning her teachers’ biases. She described what a typical scenario would look like, sharing,

I pick up on how they [teachers] react to when kids say extreme things either left or right, and I also see how they allow certain things to happen in their classroom. I might not pinpoint them, but some teachers you’re like ‘Oh, yup! That’s a Trump supporter.’

(Interview, May 24, 2017)
In this case, the student found patterns in how teachers reacted to particular events that took place in the classroom. Whether a teacher chose to address or ignore statements and outbursts from students that follow one line of political thought, Jackie was able to infer what her teacher’s political preferences and internal biases were.

In summary, though students demonstrated great difficulty in defining and identifying bias and its relationship to CML, they were indeed able to detect biases in the “real world.” In other words, despite teachers’ efforts to remain neutral in the classroom and conceal their own political opinions, students were able to pick up on their teachers’ personal viewpoints, and clearly articulate how they arrived at those understandings.

Limitations and Validity

My first concern about the validity of my findings centers on the number and diversity of both teacher and student participants. Within a department of twenty-eight social studies teachers, only nine volunteered for this study. It would have enhanced the reliability of my findings had I been able to recruit more members of the department. Despite this, I tried my best to include a wide range of perspectives from teachers of different courses, with varying degrees of experience.

With regard to student volunteers, I was only able to interview six students in total, as several others failed to submit the necessary consent form for IRB. In addition, student voices reflected here may disproportionately represent particular vantage points within the student body; four of the six students interviewed were students of color, and five of the total six were female. However, in looking at the perspectives that are present, I believe that the experiences of these students accurately reflect the concerns of the faculty who initiated this study in the first place. In other words, my colleagues were most concerned with whether minority students were
able to sort fact from fiction, and teachers wanted to give students the tools to figure these issues out for themselves and combat the harmful language hurled at them throughout the school day. Therefore, the voices in this study were important for understanding whether it was an accurate assessment of the school climate, and thus it was necessary to interview students of color, despite their relatively smaller representation in the overall makeup of the school.

Another factor in considering the limitations of this study is my position within the site as a teacher; this most certainly impacted the ways in which participants responded during interviews and enacted their lessons while I sat in during classroom observations. At the time of this study, I was more senior than two of the participants but had been teaching for far fewer years than the others. Whether this was of concern to them is not the most salient issue, but instead as participants were aware of this study being the topic of my dissertation, I am sure that they wanted to “help” me in any way that they could. I tried to mitigate the potential impact of this by assuring them that anything they said or did was important to my research, and that I was not looking for anything other than an honest telling of their experiences. I imagine that several of the participants believed that I was personally invested in the actual lesson, though I tried to distance myself from the creation of it. To counter this, I tried to reiterate in each interview that I had not designed the CARS Lesson, nor did I have any experience with what was going on in the building during the time of its inception.

Related to this, in order to further demonstrate transparency and my interest in portraying participants’ experiences more accurately, I attempted to conduct member checking. In my follow-up emails thanking teachers for their participation, I offered to provide transcripts of our interviews as well as my initial findings for their review. Only Mr. Hayes expressed an interest in seeing the materials related to his interview.
Finally, I have a set of experiences within the district that play a role, whether perceived or subliminal, in how I conducted this research. This is something that I continuously reflected upon and tried to mitigate as I immersed myself in the participants’ portrayals of what they’d experienced. Listening is something that I believe I am naturally “good” at. However, when observing the CARS Lesson there were moments where I couldn’t help but think to myself, “I would have handled that differently.” It would have been impossible to completely mute my inner “teacher voice,” so instead I simply worked to stay present in what I was observing. I did this by taking extensive notes during each phase of the data collection, and I tried to focus on interactions between teachers and students, all while attempting to fully embody the role of the researcher.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

In the last twenty years, there has been a growing body of research concerning the role of critical media literacy instruction in classrooms. This study adds to that conversation, illustrating how one department of social studies teachers used CML to empower their students to take a more critical view towards misinformation, disinformation, “fake news,” and more broadly speaking, media culture as a whole. The CARS Lesson was designed as a school-wide intervention geared towards teaching students how to evaluate media and take a stand against harmful information. This demonstrates one way in which teachers use critical media literacy to create culturally responsive pedagogy, all while negotiating the pressures of different stakeholders. In addition, my research contributes more nuanced insights about the ways in which CML values are articulated by: social studies frameworks and standards, social studies teachers, and finally, high school students (Table 12).

Scholarly Contribution

Social Studies Curricula and Media Literacy Efforts

Social studies is not only a place for students to learn about history, but it also provides students with an understanding of the citizen’s role in a democratic society. With this, scholars have often discussed the benefits of media literacy development towards greater civic participation (Hobbs, 2004; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Martens & Hobbs, 2015; Morrell et al., 2013; C. Sperry, 2006, 2012; S. Sperry, 2016). In my examination of social studies frameworks and standards, I highlighted exactly which media literacy concepts are addressed and how they align with teachers’ curricular goals. Though others
<table>
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<th>Critical Media Literacy Context</th>
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<td>Social Studies Curriculum &amp; Standards</td>
<td>Media literacy skills are goals expressed within the Social Studies Frameworks and Standards, while CML skills are indirectly mentioned and only appear as late as the 12th grade.</td>
<td>Frameworks should be adjusted to encourage CML at an earlier grade level. Teachers should consider how and when CML skill building would be an appropriate part of their existing curriculum.</td>
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<td>Social Studies Teachers &amp; CML Skill Development</td>
<td>Teachers value collaboration when lesson planning for CML. Teachers face contextual challenges when teaching CML. Teachers are motivated to integrate CML skills into their existing curriculum.</td>
<td>More opportunities should be created to foster teachers' willingness and enthusiasm for collaborating towards shared goals. Teachers need administrative support in their CML endeavors. There are opportunities for the growth of CML education, especially in social studies.</td>
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<td>Student Perceptions of CML</td>
<td>With brief but focused instruction in CML, there is the potential for substantial gains in student learning. In conversations around CML, bias is an especially problematic term for students. Students have an affinity for current events and appreciate CML as a means of better evaluating information they find within various media platforms.</td>
<td>Teachers do not have to dramatically change their course content to increase student learning in CML. There are resources available for teachers to guide students in deepening their understanding of bias. Teachers should consider how to incorporate more current events into CML instruction, especially those which are culturally relevant to their students.</td>
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have loosely discussed the ways in which media literacy goals fit within the larger social studies conversation, this is perhaps one of the first explorations also looking for critical media literacy language within the curriculum.

In my search for CML ideas in the social studies curriculum specifically, I found that it was not until twelfth grade that New York State placed a clear emphasis on students’ ability to critically evaluate different media. As the NYS Frameworks state, “Active and engaged citizens must be effective media consumers in order to be able to find, monitor, and evaluate information on political issues” (NYSED, 2015, p. 47). Though indirect in its nature, this statement suggests that CML goals are important in social studies. Appearing in “Public Policy” goals rather than “Political and Civic Participation,” the term “monitor” suggests that students take a more active role in media culture. However, the audience (primarily educators) is left to infer their own understanding of what monitor could mean. Thus, this can be seen as an “open door” for teaching activism and greater social justice. If students feel a sense of authority and have the ability to detect faulty or misleading arguments in the media, then the next step would be to engage as active agents in generating or advocating for more honest representations of their world(s).

Despite the ambiguity around a more critical approach to media literacy, the frameworks reflect a clear shift away from historical content as the primary goal of social studies, and instead emphasize various social studies “practices,” or skills. At points where students are expected to practice more traditional media literacy skills, such as identifying point of view or the intended audience, the goals seem clear.

This shift away from more content-based knowledge was confirmed in my research through interviews with teachers, and even appeared throughout the curriculum map drafted “in
house,” at Valley High. However, despite the more frequent appearance of media literacy skills within the various social studies guides, there was still a lack of understanding concerning how these skills are taught and even more so, how they are assessed. As students progress through the grade levels, expected media literacy practices become more complex, but the space is not made within the curriculum maps for teachers to address these skills explicitly.

For example, in grades K-2, students are expected to build towards “evaluating a source and distinguishing between fact and opinion,” while by the end of grade twelve, they should be able to “evaluate the credibility of a source by examining how experts value the source” (table 8, NCSS, 2013). With this, teachers are expected to begin addressing quite difficult concepts with students as early on as kindergarten, yet there is little to no guidance on how these skills should be interwoven throughout the existing content focused on conceptual acquisition rather than practices.

Though I found that these goals articulated by the frameworks (both C3 and NYS for Social Studies) clearly place an importance on developing media literacy skills, there still remains a gap between the theory and practice. Whereas the frameworks reflect what scholars have long argued for, it is still unclear how teachers should develop these skills with their students. In other words, there needs to be a more explicit connection between the desired results and best practices in media literacy instruction. Just as Federov et al. (2016) found, there is a lack of professional development when it comes to teachers’ ability to deliver media literacy instruction. Because of this, experienced teachers, such as those interviewed here, have discovered creative ways of integrating media literacy into their course curriculum and individual classrooms. However, if there were more clear directives explaining how teachers can actually teach these skills to students, we may better align classroom practices with theoretical
standards. Whether teachers have the ability to successfully develop these skills with students will be better understood in the near future, as the NYS Regents Exam for US History is slated to be administered in June of 2022. On this state test, students must demonstrate competencies related to core media literacy practices.

Further related to issues around the teaching and learning of critical media literacy skills, this study has led to further questions relating to students’ understanding of bias, and its connection to issues of credibility. Though the differences between fact and opinion are meant to be addressed at even the earliest grade levels, interviews and observations revealed that high school students had serious difficulties defining bias; an outward expression of one’s opinion. I have yet to find other studies that explore this issue, and to reiterate, only one of the six students interviewed were able to correctly define bias — in fact most of them failed to assign any meaning to the term whatsoever. As a result of this, the frameworks, standards, and social studies curriculum in general have not addressed specific methods by which teachers and students can better understand bias. Even more problematic, is the difficulty when addressing bias and its connection to credibility. Therefore, the question left for researchers, teachers and students to unpack is, “How or when does bias affect credibility?”

In light of this, I found that teachers worked their way around the issue of bias and credibility by proposing a “spectrum of credibility” to students. As this idea was so prevalent in the data, I’ve created a visual representation to illustrate how participants may have envisioned this spectrum and connected it to bias as part of critical media literacy conversations (Figure 5). However, I still wonder how these conversations would unfold, and how teachers would build confidence in their students’ understanding of the relationship between these key concepts.
Critical Media Literacy is Culturally Responsive but Demands Culturally Relevant Teaching

As earlier scholars have argued, critical media literacy pedagogy should be coupled with both culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). This study further enhances that argument, but in a unique approach does so by demonstrating the negative effects of divorcing cultural relevance from CML efforts. Though teachers were practicing culturally responsive teaching in that they critically examined their students’ experiences in order to develop new competencies, in taking substantive current events out of their lessons, these teachers failed to make the lesson culturally relevant.

Looking at definitions of these two theories, Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant pedagogy (or teaching) as, “a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Expressing similar goals but by slightly different means, Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as, “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). In light of these theories, I found that the CARS Lesson ultimately failed to include the necessary content that would be culturally relevant to students’ lives. Students had difficulty recalling the details of the lesson itself, and only four of the six students interviewed remembered the lesson at all. As a result, teachers reported their belief that students lost the connection between CML practices and non-academic practices.

In contrast, students themselves reported a keen interest and sense of understanding when it came to evaluating media sources. Some students reported a new skepticism towards information in the media. In particular, Jackie, who had indeed been the most articulate in
describing her CML processes, reported that she learned her CML skills in social studies classes—all despite her inability to recall the CARS Lesson specifically. In outlining her own practices in media evaluation, this student described what media literacy experts refer to as lateral reading. This strategy was developed by several scholars at the Stanford History Education Group and is described as, “opening up new browser tabs along the screen’s horizontal axis in order to see what other sources said about the original site’s author or sponsoring organization” (Breakstone, et al., 2018, p. 220). In addition to Jackie, all the students indicated that media literacy skills were important in navigating the informational landscape (both print and digital). This is a major success of their social studies teachers’ efforts, though we are unable to ascertain whether this is a direct result of the CARS Lesson itself—most of the students failed to detail the processes or materials used in the lesson.

In addition, the experiences of Jackie and subsequent findings relate to the work of Kahne and Bowyer (2017), where media literacy instruction had a greater impact on students’ abilities to evaluate controversial posts online, rather than increased instruction on political issues alone. In other words, the potential return on CML lessons is great, and could unlock students’ abilities to evaluate a wide array of information in our prolific media culture.

Thinking about my conceptual framework for this study, I now consider teachers’ perceptions of students’ experiences, and what students themselves reported, and whether those accounts reflect the total three phases of CML. The conception and planning of the lesson was in fact culturally responsive, as it took into account the skills and practices which students already possess and clearly desire. In addition, it helped to develop students’ ability to evaluate sources (Phase 1). Some classroom observations demonstrated teachers’ ability to take students into Phase 2, where they began to question the contextual forces that shape our media culture.
However, the CARS Lesson ultimately lacked the conceptual content that genuinely affected students, such as current events reflecting their non-academic lives; as a result the lesson lacked the cultural relevance necessary for achieving the Phase 3 of CML skill building—achieving greater social justice through the construction of counternarratives.

There are several key factors as to why culturally relevant sources (e.g., current events issues) were omitted from the final lesson plan. To better understand why and where along the planning process this change took place, and the differences between the CARS Lesson outcomes and those conceived by CML theorists, I employed a visual representation of these pivotal points using Yin’s (2014) program-level logic model (Figure 6).

This model represents how CML strategies were conceived and utilized as a solution to larger political tensions in the school community, as well as the two possible outcomes when considering using culturally relevant or apolitical sources within CML pedagogy. In looking at the planning processes for Valley High teachers when political tensions continued to escalate, we see that the decision to use apolitical sources would ultimately sacrifice the cultural relevance necessary for greater outcomes towards social justice. In effect, without the use of current events that mattered to students the lesson failed to engage students in a more critical evaluation of sources or construction of counternarratives.

Therefore, though students practiced more traditional media literacy practices in looking into concepts such as credibility and corroboration, the CARS Lesson stopped short of considering the motivations behind the messaging, and failed to have students engage with media culture in activist ways. Despite these teachers’ original intentions to empower students to “combat fake news” especially when it was harmful to them, as a result of external pressures this message was omitted from the final lesson. When the political climate became particularly
Figure 6

CML in a Politically Polarized Climate

Administrative, Parent, and Internal Pressures to remain “Neutral”

Politically Polarized Community Climate
- School community tensions
- Interpersonal conflict based on identity (racial groups, nationality, etc.)
- Confusion concerning what “to believe” in the media
- Difficulty discerning real from fake threats

CML Becomes a Culturally Responsive Solution

Teachers Plan CML Lesson

Teachers Enact CML Lesson

Using Apolitical Sources

Using Culturally Relevant Sources

CML Outcomes of CARS lesson
- Students develop a critical awareness when consuming media
- Lesson shifts students’ mindset and lens when evaluating information
- Students gain appreciation of CML skills

Intended Outcomes of Theoretical CML
- Students critically evaluate information
- CML content reflects students lived experiences
- Students reveal systemic inequities perpetuated in media culture
- Students are empowered to draft alternative narratives
- Students become social justice activists

1 = CARS Lesson reflects this outcome as reported by Teachers and students
2 = Prior research indicates the possibilities of this outcome
heated following the school’s teach-in on race, the administration applied pressure for teachers to
back away from their original CML-focused goals. This led to the enactment of a lesson that
looked quite different from the one originally planned; one that addressed socially and politically
charged issues such as climate change and immigration. The intention had been to respond to
students’ worries in real time and unpack different perspectives on controversial issues that
reflected students’ experiences outside of school. Instead, by using apolitical sources, teachers
would fall short of getting students to the point of “taking informed action” as articulated in their
original lesson plan. As a result, the CARS Lesson became that which Mrs. Barre had hoped to
avoid in being, “just another media literacy lesson” (Committee Meeting, January 20, 2017).

In summary, this research adds to the existing discourse by demonstrating the importance
of engaging students in CML work focused on issues that relate to their lives. If students are
presented with sources that are somewhat disconnected from what matters to them, they are still
capable of developing skills, but these are limited to traditional media literacy practices and may
not achieve Phases 2 and 3 of CML development.

Practical Implications

This study explores the efforts of social studies teachers who had no prior experience
with critical media literacy efforts. Based on the theoretical contributions of this work and the
key insights provided by teachers and students, there are several suggestions for educators to
consider in planning for CML instruction.

Students Need More Critical Media Literacy

First and foremost, teachers should consider integrating CML skill building into their
coursework early on and with frequency. When thinking about the overarching goals of social
studies frameworks as well as the demands of state tests, media literacy skills appear in
abundance. Students are required to put these skills into practice as they evaluate an author’s perspective, and determine the credibility of a document. Though “sourcing” in this sense has been a part of the social studies practices historically, the new Frameworks that we see in New York State are pushing educators to consider integrating even more of these skills throughout their lessons.

In consideration of the social studies Regents exams in New York State, it would behoove teachers to practice CML skills in their test preparation as well, as the section titled “Constructed Response Question” requires students to demonstrate critical thinking skills in their analysis and evaluation of a source. Because of this, teachers in this study suggested that explicit CML instruction be delivered towards the start of a school year and then revisited continuously throughout subsequent units. In making questions like the “Five Key Questions of Media Literacy” (Center for Media Literacy, 2005) habitual processes, students will better understand the contextual nuances behind information. Students need to continuously address these foundational ideas throughout a variety of media sources. These concepts include: author, language, audience, perspective and motivation (see Table 13), in order evaluate the credibility of a source. If teachers can consistently engage students in the practices of CML, these questions might then become second nature.

Another reason why CML should be more frequently addressed in social studies classrooms has to do with the difficulty expressed by teachers and students with understanding bias. Though this term has been addressed in classrooms, as reported by participants during interviews and observed in classroom discussion, there still seems to be an apparent disconnect between students’ understanding of the term, and its relationship to credibility. With this, I
suggest that teachers make the meaning of bias more apparent to students, and perhaps provide a clearer definition of the term.

In considering the available resources for teachers to start tackling this complicated issue, the News Literacy Project offers lessons around understanding what they have identified as five types of bias found in the news: partisan bias, corporate bias, demographic bias, “big story” bias, and neutrality bias. In addition to clearly laying out these types of bias, the organization describes five forms that these types may appear in as: absence of fairness and balance, framing, story selection, tone, and flawed sourcing (News Literacy Project, 2020). This is a valuable resource that can assist teachers and students in setting a baseline for creating a shared understanding of what bias is, and how it may appear in the media.

Table 13

*Key Concepts for Students: Derived from the “Five Key Questions of Media Literacy” (Center for Media Literacy, 2005)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Key Concept</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Who created this message?</td>
<td>→ author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?</td>
<td>→ language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?</td>
<td>→ audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?</td>
<td>→ perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Why is this message being sent?</td>
<td>→ motivation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Following this, teachers should engage students in the practice of identifying bias, making the process transparent through modeling one’s own method of inquiry, and repeating it many times over. A misunderstanding that students illustrated when attempted to explain bias was that it always had a negative tone. In other words, they seemed to believe that bias was present only when an author was criticizing a person or idea. We know however, that an author’s bias can often appear as quite the opposite; such as a “glowing” review or simply stating a positive opinion of something. With this, students clearly need more direct instruction when it comes to understanding what bias is, and how to identify it through tone or other clues found within information. Once teachers and students have clearly defined and practiced identifying bias in a variety of sources, only then can they begin to discuss the ways in which it may (or may not) have an effect on credibility and reliability.

What I found most interesting regarding student perceptions of bias, and something to consider in practice, centers on the ways in which students were able to clearly and concisely articulate how they identified their teachers’ biases. Though they couldn’t define the term, when asked about whether they could identify a teacher’s politics, most students indicated their keen ability to detect this in the classroom. With this, we see that in “real life” students were able to apply critical media literacy skills to their teachers’ treatment of topics and the classroom community. When teachers attempt to withhold their political views and yet they are still detectable by students, Hess and McAvoy (2019) refer to this phenomenon “political seepage.” Though teachers expressed a desire to remain neutral, and students noticed these efforts, students were ultimately able to employ their skills in order to detect these hidden beliefs. As a recommendation for classroom teachers, CML lessons should build on students’ existing practices. In addressing bias, teachers should start a conversation around how students come to
know another’s opinions or beliefs, especially when they are less obvious. This can then become a building block for deeper conversations around bias and credibility.

The final, and perhaps most compelling reason that CML needs to become more frequent in the classroom lies in the fact that all of the student participants reported a desire to learn these skills. Though the CARS Lesson stood alone as a single lesson dedicated to developing CML skills, students came away with a shift in their overall mindset towards information in the news and on social media. Several of the students reported an initial distrust of anything they read on social media, and while we don’t know whether this is an effective outlook for CML skill building, it is important to note that they were able to develop the habit of questioning information. In order to expand upon this existing skepticism, it is pertinent for teachers to develop those skills which would allow students to take their media evaluation to the next level. As students continue to turn to social media for their news, CML skills take on a more obvious urgency. Simply put, CML needs to be incorporated into social studies more now than ever as students consistently and continuously evaluate information in their consumption of current events in and outside of the classroom.

Current Events Make Critical Media Literacy More Relevant

Another issue that teachers should consider is the role of current events in CML instruction. As the CARS Lesson demonstrates, teachers believe political and social issues are more engaging for students as they are in their essence, culturally relevant. In light of this, teachers shared their disappointment in that by creating an apolitical lesson, they failed to truly engage their students in CML work. Though it was perhaps the inevitable result of parental and administrative pressures, teachers expressed remorse when thinking about the differences
between what they had intended as a lesson in social justice and empowerment, and what they ultimately enacted.

As a result of this finding, I imagine two things need to occur in order to bring more current events into the classroom. First and foremost, administrators must also support teachers’ efforts to engage students in CML instruction related to current events and otherwise “hot button” topics. Teachers cannot be expected to take on the possibility of parent backlash alone, and they need to feel supported by their administrators in CML endeavors. When parents complain about teachers addressing important and culturally relevant topics that engage students in controversial discussions, administrators should understand the intentions behind this, and be prepared to defend these curricular choices.

Secondly, teachers must take it upon themselves to do the individual work that is required of them when discussing controversial issues with students. When examining an author’s perspective and considering the motivation behind it, the conversation can become a slippery slope regarding the diversity of student (and parent) political leanings. Students may not always see something as being biased, but instead believe it as fact. Unpacking this notion to such a student requires a teacher’s preparedness to expound upon the differing perspectives regarding an issue, and in my research some of the teacher participants expressed how time consuming and difficult this can be. With that, if teachers are willing to put in the extra effort to understand multiple points of view regarding important issues, the return on their investment would be an increase in engagement and a sense of relevance to students’ lives. For CML skills to become second nature to students, both administrative and teacher preparation for controversial issue discussions must occur.
Finally, when considering the use of current events, teachers should consider how students are already grappling with the news as well as their existing non-academic literacies. Students such as Michael and Laura expressed a lack of interest in politics, and this is perhaps in part due to a bombardment of information in the news and social media. If CML were to be successful, teachers need to bring students back to the current events conversation and can do so by utilizing their existing social media practices. By drawing upon their experiences with platforms such as Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram, teachers can encourage students to use such modes of communication to create their own counternarratives to harmful disinformation. This final aspect takes time and creativity on behalf of the educator but may also yield infinite possibilities for student activism. In addition to an increased effort on the part of teachers to develop their awareness of tending social media platforms, this would also require a new level of transparency regarding their curricular goals. With this, they may avoid some of the backlash that the teachers in this study experienced as a result of political polarization in the community and school.

**Future Research**

In considering what this study offers, there are many questions left unanswered which would be useful to future endeavors. This study provides merely a “snapshot” of what CML looks like when a group of social studies teachers collaborate to respond to their students’ needs. One area that would be beneficial to explore would be the possibilities of CML instruction in other disciplines, beyond social studies and ELA (as much of the research already focuses on this). How in fact, would CML pedagogy apply to the natural sciences or mathematics? This is an area that very few have explored and would indeed be interesting to investigate further.
Another possible path towards better understanding the benefits of CML might look at what students are doing beyond the classroom as a result of direct instruction in this field. We know that students consume information throughout their day, both in and outside of school. For further evidence of this one only needs to glance down a high school hallway to see the droves of students consumed by their phones while moving between their classes. A possible action-research project would create a CML intervention, but would ask many more than six student participants about their media habits outside of the classroom. As an assessment of such a project, the study might ask some of the following questions which are directly based on the “Core Concepts” (table 1) stated by Kellner and Share (2005):

- How do you think those posts (messages) are constructed?
- What are the rules (unwritten or otherwise) of language in social media?
- How do you think different people experience the same message and why?
- What are the values embedded in that post, or tweet?
- Who is benefiting from that social media post?

By looking at a larger group of students’ media habits as squarely related to a CML intervention, we might better understand both the benefits and limitations of this type of pedagogy.

Finally, as these students were interviewed just two months after the CARS Lesson, future research might involve a longitudinal approach. What are young adults coming away with after a CML intervention in high school? It would be important to see whether the threshold concept as discussed by Leggett and King-Reilly (2020) sustains, and whether CML instruction has a lasting impact on students once they move into their adult years. Can critical media literacy permanently shift the mindset of a student? As they leave their formal schooling, do they carry these lessons with them throughout the rest of their lives? Critical media literacy should be
centered around students’ experiences. With that, as their modus operandi and values change with time, will they transfer this knowledge to new facets of their lives? These are just some of the questions that future research should explore, and there are many possibilities for CML interventions in a variety of educational settings.

Conclusion

There have been many efforts to address the importance of media literacy in schools, but still very few have examined how critical media literacy, oriented towards social justice, appears in the curricula or in the classroom. In addition, there is hardly any empirical research which exists that focuses on CML practices in social studies classes in particular. This study provides a look at how teachers can organically arrive at CML as a solution to a larger problem. In fact, this may be one of the first studies to examine the planning and implementing of a CML lesson as it was conceived by teachers who were not CML specialists. In other words, these teachers participated in a process that has not been examined before. With that, this study further expands the conversation around how CML can be used to empower students and teachers and fight back against misinformation in the age of social media proliferation, and still remain within the scope of social studies course content.

In terms of better understanding CML in social studies frameworks and standards, what my work has demonstrated is that there is an increasing emphasis on participatory democracy, further strengthening arguments that CML is a necessary part of developing democratic participants (Leggett et. al, 2020).

Finally, this study illuminates the intersection between CML and community values, and explores the ways in which controversy becomes an active player when teachers craft CML lessons. Educators are constantly negotiating CML goals while navigating stakeholders’ values.
With this, culturally relevant pedagogy must be considered alongside CML pedagogy, and teachers should avoid compromising this aspect. Ultimately, teachers should feel encouraged to integrate critical media literacy into their curriculum as not only an important skill set that serves our society, but also as a necessary part of a broader teaching philosophy, focused on creating engaged and critically minded citizens.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Protocol and Research Questions for Classroom Observations

How does a group of teachers design and implement a common lesson with shared goals?

- How do teachers communicate the goals of this department-wide lesson?
  - Are they explicit, or implicit to students?

- In what ways does this lesson fit within the course curriculum?
  - Does the introduction to this lesson seem fluid within a unit, or is it treated as something “separate” from other coursework?

- In what ways does this lesson adhere to, or diverge from the prescribed format designed by the planning team?
  - Introduction? –do they use the recommended “hook” questions? If so, how do they use them?
  - Sort activity?
  - Do they use the suggested sources? If so, how?
  - Are they teaching media literacy within a historical context or with current events?

- How does the teacher position themselves, and their own biases in discussion?
  - Are they attempting to remain neutral, as per the directive?

- How are students asked to participate?
  - How are they engaged in the lesson and what evidence of understanding does the teacher look for? Calling on students, group work, written work, exit ticket?

- How does the teacher treat student perspectives?
  - Are students’ views heard in discussion?
  - Are they allowed to voice their opinions?
  - What are students’ reactions to this lesson, both verbal and nonverbal.

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Appendix B

**Teacher Interview Protocol**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking about the context...how/why did this get started?</th>
<th>1. If you’re able to think about the period in December when the idea for this lesson first started, can you tell me a bit about that time?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. *How was the development of this lesson shaped by the period immediately following the election, and/or current political climate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your involvement in the planning?</td>
<td>3. (If on the planning team) Can you tell me a bit about what led you to join the planning team? or—if not…did you have the option, how was the planning team formed?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. *In thinking about your overall course goals for students, do you think that the lesson’s goals related to these ideas? or—do you think that it was something that you cared about and decided to do?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. In thinking about the final lesson plan that was put together by the planning team, what aspects of the lesson did you think needed to be changed for your particular class?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. *When the final lesson was discussed at the department meeting, everyone was asked to remain “neutral” when teaching it. What are your thoughts about this?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. When you think about students’ awareness of media literacy, fake news, and/or bias before this lesson, what’s your impression of that? *Do you think that they had learned anything about that either somewhere else, or in your class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing the experience of teaching this lesson...What was it like “in the moment?”</td>
<td>Now I’m going to talk to you about the actual teaching of the lesson.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. Can you think of parts of the lesson that you changed throughout the day from class to class, or even “on the fly” while you were moving through your plan?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. <em>Were there any points during the lesson where you struggled to stay “neutral?”</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. * In terms of the goals of the lesson, how effective do you think this lesson was in achieving those goals?—maybe refer to the goals of the lesson and/or goals that they mentioned earlier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the lesson...what were the lasting effects/impressions of this?</td>
<td>11. After teaching this lesson several times throughout the day, are there aspects that you would change (or omit), if you were asked to teach it again?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Are there areas in your future teaching where you might reintroduce the CARS process?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13. This was the first department-wide lesson that I can think of...if you had to grade your overall experience of it, from the planning process to teaching, what would you give it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Can you think of any other challenges to discussing controversial topics with your students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Do you have any other thoughts on how you address critical thinking skills and media literacy with your students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C

#### Student Interview Protocol

| Thinking about context… | 1. In thinking about your social studies classes, this year, or in past years, can you describe a lesson that you found particularly fun or engaging?  
2. What was the most memorable thing that you learned from that?  
3. My research is primarily focused on controversial or “tough” discussions that concern social studies classes.  
4. When you think about the election that happened in the fall, what was your experience of that, either in or outside of the classroom?  
5. Did you talk about it with your parents? Your friends? Your teachers? Did you hear kids talking about it in the cafeteria?  
6. Did you hear about the Teach In about racism? What did you think about that? |
|---|---|
| Describing classroom climate… | 7. How comfortable do you feel sharing in the classroom? Does this extend to your opinions as well?  
8. What do you account for that? Your classmates, your teacher, your personality?  
9. Do you think that you could identify your teachers’ opinions on things such as politics, or controversial issues? |
| Identity and the lesson on media literacy | 10. Can you briefly describe your relationship with news?  
11. Are there any sources that you like to read (either online or in print)?  
12. How do you decide which sources you like to get your news from?  
13. Can you define, in your own words, what you think “media literacy” means?  
   a. How about the term “bias?”  
   b. Now what about “fake news?”  
14. In your past experiences from social studies classes, have you had the opportunity to discuss how to evaluate sources?  
15. Thinking about the CARS Lesson from March of this year, can you describe what you thought the goal of that lesson was? |
| Beyond the lesson…what were the lasting effects/impressions of this? | 16. Have you used any of those ideas since that point?  
17. Is there one idea that you think struck you as being really important? Do you think this should be a necessary part of social studies classes?  
18. Is there anything about that lesson that you thought should be changed?  
19. Do you see that lesson having any impact on you outside of the classroom?  
20. Do you have any other thoughts? |
Appendix D
CARS Handout
Front

You should evaluate every website you use for research or personal information. The CARS process for evaluating sources is listed below. Ask yourself the following questions about each site and try to use only those that have the best evidence of credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support.

**Credibility**

Goal: A source is created by a person or organization who knows the subject and who cares about its quality.
- Is there a publishing or sponsoring organization? Is the organization an authority on the subject?
- Is the author listed? Is the author an authority on the subject? How do you know?
- Are there spelling errors, grammar errors, dead links, or other problems that indicate a lack of quality control?

**Accuracy**

Goal: A source with information that is current, complete, and accurate.
- Does the information on the site or source agree with other sources?
- Does the site/source contradict itself?
- What is the date of publication or copyright?
- If a website or electronic resource, how recently has it been updated?

**Reasonableness**

Goal: A source that is truthful and unbiased.
- Does the author, host, publisher, or sponsor have a bias?
- What is the motivation or purpose for creating the site or source? (To sell a product? To advance a viewpoint or belief? To educate?)

**Support**

Goal: A source with verifiable sources of information.
- Are the sources listed? Can they be checked?
- Is there a way to contact the author or organization?

**Where Should You Look to Find This Information on a Website/Electronic Source?**

Ideally, information such as the author, host organization, and publication date will be easily located at either the top or bottom of the page. However, you may need to dig deeper:
- You can find out about the host organization by looking at the URL, especially the domain name (e.g., cnn.com, harvard.edu, cdc.gov). There are no universal rules for which domains are good or bad, but the domain name can help you identify the host organization.
- The information you need might even be on a different page. Try clicking on "About..." or "Contact Us" to find more information. You can also just enter the domain name without anything past the first slash and see what information you find.

**TIP:** Save some work by creating your bibliographic citation while you evaluate. Many of the elements you need to cite a web page in MLA Style (author, publisher, date, etc.) are the same ones you need to evaluate its quality. If more than a few of these are missing, the site is probably not a good one!
Appendix D

CARS Handout

| **Credibility** | *Is there an author or publishing/sponsoring organization listed?*
| Goal: A source that is created by a person or organization who knows the subject and who cares about its quality. |
| *Is the author or organization an authority on the subject? How do you know?* |
| *Are there red flags? (spelling or grammar errors, dead links, etc.)* |

| **Accuracy** | · Does the information on the site/source agree with other sources? |
| Goal: A source with information that is current, complete, and correct. |
| · Does the site/source contradict itself? |
| · What is the date of publication or copyright? |

| **Reasonableness** | · Does the author, host, publisher, or sponsor have a bias? |
| Goal: A source that is truthful and unbiased. |
| · What is the motivation or purpose for creating the site/source? |

| **Support** | · Are the sources listed? Can they be checked? |
| Goal: A source with verifiable sources of information. |
| · Is there a way to contact the author or organization? |

WHERE SHOULD YOU LOOK TO FIND THIS INFORMATION?

*You can find out about the host organization by looking at the URL, especially the domain name.*

*The information you need might even be on a different page.*
Appendix E

CARS Lesson Plan

Social Studies Department Lesson

Goal:
Help students analyze, digest and take informed action on news and information presented to them. We would like to teach students media literacy skills and help them understand how one can take a stand against false news or negative/hurtful messages.

Main Idea:
Full period lesson in all GI, GII, U.S., PIG and ECO classes on MARCH 3rd.

Topics/Skills to Cover During Lesson:
1. What should you do when you hear/see something that is new/alarming?
2. What process should you follow to determine if the information is true?
3. What could you do to either stand up against something that is either false or true but hurtful/negative?

LESSON PLAN
Prior to the lesson, teachers may choose to review the CARS process with their class.

1. Quote or Video To Introduce Lesson (Optional)
   Madison's Federalist 57
   Anything else (and share)
   Question: Why is being an informed citizen important?
   “A lie told once remains a lie, but a lie told a thousand times becomes the truth”- Joseph Goebbels
   Short video clip: https://twitter.com/SHEG_Stanford/status/831602174685827073

2. Line Value Spectrum
   Put two pieces of paper at opposite ends of the classroom: Important and Not Very Important.
   As you pose a question, have students move to where they fall on the spectrum.
   Other options: Give to students as homework assignment or just have a class discussion without students moving around room.

   Questions (use any or all):
   1. How important is honesty to you?
   2. In regards to social media, how important is honesty when someone is posting something?
   3. How important is it that people are honest/truthful when posting pictures/captions about you?
   4. In regards to social media, how important is it to you that a post is something that you agree with?
   5. How important is honesty in sources that you usually get current information from?
   6. How confident are you in your skills to determine what is true in sources that provide information?

3. Sorting Activity
   Use 3 random headlines/blubs provided by department or found on your own. One should be credible, one should appear credible but biased, and the last should be “fake.” Check Google Classroom for resources to pull from.
   Place students in small groups (groups will be used again) and ask students to put the sources in order from
Appendix E

CARS Lesson Plan

Back

most credible to least credible.
Review: Teachers can go around the room and ask students for their order and how they came up with the order.

4. Use the CARS Process
Assign each group ONE of the original three articles to run the CARS process on. Review as a class the results.

5. Taking Action Against False or Hurtful Information
As a class, construct a t-chart as to what you can do if you spot misinformation OR find out something that is troubling IS in fact true.
Teachers will email items on their t-chart to Kathy Bellino to help generate a school-wide list.

6. Optional Formative Assessments
Op-Ed Piece
Have students construct an Op-Ed piece (150-200 words) that address misrepresentation of information or an issue of their concern based on true information. In their piece, students must use reliable source(s) to disprove or prove their point of view. Students must use at least 3 different sources to fact check. Perhaps offer suggestions in your class as to possible topics/issues.

Other Ideas for Formative Assessments/Lesson Wrap-Ups (please add here):

Other Resources
3 Historical Examples of Fake News from The Scientific American Researchers Created Fake News, Here’s What They Found from the NY Times Fake News Fooling Millions from Upfront Magazine