

Teaching Young Learners with the C3 Framework

Leveraging Community Partnerships to Reframe the Narrative in Elementary Social Studies

Vicki Hobson, John Hobson, and Neeley Minton

How can the Inquiry Design Model be employed as a vehicle to design antibias and antiracist curricula for our youngest learners?

In the aftermath of the Unite the Right rally in which white supremacists fomented terror and death in our city of Charlottesville, a group of educators came together to reflect on what happened and determine what we could do to push for racial justice in our community. As white educators immune from some of the direct negative impacts of racism in our daily lives, we found ourselves largely unaware of the history of Black agency and success in our small Southern city and of the white backlash to that success. We wanted to learn more. We wanted to do more. From that tragedy, “Reframing the Narrative” was born, a years-long grant-funded project to produce and implement antibias and antiracist curricula.

To help us define and describe the curricula we intended to create, we turned to Liz Kleinrock, who describes antibias and antiracist (ABAR) curricula as “rooted in action by identifying our biases in order to dismantle white supremacist beliefs, values, and culture.”¹ In order to concretize this concept for elementary educators, we developed an image referred to as the “Reframing Tree” (see Figure 1). On the left side of the tree, words such as *agency*, *excellence*, *joy*, and *resistance* are listed. On the right, you can see words such as *injustice* and *oppression*. For our project, these represented the key design principles that would be at the foundation of our curricula.

We chose to use the Inquiry Design Model (IDM)² as the means to create curricular materials that reflected the ABAR design principles represented in the Reframing Tree. IDM,

which follows the C3 Inquiry Arc, is a distinctive approach to creating curriculum and instructional materials that honors teachers’ knowledge and expertise while centering student agency. IDM ignites student learning with questions, privileges source material, and employs disciplinary tasks for students to consolidate their learning. We are sharing our experience because we believe that C3 and the IDM model can be a vehicle for curricular and pedagogical transformation and that components of our work are replicable in other contexts.

Reframing the Narrative (RtN) was initially focused on secondary classrooms and teachers. Because the pandemic forced us to do most of our work virtually, we had significant unspent funds from our grant. We decided to direct these funds to supporting RtN at the elementary level. For the inaugural elementary cohort, we focused on two levers: teacher professional learning and curriculum design (see Figure 2).

Implementation of RtN with Elementary Educators

In pursuit of enhancing the quality of elementary social studies education, our project focused on empowering teachers through a comprehensive professional learning initiative. The primary goals were to increase elementary educators’ social studies content knowledge, widen their pedagogical practices, and sharpen their curriculum design skills while promoting inclusive and culturally responsive teaching approaches. We had over forty elementary educators sign up to join our cohort for the 2021–2022 school year and were able to provide a multitude of learning experiences which culminated in a three-day IDM writing workshop spearheaded by Dr. John

Reframing Tree

Identity
Affirmation
Agency
Joy
Excellence
Resistance



Oppression
Injustice
Unfairness

Figure 1. The Reframing Tree

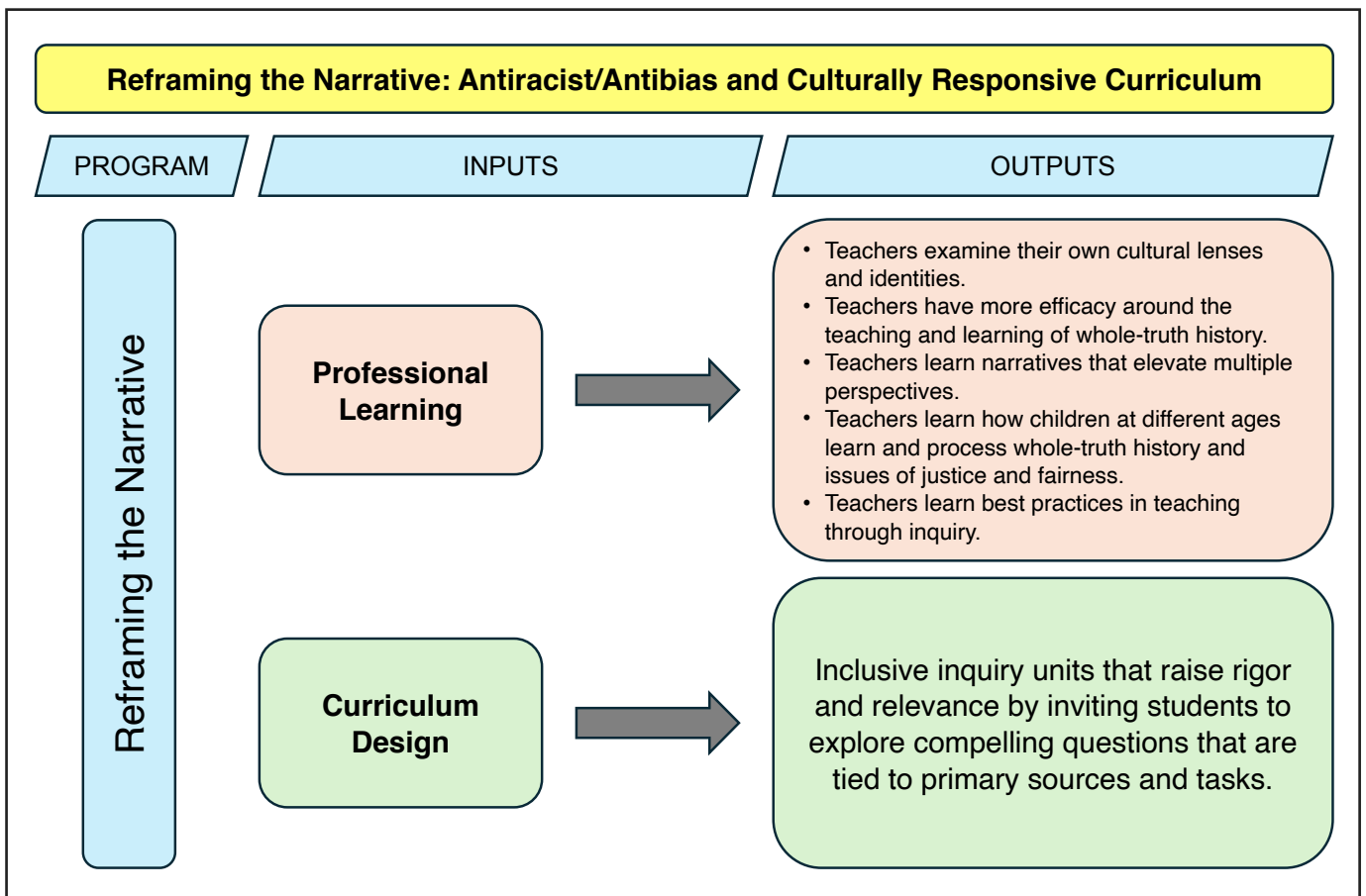


Figure 2. Logic Model of Elementary Reframing the Narrative

Lee, one of the authors of the *C3 Framework*.

Professional Learning Experiences

Effective professional learning is content focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and other expert support, offers time for feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration.³ Because elementary teachers typically teach “everything,” many of them have shallow historical content knowledge.⁴ In order to make up for this content gap and build elementary educators’ knowledge of whole-truth history that elevates multiple perspectives, we leveraged community partnerships and place-based experiences to center local stories and histories. We later applied this new learning to the development of curricula at the IDM workshop.

Jefferson School African American Heritage Center

The kickoff event at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, marked the beginning of a transformative journey for educators. Under the guidance of Executive Director Dr. Andrea Douglas, teachers explored the importance of elevating narratives of agency, excellence, joy, and resistance to injustice, particularly within historically marginalized communities. The emphasis was on exploring diverse historical narratives that encompassed both struggles and triumphs. Dr. Douglas led participants through an exploration of Charlottesville’s history from a Black-centric lens, shedding light on often-overlooked stories of joy and resistance.

The event also recognized the importance of culturally responsive teaching, with sessions dedicated to providing insights into addressing race with young learners. Teachers engaged in reflective activities to examine their own cultural lenses and approach social studies instruction with greater sensitivity and awareness. Another key aspect was critiquing the Virginia Standards of Learning for inclusivity and accuracy, with a focus on reframing to embrace multiple perspectives. The kickoff event served as a catalyst for increasing teachers’ social studies content knowledge and awareness of cultural identities and set the stage for further exploration at James Madison’s Montpelier.

James Madison’s Montpelier

Our second learning experience took place over three days at James Madison’s Montpelier. Montpelier serves as a natural ally in Albemarle County Schools’ endeavor to cultivate culturally responsive and antiracist educators, students, and curriculum. The historic residence of James and Dolley Madison, Montpelier provides a unique setting where the Founders’ compromises, the enduring impact of slavery, and societal shortcomings of the past two centuries are starkly evident. This former plantation of the fourth president served as a

platform for educators to explore the question: How do we teach our youngest learners a truthful account of history in ways that align with their developmental needs? Through a diverse array of engaging learning experiences, teachers were equipped with the tools and insights to cultivate inclusive and accurate historical education for their students.

We partnered with the team from the Department of Education and Visitor Engagement to create a place-based learning experience centered around a series of tours that delved into the lives of the enslaved and freed individuals who once inhabited Montpelier. Educators engaged with *The Mere Distinction of Colour*, an award-winning exhibit which showcases an honest and impactful portrayal of slavery and its legacies, as well as *Colour through a Child’s Eyes*, which invites participants to learn about slavery and race from a child’s perspective. Additionally, educators toured the Gilmore Cabin, a home built and owned by a formerly enslaved man at Montpelier after his emancipation, as well as the Train Depot, which was restored to provide a glimpse into what segregation looked like in 1910.

These tours deliberately emphasized the humanity of those who lived and forcibly worked at Montpelier over a series of decades. By witnessing firsthand the hardships faced by those who lived through slavery and emancipation, educators grappled with the complexity of these histories. These experiences inspired them to seek creative ways to convey these complexities in truthful ways to their young learners while also nurturing empathy and understanding. It is important to note that these tours, especially the exploration of the Gilmore Cabin, emphasized narratives of success, agency, and joy in addition to narratives of slavery and oppression.

In addition to the tours, we partnered with numerous organizations to support the continued development of social studies content and pedagogical knowledge. The Virginia Tribal Education Consortium’s Chief Executive Officer, Kara Canaday, provided essential insights into indigenous perspectives, spanning both historical and contemporary contexts. This invaluable session offered teachers actionable strategies to ensure that indigenous peoples are not confined to the past within their curricula. Educators learned to challenge stereotypes and inaccuracies so that they could accurately represent the multitude of indigenous histories and cultures in Virginia and beyond.

Further, participants received training from both the Albemarle County Equity Specialist team and the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. This critical component of the workshop encouraged educators to engage in open discussions about identity, race, and positionality, prompting them to reflect on their own teaching practices. Through the two interactive workshops, teachers honed their ability to create a classroom environment that values diversity, and teachers left feeling better equipped to facilitate conversations about race and identity. These sessions empowered educators

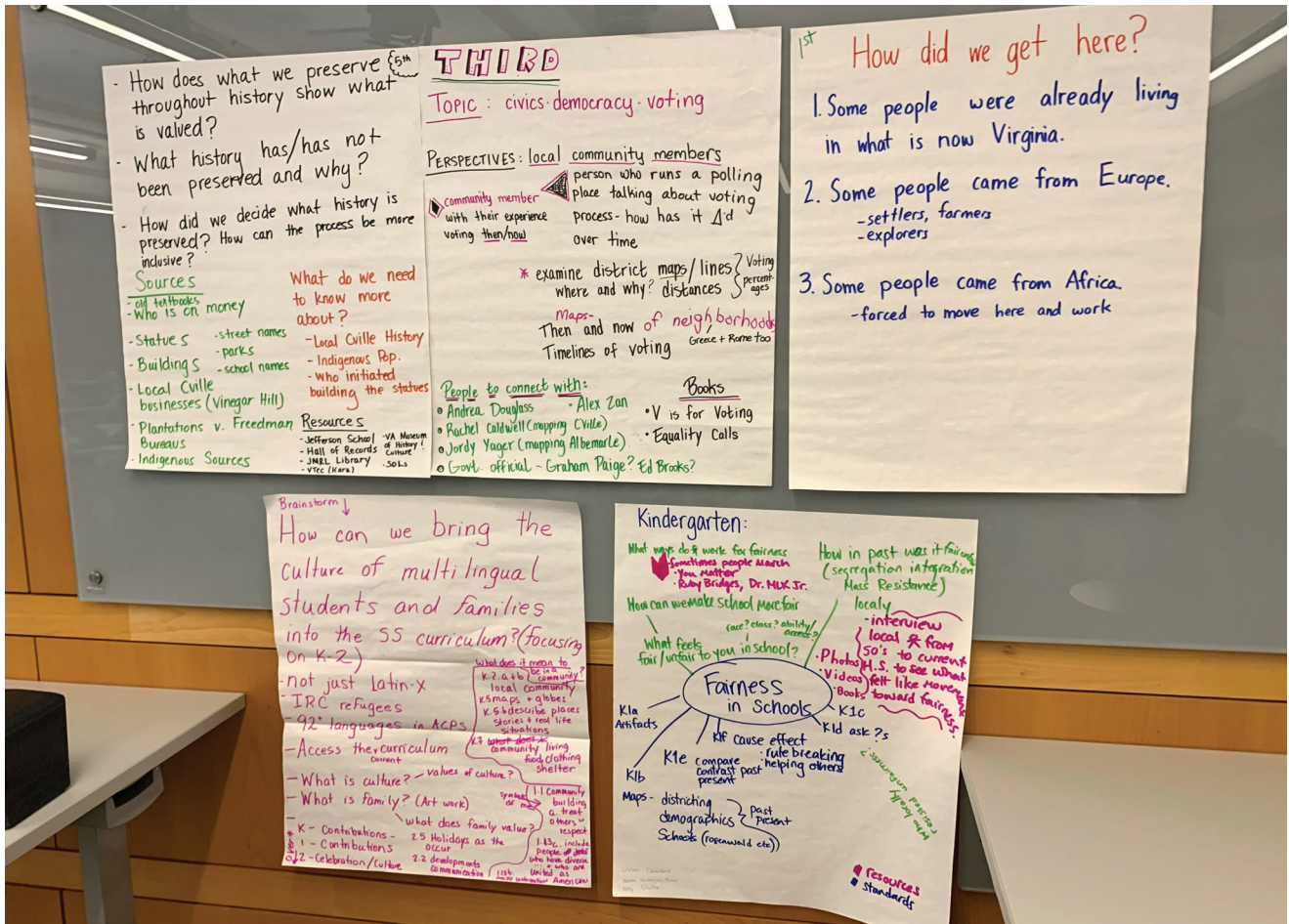


Figure 3. Collection of possible topics for the summer IDM workshop

to navigate sensitive topics with confidence, encouraging open and respectful dialogues among their students. To wrap up these days-long sessions, our teachers collaborated in grade-specific design groups where they brainstormed topics for their inquiries (see Figure 3). These posters exemplify teachers' attempts to incorporate both sides of the Reframing Tree in addition to specific content learning from the place-based experiences.

Based on data we gathered from teacher surveys and exit slips, the place-based professional learning experiences at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center and Montpelier were a resounding success. By centering humanity and resistance to injustice, our educators left feeling better prepared to guide their youngest learners through a journey of critical inquiry and understanding. As a culminating task, we asked educators to distill their takeaways from the weekend in the form of a Six Word Memoir (see Figure 4).

Book Studies

While the place-based experiences were clearly meaningful, we also wanted to employ other crucial tenets of professional learning, namely that the work should be of sustained duration and support collaboration.⁵ In addition to vetting

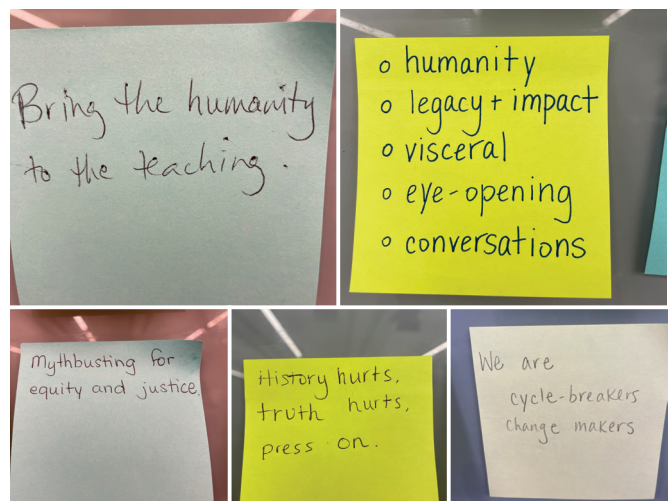


Figure 4. A selection of Six Word Memoirs from the professional learning weekend at James Madison's Montpelier

and selecting NCSS Notable Trade Books to center in their curricula, our educators divided into small groups and participated in an ongoing book study around one of the following three texts: *Start Here, Start Now: A Guide to Antibias and Antiracist Work in your School Community* by Liz Kleinrock, *A Different Mirror for Young People: A History*

of *Multicultural America* by Ronald Takaki and adapted by Rebecca Stefoff, and *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi.⁶ We developed a book study facilitator's kit to guide their learning, but teachers took turns facilitating each week's discussion. The goal was to keep the learning and reflection going between the end of our place-based professional learning experiences and our IDM workshop that would be happening in the early summer. We chose these books specifically to build both pedagogical and content knowledge in advance of designing ABAR inquiries in collaborative teams.

Inquiry Design with Community Partners

As a culminating event for our year, we brought together educators and partners from local and national museums, institutes of higher education, and historic sites in addition to public historians and community leaders to design learning experiences based around a set of antiracist and culturally responsive design principles using IDM. We loosely organized our workshop into the three phases of IDM Design: Framing the Inquiry, Filling the Inquiry, and Finishing the Inquiry.⁷ In each of those phases, design teams focused on the key building blocks of inquiry: questions, sources, and tasks.⁸ For three days, design groups went through a carefully sequenced series of design challenges to ensure all groups would have a complete IDM blueprint and accompanying materials by the end of the workshop.

On the first day, small teams learned about all of the components of the IDM blueprint, and their morning design challenges mostly focused on Framing the Inquiry, which included finding an interesting content angle, formulating the compelling question, and stress-testing the compelling question with argument stems. During the afternoon, teams began to work on Filling the Inquiry by brainstorming possible supporting questions and sketching out formative task ideas. Prior to the second day, all teams engaged in feedback sessions on their compelling questions and vertical and horizontal alignment of their supporting questions and formative tasks to ensure they were building logically toward the summative assessment. The entire second day was devoted to selecting and preparing sources (Filling the Inquiry) and designing the staging, extension, and taking informed action tasks (Finishing the Inquiry). Professional learning sessions focused upon ensuring inquiries have a variety of source types, adapting sources for elementary students (i.e., excerpting, modifying, and annotating), and creating scaffolds to support students to make sense of complex sources. As design teams selected sources, they used the Reframing Tree to vet all potential sources, ensuring that sources emphasized agency, excellence, joy, and resistance in addition to addressing injustice and oppression. During the final day of the workshop, design teams finalized their work based on feedback from two university professors and other participants.

By the end of the three-day workshop, each small group had designed a mostly cohesive and polished inquiry, complete with prepared sources, scaffolds for teachers, and teacher-facing instructions. For an example of one of the completed inquiries see Figure 5. This inquiry, *Should Virginia Have a State Food?* exemplifies teacher application of professional learning around ABAR instruction, specifically the instantiation of both sides of the Reframing Tree, in that it reflects agency and joy as well as historical injustice associated with colonization. Additionally, educators who worked on this inquiry collaborated with Kara Canaday from the Virginia Tribal Education Consortium to ensure accuracy of content with regard to indigenous peoples. She worked with educators to portray indigenous peoples in both the past and present, which helps students to avoid forming misconceptions that indigenous peoples only exist in a timeless past. Inquiry editors spent the following weeks checking links, editing student-facing materials as needed, and ensuring that each unit would be ready for teachers to pilot in the fall.

Ongoing Impact

As a result of the Elementary RtN project, the cohort of teachers who participated emerged as experts and champions in the work of developing and implementing ABAR and culturally responsive inquiry-based learning. After building the capacity of a smaller forty-person cohort in developing inquiry-based curriculum, our goal was to spread this work to other teachers in our school division and to the division as a whole. We finished developing and refining the inquiries in July 2022 and held an optional professional learning session where teachers modeled teaching through inquiry. Our cohort members and other teachers on their teams began piloting the curriculum in August. We partnered with a local university professor to conduct research on the implementation process.

As the pilot was concluding, we sought official approval from the school board for the trade books that teachers included as sources within the K–5 inquiry units. Enlisting school board support ensured that teachers would be protected in teaching whole-truth history to our youngest learners. By approving the curriculum, the school board signaled that they fully support the work of teaching whole-truth history through inquiry to all learners, starting with our kindergarteners.

We are currently in the first full year of full implementation across the school division. All K–5 teachers are teaching through the inquiries we developed as the core part of our guaranteed social studies curriculum. We are continuing to collect data on implementation and will make adjustments to our curricular resources as needed.

Lastly, many of our inquiries are accessible in the C3 Teachers inquiry database, the #GoOpenVA site, and on the Albemarle County Public Schools website. It is our hope that this work will continue to spread beyond this project

Should Virginia have a state food?	
Standards and Content	Contributions of Natives, Europeans, Africans, and other cultures to food in past and present Virginia. Standards: 1.1(e); 1.2; 1.10(f); 1.12(b); 1.13(b)(c)
Staging the Compelling Question	Ask students: "What did you eat for lunch (breakfast, dinner) today? Where did it come from and how was it made?"

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3	Supporting Question 4
What did Native people in Virginia eat and why?	What did the first Europeans eat in Virginia?	What did the first Africans eat in Virginia?	How did different cultures interact to create foods we eat today?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Using a graphic organizer, make a list of common foods that native Virginians ate.	Using the same graphic organizer, make a list of foods commonly eaten by European settlers.	Using the same graphic organizer, make a list of common foods commonly eaten by enslaved Africans.	Select a favorite local restaurant dish or food eaten at home and draw and label the dish, identifying the origins of any key ingredients.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: Image of an Indian village Source B: Image of Virginia Indians eating food Source C: Images of indigenous cooking techniques: stewing and smoking Source D: Written description of traditional Monacan foods and crops	Source A: Image of 1600s European Kitchen Source B: Image of 1600s New World Kitchen in color Source C: Image of Colonial Dairy Farming Source D: Written description of what Europeans brought with them to Virginia	Source A: What did the first Africans bring to Virginia? (image set) Source B: Written description of what Africans brought with them to Virginia Source C: Video demonstrating how Africans hid seeds in hair	Source A: Image of french fries Source B: Image of ice cream Source C: Image of macaroni and cheese Source D: Written description of culinary contributions by enslaved chefs Source E: Video about macaroni and cheese Source F: Image of smoking fish & image of smoked ham Source G: Image of Indian corn & image of cornbread Source H: Image of peanuts & image of a peanut butter sandwich Source I: Image of yams & image of sweet potato pie Source J: Image of New World colonial kitchen & image of frybread

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT: Should Virginia have a state food? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) for or against Virginia having an official state food, and if so, what that food should be and why.
	EXTENSION. Pin map linking foods all over the world to Charlottesville/Virginia. Write a letter to the General Assembly recommending a state food.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Discuss and vote on whether Virginia should have a state food. ASSESS Make campaign posters for competing "candidates" for Virginia's state food, incorporating historical evidence to make compelling arguments. ACT Students will present their campaign posters to the class and provide their argument for their choice of state food.

Figure 5. This IDM Blueprint with active links is available from the Albemarle County Public Schools website, <https://www.k12albemarle.org/our-departments/instruction/social-studies/reframing-the-narrative>.


so that educators and students can experience inclusive and rigorous social studies instruction at all grades.

From its inception, RtN was driven by teachers' desire to incite systemic change from within. By using IDM as a vehicle, we were able to transform our curricula to reflect the ABAR principles we espoused in the Reframing Tree. We believe that what we learned and did is transferable to other contexts, and we offer the following advice in order to maximize the power of designing and implementing inquiry.

1. *Bring community partners into the curriculum design process.* All communities have a wealth of resources and assets.
2. *Be creative in who you identify as a community partner.* While we certainly leveraged the expertise of people from institutes of higher education, museums, and historic sites, we also found that our local griots brought the stories of our community to life.
3. *Build teacher capacity and have them champion the work; it will spread faster!* Much of our elementary social studies curriculum has been developed over the course of the past few years by our local educators for our local educators. Full-scale implementation is eased when the message is spread through champions of the work.
4. *Engage stakeholders throughout the entire process.* ABAR work can be derailed at any moment, so setting groundwork and providing opportunities for all stakeholders to learn about what is happening is critical. Over the past couple of years, we have presented at school board meetings, held in-person and virtual community outreach sessions, and sent electronic communications to teachers and caregivers with updates.

Note. Reframing the Narrative was a collaboration between James Madison's Montpelier and Albemarle County Public Schools funded by a *Strengthening*

Systems grant from the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation to design antiracist and antibias curriculum for K–12 social studies.

To access the full set of inquiries utilized in Albemarle County Public Schools, please visit the Reframing the Narrative website: www.k12albemarle.org/our-departments/instruction/social-studies/reframing-the-narrative. 

Notes

1. Liz Kleinrock, *Start Here, Start Now: A Guide to Antibias and Antiracist Work in Your School Community* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2021), xxiv.
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4. Rebecca M. Sanchez, "The Six Remaining Facts: Social Studies Content Knowledge and Elementary Preservice Teachers," *Action in Teacher Education* 32, no. 3 (2010): 66–78; William B. Russell III, "Social Studies, the Lost Curriculum: A Research Study of Elementary Teachers and the Forces Impacting the Teaching of Social Studies," *Curriculum and Teaching* 24, no. 2 (2009): 75–86.
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8. Grant, Swan, and Lee, *Inquiry-Based Practice in Social Studies Education*.

Vicki Hobson is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education at the University of Lynchburg. hobson_v@lynchburg.edu

John Hobson is an Assistant Principal at Virginia L. Murray Elementary School in Albemarle County, Virginia. jhobson@k12albemarle.org

Neeley Minton is the Lead Coach for K–12 Social Studies curriculum and instruction in Albemarle County Public Schools in Albemarle County, Virginia. nminton@k12albemarle.org

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Kathy Swan, John Lee, and S.G. Grant.

Foreword by Walter Parker.

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