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Building Civic Efficacy in Adolescents through Civic Zines

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Zines for a Means:

Building Civic Efficacy in Adolescents through Civic Zines

An Action Research Project

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By

Darryl Owens

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This action research project, written under the direction of the candidate's master's project advisory committee and approved by members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the faculty of the Kalmanovitz School of Education, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching Leadership degree.

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Abstract

Zines for a Means: Building Civic Efficacy in Adolescents through Civic Zines

By
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Master of Arts in Teacher Leadership
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This action research study explored how the implementation of an inquiry-based, civic zine (pronounced "zeen") project supported a group of middle-school students' civic efficacy and engagement. Youth in the United States continue to show the lowest levels of civic participation during elections, and the traditional, one-size-fits all approach to civic education is not raising attainment or engagement (Booth & Medina, 2023; Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2018; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Gadsden et al., 2019; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). This mixed-methods study adds to a growing body of research that posits the need for reimagining civic education in schools across the United States. It provides an analysis of how the project *Zines for a Means* might provide one avenue for fostering these two elements that support a key purpose for education: developing an informed, engaged, and efficacious citizenry.

Dedication

This action research project is dedicated to all who have supported my personal and professional growth: My first teachers, my mum, dad, grandparents, and broader family; my schoolteachers and professors; and my teaching colleagues, past and present. I appreciate the time and patience you have given to support my progress. I also dedicate this to my students, who let me learn with them daily, bring excitement and energy to my life, and allow me to be silly; you are my greatest teachers!

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Chapter I

Introduction

"...do something outside yourself. Something to repair tears in your community. Something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. That's what I think a meaningful life is. One lives not just for oneself, but for one's community."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg (Stanford, 2017)

The United States and the wider world continue to diversify at a rapid rate (Howard, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Members of American society identifying as multiracial increased by almost 276% between the years 2010 and 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Yet, teachers, systems, and traditional pedagogical approaches remain (Howard, 2020; Shear et al., 2018). Systemic inequities are reinforced by a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and assessment, as student achievement continues to be measured with federal and state-mandated summative testing, such as the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) and SATs (Levinson, 2012; Sturgis & Casey, 2018). These assessments measure students against static, narrow standards that may not equip them with the transdisciplinary skills required for 21st-century life (Serriere, 2014; Sturgis & Casey, 2018; Sturgis & Patrick, 2010). This education approach fails to serve diverse student populations (Flannagan & Levine, 2010; Howard, 2020; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levinson, 2012).

Many organizations, policy creators, and educators are working to construct educational approaches that will enable students to meet an uncertain future confidently. Employment, environment, and society will continue to expand and evolve, making it essential to reimagine teaching and learning (Levy et al., 2023; Sturgis & Patrick, 2010; Voorhees, 2001). There are calls for inquiry-driven, student-centered pedagogical approaches that hold equity at their core (Sturgis & Casey, 2018; Sturgis & Patrick, 2010). Schools across the globe are shifting their

focus away from teaching a bank of set knowledge to placing greater emphasis on transferable skills, knowledge, and dispositions that apply to a variety of contexts; this blend is often referred to as *competency-based education* (CBE) (Fullan et al., 2018; Sturgis & Casey, 2018). These competencies often take on nuanced forms based on the individual contexts. Still, most focus on inter and intrapersonal qualities such as "character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking" (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 6). Although a growing body of research supports this approach, especially in higher education, there is still much to learn about implementing CBE in the elementary and middle grades.

Another area of inequity in the U.S. education system is access to civic education (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Although there was a slight increase in youth voter participation in 2018, 18-29 year-olds continue to have the lowest level of voting in the electorate, with just 23% voting in 2022 (Booth & Medina, 2023). Disparities for young voters were more significant for those identifying as Black and Latino, whose voter turnout was 15% and 14%, respectively (Booth & Medina, 2023). Various sources argue that low levels of civic engagement are not due to apathy but instead due to a lack of access to meaningful and relevant civic education experiences (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2018; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Gadsden et al., 2019; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). This is referred to by Gadsden and colleagues as "The Civic Engagement Gap" (2019, p. 83) and by Kahne and Middaugh as "The Civic Opportunity Gap" (2008, p. 1). It is argued that there is a need to move away from teaching facts and figures of the past to teaching students a blend of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are relevant to their lived experiences, supporting their civic engagement and, thereby, nurturing democracy (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Holbein & Hillygus, 2020).

Early adolescence is a crucial time when humans practice and solidify habits for their adult lives; this includes civic engagement and participation (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Developing these habits requires the development of intentional, "concrete opportunities" so youth can practice this participation (CIRCLE, 2018). There is no single way to participate actively in democracy, and it could be argued that young people require ongoing, diverse experiences to find their role as active citizens (CIRCLE, 2018; Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). A particularly powerful approach to citizenship development is including service learning and volunteerism (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Ohn & Wade, 2009). However, there is less research into the potential that other approaches might hold.

This action research project aimed to explore ways to empower my fifth-grade students to engage meaningfully in their community, strengthening their capacity as civic actors, by implementing a research-based, efficacy-enhancing unit of study: *Zines* (pronounced, "zeens") *for a Means*. Through my research, I sought to uncover ways to foster critical competencies that might lay a foundation for future civic participation, hoping to identify a means for supporting, strengthening, and healing our democracy.

Statement of the Problem

In the following paragraphs, I introduce two problems that this action research aimed to address. The first was to identify and action authentic and meaningful opportunities to develop youth civic efficacy and engagement. The second was to explore ways I could support a school-wide implementation of a new competency-based learning (CBL) framework. To frame this research, I considered these problems at a national, school, and classroom level.

It is hard to deny that the United States democracy is "fractured" and fragile (Bowen & Barrien, 2022; Howard, 2020, p. 92). In an era of fake news, police violence against people of

color, and attacks on fundamental human rights and dignity, there is a need to focus attention on ways to develop a more just democracy for all. These recent events support the critical need for an urgent focus on educating for a just democracy. In this polarized political climate, statistics show that youth demonstrate decreasing civic knowledge and engagement (CIRCLE, n.d.; Putnam, 2000).

To strengthen democracy, educators must seek ways to provide youth with experiences that foster humility, empathy, and connection with others. Nevertheless, measuring student success using national and state-level standardized testing continues to pressure schools and students to focus on reading, writing, and mathematics. This has decreased the time and attention given to arts education and social studies (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levine, 2003; Levinson, 2012). If this traditional approach to viewing achievement continues, we risk missing an opportunity to support students in realizing their unique potential; we risk limiting our students and, ultimately, our society (Belvins et al., 2016; Howard, 2020; Levinson, 2012). There is a vital need for educators to construct intentional opportunities that allow students to go beyond themselves and their schools and to participate actively within their community.

John Dewey and others assert that, although there is no single aim of education, an essential purpose of schooling is to ensure the development of an active and informed citizenry (Belvins et al., 2016; Dewey, 2018; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Levine, 2003). Various researchers, educators, and other stakeholders view schools as fundamental in developing students' understanding of and capacity for civic engagement (Singer & Shagoury, 2006; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013; Sturgis & Casey, 2018). When considering the purpose of education, Brameld (2000) states that there are “two major roles: to transmit culture and modify culture” (p. 75). According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS),

social studies education plays a vital role in building habits that will support youth in living "productively as democratic citizens" (2013, p. 27). It might be argued that if we seek to support the healing and furthering of our democracy, we must reimagine our education system, notably social studies education. Still, many wonder how to approach this daunting challenge. A critical approach to addressing inequities in civic education is through inquiry; exploring ways educators approach this work will support an expanding understanding of ways to teach for civic efficacy and engagement.

As a fifth-grade humanities educator, I wanted to seek new ways to add to my students' repertoire of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions and to bolster their sense of self-efficacy as civic agents. Fifth grade is a time of great discovery and growing independence (Anderson, 2011; Morin, n.d.). Typically, students form opinions and attitudes about topics and develop their moral compass as they notice issues of fairness. Nevertheless, my fifth-grade students shared many obstacles that stood in the way of their civic action, including a lack of trust from adults, restrictions for voting and social media use, safety concerns, and financial dependence. My research identified promising practices that might support student efficacy and engagement, including creating zines. This action research explored the potential a student-centered, civic-zine project may have on building two essential building blocks of an active citizenry: civic engagement and civic efficacy.

As someone who seeks to be a transformative teacher, I feel responsible for providing students with the space and time to develop critical thinking and civic engagement skills. I am fortunate that my school's central belief is that student's academic success and development as socially just individuals are equally important. Being an independent school, my school also has the flexibility to allow for this approach to pedagogy. I wanted to use this project to explore ways

to foster civic engagement while developing students' reading and writing skills. Furthermore, neglecting this area of education poses a risk to our democracy, as students may become apathetic about local and global issues, causing them to be less engaged in their democracy. Teaching students how and why it is essential to be active in their communities and engaging in collective action for good can create lasting dispositions and greater engagement in the future (CIRCLE, 2019; Flannagan & Levine, 2010).

Lastly, students at my school often had limited ideas about how they could be changemakers. Often, when independently seeking change in their community, students organized a bake sale or fundraiser. I wanted to provide students with a new way to influence their community that did not involve raising money. Instead, I sought opportunities for them to use their voices to influence, inform, and engage community members on an issue. Through my preliminary research, I found several ways to do this and eventually decided on the promising practice of using civic zines. Zines are self-published booklets that are often personal and are an accessible way to share perspectives, experiences, and information with others (Kawai & Cody, 2015; Oslund & Barton, 2017; Yang, 2010).

Purpose of the Research

This action research study aimed to explore the question: *How might an inquiry approach support fifth-grade students' competency for meaningful community engagement, and how might this impact their self-efficacy?* The unit aimed to support students in developing skills identified in the school's recently adopted competency-based framework. The focus of this framework was to create a shared and stable language to assess students' ability to put our school learning dispositions and skills into action. The driving force behind this implementation was developing consistency and equity in our school assessment practices and making expectations visible to

students. Through student reflection, observations, and work samples, I aimed to identify and assess how students might show growing competence in skills connected to enacting change in their community. To reduce bias and increase transparency, I developed and shared a rubric and project pathway with students, which detailed the unit's purpose and process at the beginning of the project.

Past research highlights the power of an inquiry-based pedagogy; it has the potential to nurture "transferable skills," "agency," and lifelong learning (Murdoch, 2015, pp. 14-15). In this case, students would increase their transferable skills and agency to enact change within their community. Research also points out that meaningful inquiry should be student-centered and co-created to develop student agency, ownership, and motivation (Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Holbein & Hillygus, 2020; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Murdoch, 2015). Considering these elements, I considered my current cohort of student's interests and passions when building this unit. Many of my students gravitate toward graphic novels and comics. Through our work together this year, it was clear that many cared deeply about current justice issues. We discussed school shootings, transgender rights, and police brutality in our humanities sessions. The students were able to handle these conversations with curiosity and empathy. Allowing students to go further and investigate a cause of their choosing was intentional to build "ownership," "interest," and "purpose" (Murdoch, 2015, p. 19).

Dewey (2009) argued that children should be at the center of the curriculum and that their interests and questions must guide it. In this writing, he promoted the idea that one role of the teacher is to "psychologize" curriculum, connecting to a child's interests and experiences to ensure students are motivated and engaged in learning (Dewey, 2009, p. 23). This action research explored ways to support students in taking action through an accessible and engaging context:

creating zines. Zines are short, self-published booklets often focused on a topic of personal interest or importance (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Mitre & Serriere, 2015; Pérez, 2017). The term *zine* stems from the term "fanzine," which refers to a DIY booklet created by a fan about a topic (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004, p. 408). The relevance of zines as a form of political and civic engagement allows students to communicate what they care about meaningfully and authentically. The design and implementation of this unit of study aimed to develop fifth-grade students' civic agency through a real-world application of written communication. I hoped to provide them with time and space to explore an issue they care about, express themselves creatively, and create an opportunity to be successful in their civic engagement, building their efficacy.

Additionally, I sought to provide students with explicit examples of youth applying the *10 Questions for Young Changemakers* to inspire their civic action (Nam, 2019). I wanted them to recognize that there are many ways to participate in society and to provide an opportunity for them to practice a form of civic engagement in a safe environment. I believed that teaching students to create something for their community would encourage them to explore a new way to be change agents, thereby seeing themselves as change agents and building their self-efficacy (Bandura,1989). I hypothesized that this unit would engage students and develop their ability to recognize themselves as civic agents who can enact change within their community.

Action Research Question

This study explored the question: *How might an inquiry approach support fifth-grade students' competency for meaningful community engagement, and how might this impact their self-efficacy?* By designing a series of lessons building on students' understandings and skills for engaging effectively in their community, I hoped students would develop self-efficacy and view

themselves as civic agents. I also hoped that, through a carefully scaffolded unit of study with clear and transparent success criteria, students would develop the competencies, *Engage meaningfully in my community,* and *Read the world* (a competency focused on reading and critical thinking). Through encouraging students' civic engagement during early adolescence, I hoped to foster dispositions that would reverberate into their lives beyond the classroom, supporting and healing our democracy.

Limitations

Several limitations may have impacted this action research project, including a short timeframe, a small sample size, and other variables that were challenging to control. Another limitation was my assumptions about how this project would develop and how students would respond. Nevertheless, this research aimed to inform ongoing practice, holding value for me as a reflexive practitioner. There is room for development and improvement when I repeat this unit of study in future years.

Due to the timing of my graduate program, there was a small window of time to conduct this study. Unfortunately, this caused me to have to build the unit as I taught it; and therefore, my methods and approach may not have been as well developed as I would have liked. However, there were indeed advantages to developing the unit based on the learners who were engaging with it, as I could identify what was working and what could be improved as I went. However, the data collected may be skewed as some students were taught a slightly different lesson based on my adaptations, depending on whether their class was taught first or second.

Another drawback with the timing of this unit was that it was actioned in the final six weeks of the school year. This time of year is notorious for interruptions, and we faced canceled and postponed lessons due to an end-of-year overnight field trip, performance rehearsals, and

testing. However, it is also important to note the benefits of engaging with this unit during this point of the academic year, as the students could draw upon prior knowledge and make connections with previous studies, noticing throughlines. While this was the case, the timing of this work may have affected the depth of the learning and the impact of this unit of study.

This research was conducted with 40 fifth-grade participants at an urban independent school. This is a small and specific sample size; therefore, drawing universal conclusions from its limited data is challenging. Although the school has sliding-scale tuition (tuition is based upon the student's financial access), most students come from high socioeconomic status and are primarily homogenous regarding racial identity compared to county and state demographics (confidential school site data; EDP, 2023). The city where this school is located is also unique in its level of wealth in comparison to the rest of the United States. Therefore, a relatively small number of schools would have a similar student population to this group of participants.

The fact that I acted as the teacher and researcher in this project may have also affected the data collected. It was likely that students' desire to please or give certain responses when reflecting on this unit impacted the reliability of the data. The classroom is a challenging setting due to power dynamics between teacher and student, despite actions taken to develop a more balanced learning environment. In addition, extrinsic motivation influenced students' engagement with this unit. Although the unit was developed and guided by student interests, the classroom is not a natural setting, as students are expected to participate and show growth. Therefore, results from this study may be limited solely to the classroom environment, and more favorable data may be due to this age group's desire to demonstrate academic success and perfectionism (Wigfield et al., 2005).

As a teacher-researcher who values the ideas at the heart of this unit, I naturally held assumptions about how students would receive this study. I believed that students would be enthusiastic to learn about a cause that interested them and that students would care about issues impacting their community. I also assumed students would be eager to create zines due to their interest in graphic novels. Another assumption was that students would feel connected to the novel that grounded this work and that this would spark their own creative process.

My final assumption was that a comic store in the school's locality would be open to building a partnership and collaborating with the students involved. This may not have been the case due to the strain on these small businesses from the COVID-19 pandemic and other pressures. Despite these limitations, I believe the learning gained from this action research would further my transformative teaching and offer further data for the broader education community.

Positionality of the Researcher

Raised in a system structured around white supremacy culture (Okun, 1999), which placed *perfectionism*, *a right to comfort*, and *paternalism* at its center, I have internalized many harmful viewpoints. Our country is rapidly diversifying, and it is predicted "that by 2035, students of color will constitute a majority of the student population" (Howard, 2020, p. 39). My teaching must be responsive to my students so that it is politically relevant and engaging. I need to continue paying attention to what my students know and care about, taking explicit steps to understand their intersecting identities and the valuable cultural knowledge they bring daily.

As a White, monolingual, middle-class, cisgender woman teacher, I know that I mirror the demographics of many teachers in the United States (Howard, 2020; Shear et al., 2018). When discussing student engagement with service-learning, Bowen and Berrien (2022) express the importance of reflecting "critically on power, privilege, and positionality…as (we) learn to

grapple with weighty issues" (p. 34). I must hold myself accountable, noticing and questioning biases as they likely arise. When engaging in this research, which is centered around equity, I must ensure that all students have access to materials and resources that will support their access so that they can be successful. I must see my students' humanity and the rich cultural knowledge each brings to our learning.

I recognize that all students hold multiple, intersecting identities, and I must seek opportunities to uplift these. I must actively watch out for places where my privileges might dictate a particular direction, taking note of when this happens to acknowledge the impact on my students and, if necessary, repair harm. Additionally, most students at this school come from wealthy backgrounds and have greater access to resources. Sometimes, these students, despite their best intentions, can inadvertently cause harm to communities experiencing oppression. To decrease the likelihood of harm, I needed to ensure that I was keenly aware of the contents of each zine and the intent behind their message. An example of this was using questioning to engage students in critical thinking about whether something they added to their zine might negatively impact community members.

Although the historical use of zines does speak to parts of my identity, being a Queer woman, they are not something that I have often used to share my experience in this world. It was vital for me to explore and know the history of this mode of communication and expression to ensure that we were using this tool in a culturally respectful manner.

Despite the likelihood that my positionality as a researcher would impact outcomes in this study, there remained a need for further research into inquiry and competency-based learning, as both approaches have the power to increase equity for all learners, offering a route to closing the opportunity gap. Due to this, I felt that it was necessary to implement this project.

Definition of Terms

Civic Agency

The capacity and commitment to participate actively, alongside others, to act on issues impacting the community (Emibayer & Mische, 1998; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Kawai & Cody, 2015).

Civic Education

Instruction that supports the building of "knowledge, skills, and values" needed to participate in their democracy (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008, p. 34). The development of students' understanding of how they can be active citizens in their communities (Sharma et al., 2022).

Civic Efficacy

Efficacy is "one's ability to attain personally and collectively, evidenced when one believes that what they do is effective" (Serriere, 2014, p. 45). Civic efficacy might be defined as feeling effective through community engagement, knowing that one can impact the world around them through their actions. According to Serriere, "civic efficacy entails youth taking a stance on issues that matter to them and knowing that their actions can make a difference" (2014, p. 45).

Civic Engagement

Acts in which an individual participates actively in their community. There are many forms of civic engagement, including volunteering, voting, learning about community needs, staying informed, and developing critical thinking skills (Sharma et al, 2022). According to Kahne & Middaugh, civic engagement is any action that allows students to "develop [their] sense of their civic and political capacities, connections, and commitments" (2008, p. 35).

Civic Zines

Zines (pronounced "zeens") are homemade, self-published booklets focusing on a cause, issue, or topic impacting one's community (Yang, 2010; Kawai & Cody, 2015). These booklets are shared with the community to take civic action. Historically, Zines have been used as counterculture, often used by historically underrepresented and marginalized groups whose views do not align with mainstream media (Congdon & Blandy, 2003).

Competency-Based Learning

An approach to pedagogy that focuses on mastering transferable skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for success in various contexts (Sturgis & Casey, 2018). Fullan and colleagues define competencies as "multilayered capacities that combine knowledge, skills, and attitudes about self and others" (2018, p. 17). Competency-based learning (CBL) stems from the understanding that the world is rapidly changing, and that teaching must equip students with skills that are interdisciplinary and will remain relevant in their futures (Klingstedt, 1972; Shubilla & Sturgis, 2012; Sullivan & Downey, 2015). Competencies may also be referred to as "soft skills" or "21st-century skills;" these may include collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (Alt et al., 2023, p. 1; Sullivan & Downey, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education states, "A competency is a combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task in a given context" (USDE, 2001, p. 1). A CBL approach emphasizes authentic experiences connected to students' lives (Sturgis & Casey, 2018; Sullivan & Downey, 2015). Many view this approach as having the potential to enhance educational equity as it moves away from one-size-fits-all traditional approaches of education, instead emphasizing student-responsive practices such as scaffolding, regular, formative assessment, and feedback,

shared expectations, and recognize that mastery is an ongoing endeavor (Sturgis & Casey, 2018; Sturgis & Patrick, 2010; Sullivan & Downey, 2015; Voorhees, 2001).

Community

Regarding this research, community refers to people connected by geographical location or sharing identities, values, or experiences (Bruce & Lin, 2009; Jamieson et al., 2011).

Dominant Culture

Provider's Council (2019) defines *dominant culture* as those who have identities that align with "the established language, religion, values, rituals, and social customs on which the society was built" (p. 2). Those holding identities mirrored by the dominant culture have power. In the United States, the dominant culture is White, Middle/Upper-Class, Christian, Cisgender-Men, Heterosexual, English-speaking, and able-bodied (Choudhury, 2015; Jewell, 2020).

Democracy

"A democracy is widely defined as a political system in which ultimate power lies with the whole people and in which all citizens share power equally at decisive moments, such as during elections." (EAD, 2021, p. 19). It is a system of government that values social participation and experimentation (Dewey, 2018). Serriere (2014) adds some key "principles of democracy" that include "valuing equal access to participation, justice, and due process of law," (p. 53). Additionally, democracy is recognized as a social endeavor that goes beyond personal interests, recognizing how decisions impact the whole community (Dewey, 2018).

Equity

In the context of education, equity refers to all students having access and opportunities to what they need "to develop [their] full academic and social potential" (Sturgis & Casey, 2018, p. 45). Equitable education is centered on three core ideas: high expectations for all students,

interrogating biases in systems and practices, and having cultural humility to seek out every student's "unique gifts, talents, and interests" (Sturgis & Casey, 2018, p. 45). According to Sturgis and Casey, "educational equity is a fair and just system where every learner — students and educators alike — is thriving." (2018, p. 2).

Inquiry-Based Learning

The act of using curiosity to drive learning opportunities through questioning and exploration. Murdoch (2015) defines inquiry-based learning as a means "to develop deeper understandings of how the world works and to build and refine a set of skills and dispositions that will enable learning to continue life-long and life-wide" (p. 14). Inquiry-based learning often moves through different stages, including activating prior knowledge, asking questions, researching and organizing findings, reflecting, and taking action. Movement through this "inquiry cycle" is a continuous process. Education theorist John Dewey and others have emphasized the importance of learning through inquiry in a social, authentic context to support the development of active, democratic citizens (Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Dewey, 2018; Klingstedt, 1972).

Student-Centered Learning

An approach to pedagogy responsive to a student's unique needs, focusing on building on prior knowledge, skills, and agency (Alt et al., 2023). Those taking a student-centered approach construct learning opportunities connected to their lives and experiences, tune into student interests and consider ways to explicitly teach skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for success beyond school. Additionally, Levy and colleagues describe student-centered learning as allowing students to co-create their learning journey (2023).

Urban

A geographical location with a high population relative to space. Cities such as New York, London, and Tokyo would be described as urban due to the density of buildings, population size, and complex infrastructure such as public transportation systems, libraries, airports, and museums (NCSS, 2013).

Implications

This study aimed to increase civic agency by intentionally implementing an authentic purpose for writing, allowing students to practice and develop two of our core competencies. An inquiry-based approach aimed to decrease the power dynamic between teacher and student, aiming to liberate students by following their lead and questions. The use of civic zines as a way for students to engage in this learning offers a new avenue for students to develop their voice and agency. It also has the potential to support students in recognizing their power as changemakers and how they might use their voice and influence to be part of positive, collective action for social justice.

This study offers a possible approach to building civic engagement and efficacy through implementing a competency and inquiry-based approach to learning in their setting. It shares strategies for gathering information using formative assessment tasks, ways to make learning transparent to students, ways to increase student engagement and voice, and a strategy for using reading and writing skills as a creative and authentic way to be civically engaged. This research offers a roadmap for educators wishing to provide students with another avenue for sharing their opinions, passions, and perspectives with others.

Although this project was implemented with a group of independent school students in an environment that is not representative of the student population of the United States, there is potential for it to be adapted and implemented in any school that serves upper elementary and

middle school students. Teachers searching for a way to liberate their students through their teaching will find that using civic zines is an accessible, engaging, and meaningful way. The project pathway used in this unit can be readily adapted to support a more prevalent need in any community. Although zines are used to present learning in this unit, it could be adapted to support other creative forms of civic engagement, from TED-style talks to student-generated documentaries, and beyond.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This action research explored ways educators might foster students' sense of civic agency and community engagement through an inquiry-based unit of study. Finding ways to nurture equity in schools is an area of great concern. There continues to be a growing academic achievement or opportunity gap in the United States, partly due to approaches that do not serve students of color and other marginalized groups. These disparities are also evident in civic engagement and participation (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008a).

This study aimed to explore the impact of implementing a student-centered, inquiry-based pedagogical approach that might support building students' competence in engaging meaningfully with their community. To promote this, I supported students in creating civic zines (pronounced "zeens"), self-published booklets about a topic, issue, or cause of personal importance to encourage their civic engagement. Through this project, I wanted to uncover ways to build students' ability to see themselves as agents of change, answering the question: *How might an inquiry approach support fifth-grade students' competency for meaningful community engagement, and how might this impact their self-efficacy?*

The school setting for this action research recently shifted to using a competency-based assessment model to develop a more equitable approach to assessment. As a teacher leader, my goal was to support my school by implementing units of study that taught subject-specific skills and skills connected to the above competencies.

Overview of the Literature Review

This literature review aims to share critical ideas supporting this action research. The review will first explore the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The two

fundamental theories supporting the development of this action research were Dewey's theory of inquiry and Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

Next, I consider more recent empirical research supporting the approaches and frameworks implemented in this research. The literature review will include research on effective ways to build civic engagement in youth, the power of a competency-based, inquiry approach to pedagogy, and the potential that a specific strategy – creating zines – holds to develop students' community engagement and capacity to be civic actors.

When researching, I gathered information using a combination of peer-reviewed journal articles and books retrieved from Education Source, ERIC, and my institution's library catalog. The key search terms used to identify recent research included *citizenship education, community involvement, competency-based learning, inquiry-based learning,* and *zines.*

Theoretical Rationale

The work of two notable theorists, John Dewey (theory of inquiry) and Albert Bandura (theory of self-efficacy), provided a base for this action research. Both theorists support that an inquiry-based and equity-centered approach to pedagogy develops student civic agency and engagement. They also argue that this approach promotes a more just and democratic society for all. Another critical belief from these theorists, aligning with my research, is individuals' power to impact their societal and natural environments.

Dewey's Theory of Inquiry

The first theory that supported this research was Dewey's theory of inquiry (Dewey, 2018a; Dewey, 2018b). One key idea in Dewey's model is that learning is an active process in which the learner and environment interact with and influence one another (2018a; 2018b). He shares that humans learn by encountering problems in their world and analyzing what factors

have created them (Dewey, 2018a). They then seek ways to solve the problem using their ideas and tools, often through collaboration. Dewey emphasized that diverse perspectives and experiences support this problem-solving and the movement toward developing a more secure and prosperous future for all (Dewey, 2018a).

Another key idea at the heart of Dewey's work is that education is critical in building a democratic society. He claims democracy is "more than a form of government" (Dewey, 2018a, p. 93). Instead, it is a collaborative problem-solving experience that is, at its most effective, informed by people with diverse backgrounds and experiences. He also asserts the critical need to educate citizens to actively engage in their society to support the functioning of democracy (Dewey, 2018a; Dewey, 2018b).

When considering pedagogy, Dewey favors a progressive and equitable approach to teaching and learning (2018a). He critiques some societies' value on distanced, authoritarian forms of education in which outside agencies dictate curriculum and standards (2018). Instead, he emphasizes a need for learning in "closer quarters with the nature of present social life" (Dewey, 2018a, p. 87). With this, Dewey also proposes that schools should view themselves as smaller versions of the wider society, "a miniature community" offering students opportunities to practice and build "experience they will use both while in school and later in life beyond school walls" (2018a, p. 381).

Dewey's theory of inquiry provided a foundation for this research, as its purpose was to provide students with the scaffolding and support to practice engaging with their community through their zine creation. Students had opportunities to consider how they fit into their society, identifying problems of personal importance, and evaluating ways to move towards solutions. Although the participants created individual zines, there was an emphasis on drawing on

knowledge and expertise from others; they used research from experts, credible sources, and one another (Nam, 2019). This approach was based on Dewey's ideas that learning in and alongside the community can support problem-solving and deeper understanding.

Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy

Another theory underpinning this research is Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is an element of Bandura's social cognitive theory, which views people as having a symbiotic relationship with their environments (Bandura, 1989). This theory asserts that the ability to enact personal and societal change starts with a person believing they can accomplish a goal.

There are several ways to build this self-efficacy. One way is to create ways to allow students to see others with similar experiences and identities being successful in similar activities. For example, seeing other young activists succeed positively impacts the participants' view of themselves as changemakers (Kahne & Sporte, 2008).

Another way to develop self-efficacy is through the learning environment. When learners have time and space to practice and feel supported through affirmative and constructive feedback, this can build the belief that they are capable and can succeed (Siegle & McCoach, 2007). When giving feedback, it is crucial to focus on the process and approach to the task and to highlight how students used their strengths and skills to succeed—knowing that they have the capacity for success and what is helping them to develop can support the further development of these skills.

According to Bandura (1990), when seeking to build self-efficacy, educators should plan activities that support students' needs through modeling and feedback, scaffolding the process. Hence, they are more likely to succeed (Siegle & McCoach, 2007). This forethought helps

learners feel confident and equipped to try a challenge that is an appropriate next step in their learning journey. Ensuring a high likelihood of success feeds the theory that the more success a person experiences, the more they will believe they can continue to be successful, building effort and motivation, which, in turn, leads to more chances of success and, therefore, a stronger sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 1997). Evidence shows that as learners develop self-efficacy, they become more willing to take risks, persevere, put greater effort into tasks, and have increased motivation (Bandura, 1989; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Bandura (1989) also states that as a person's efficaciousness grows, so do their goals and commitment to realizing them. People with higher levels of self-efficacy have greater trust in their problem-solving and analytical thinking skills, which in turn continues to build a person's feeling of accomplishment. In contrast, those with lower levels are less likely to feel motivated to persevere through challenges (Bandura, 1989).

Considering the enormity of the challenges facing American democracy and the size of the problems impacting their city, state, country, and broader world, I hoped that employing an approach centered on developing self-efficacy and agency might support the participants in developing motivation, perseverance, and self-belief, so that they felt able to be meaningfully engaged in their communities, taking civic action. Knowing this, I ensured that, when planning the unit of study, students had opportunities to actively develop their agency and efficacy through accessible and meaningful opportunities. I also sought ways in which students could see other youth engaging in their communities, empowering them to better see and act on their power, to be "better able to realize desired futures" (Bandura, 1997, p. 1).

Review of Related Research

To better understand the current research landscape in self-efficacy, inquiry, and ways to develop civic engagement, the next section of the literature review will establish a foundation for this action research project through critical analysis of recent studies. Three areas will be discussed. The first is how an inquiry-based pedagogical approach might affect student efficaciousness and engagement. Next, I will investigate projects implemented with adolescents and young adults that support civic agency and competence. The final section explores the promise zines hold to empower young adolescents to participate in their communities actively. Each area informed the design and implementation of this action research project.

Inquiry-Based Pedagogy for Building Efficacy and Engagement

Both Bandura and Dewey's theories on pedagogical approach support inquiry-based learning, or learning by doing, as a means for increasing student engagement and self-efficacy. Therefore, I wanted to know more about how I might implement this approach in my fifth-grade humanities classroom. This section will review studies that add to the understanding of using inquiry to build efficacy and civic engagement.

My school recently adopted a competency-based learning (CBL) model to support the tangibility of our mission, beliefs, and values. CBL is an approach to pedagogy that recognizes transferable skills that will enable learners to meet a rapidly changing world (Fullan et al., 2018; Levine & Patrick, 2019; Schaef, 2016). With CBL, the focus moves away from learning as solely knowledge acquisition to a means for developing increasing proficiency with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for lifelong learning and success (Alt & Raichel, 2018; Fullan et al., 2018; Levine & Patrick, 2019). Competencies are often developed based on the individualized needs of a particular setting, but examples of competencies might include

character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking (Fullan et al., 2018).

In their 2023 study, Alt and colleagues researched the impact of competency-based learning and formative assessment feedback on student perceptions of the acquisition of "soft skills," a term that might be synonymous with competencies (p. 1). The researchers argued that there is a need for a pedagogical approach that supports the development of "personal, social, and methodological" skills to support students in life beyond the classroom (Alt et al., 2023, p. 7). Alt and colleagues argued further that there is a need for a pedagogical approach that supports these skills, hypothesizing that a competency-based learning approach would realize this. They also believed that formative assessment feedback (FAF) would help students recognize when and how they were building these skills and strengthen their understanding of their next steps, informing goals (Alt et al., 2023).

This research was conducted in Israel, with Israeli undergraduate students studying education, health, or social work. The 303 students were at various points in their courses, from first year to final year. Seventy-six percent identified as female, and all students identified as ethnically Jewish or Arab (Alt et al., 2023, p. 7).

To measure student perceptions, the researchers used two different six-point scales, one focusing on CBL and the other on FAF. Their findings indicated that students felt that CBL was conducive to developing soft skills and that FAF indirectly supported the CBL approach. From their findings, the authors suggest that using a CBL approach centered on constructivist pedagogy fortifies students' perceptions of soft skill growth. Therefore, the authors recommended that educators use CBL and FAF in their instructional practice to develop these skills and ensure students are ready to meet their world beyond the classroom (Alt et al., 2023).

Due to using a single data collection tool, a student self-reported survey, these data are only partially reliable due to various factors. These factors included students' nuanced understanding of the survey's content and response biases. Also, the participants were majority female and Jewish; no other ethnic backgrounds were identified in the study. Therefore, this survey's results may differ with participants of different backgrounds, so further research is needed to verify these findings in other contexts. Using more than one tool to collect data, such as observations from professors and interviews, would have supported the triangulation of this data and strengthened its validity.

In their study, Steinberg and colleagues (2011) discussed the need to develop and implement valid assessment protocols for measuring the effectiveness of civic engagement programs in developing Civic-Minded Graduates (CMG). They define CMGs as students who are driven to be civically engaged. They sought to explore possible frameworks on which to build tools to measure civic-mindedness, defining it as "a person's inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community" (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 20).

Once they had explored prior empirical research, including Kirlin's four major civic skills for effective civic participation (2003), Bringle and Steinberg's domains for civic competence (2010), and Musil's six interconnected elements of civic engagement (2009), the authors developed and iterated on their findings to create three ways to measure civic-mindedness (Steinberg et al., 2011).

The researchers developed a mixed methods approach to gather information about how students from various courses demonstrated civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors. The three data collection tools included a self-reporting scale to collect quantitative data, called

the CMG Scale, alongside a narrative prompt and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to gather qualitative data. To assess student responses, the researchers designed a rubric that was cross-checked and examined by faculty from a different university. They later revised this rubric based on these recommendations.

The Steinberg team began the research process by conducting three studies to test the validity and reliability of the CMG scale, narrative prompt, and interview protocol (the CMG construct). The first study checked for consistency of the CMG scale with 70 participants at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). The participants were each involved in service-learning opportunities at this institution. The study showed that the scale had "good internal consistency" (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 25). The CMG Scale was used to assess students at the beginning and end of the academic year. This study showed a positive correlation between CMG scores and "the number of service-learning courses a student had taken" (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 25).

The researchers used a second study to continue exploring the CMG Scale's reliability. They compared the data collected with their scale and Bringle et al.'s (2006) integrity scale. In this study, 86 IUPUI students, all involved in a service-learning program, completed a pre-and post-assessment using the CMG Scale. Researchers adapted their wording from negative to positively worded statements to check for "social-desirability bias" (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 23). They found that results continued to be consistent, and there continued to be a positive correlation between the number of service-learning opportunities and students' civic-mindedness. They also found a positive correlation between the CMG scale and The Integrity Scale, indicating its validity. They did not find a significant correlation between the CMG Scale

and The Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale, noting that the respondents did not use this scale to "say good things about one's self" (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 26).

In their final validation study, the researchers aimed to significantly broaden their sample size, again seeking to validate the CMG construct through the triangulation of the three data collection methods. They aimed to recruit 4,396 participants by inviting them to engage in an online survey through email; 606 students responded to this survey, completing the CMG Scale and CMG Narrative online. Next, the researchers randomly contacted 200 of these students to invite them to the semi-structured CMG interview. The researchers offered gift cards for their participation, and 41 students completed the interviews. However, not all students had completed the other two components of this data collection protocol. Out of the group of 41 students, only 29 completed all three elements of the CMG construct.

Triangulation of the three data points aimed to strengthen the researchers' findings by giving a well-rounded picture of each participant's civic-mindedness. The results of these data showed "significant correlations between score and ratings on all three instruments," validating their worthiness as a collective tool for measuring civic-mindedness (Steinberg et al., 2011, pp. 27-28).

Limitations of this research included the possibility of social-desirability bias and the likelihood that participants involved in the first two studies were "predisposed toward civic-mindedness" as all participants were engaged in service-learning programs (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 28). In the third study, the researchers hoped to mitigate this limitation by including a larger sample size and not only selecting students who were known to be involved in service-learning programs. Another limitation is that the CMG domains "are all rooted in an American understanding of civic learning" (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 28). To strengthen findings, future

research might further examine how to build a “cross-cultural analysis” of these components to include diverse perspectives of civic-mindedness (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 29).

Implications from this research include exploring how higher education institutions might best develop civic-mindedness in their students to build the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to engage in democratic life. Steinberg and colleagues posit that the CMG instruments might offer a way to assess student’s competence in this area and inform future learning opportunities. Another implication of this study is the need to build opportunities for students to engage in collaborative, interpersonal experiences to support the “internalization of motivation” for civic action (Steinberg et al., 2011, p. 28). The researchers noted that, despite limitations, the CMG construct offers a way to communicate and assess “civic learning outcomes” and provides a place for organizations to root their vision for the “public purposes of higher education” (p. 30).

Although the Steinberg et al. research was designed and conducted with higher education institutions and students in mind, many helpful parallels exist between my action research and this study. The core purpose of both was to learn more about developing and assessing civic-mindedness and competence in students.

Even though IUPUI and my school use different vocabulary to describe the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors associated with civic-mindedness, there are some significant similarities. Both institutions have worked to carefully construct, clarify, and articulate the outcomes for their graduates, be they in eighth grade or their senior year of college. Both have taken this further, recognizing the need to assess this part of students' teaching and learning experience.

This research provided some interesting insights into how student civic engagement might be measured. Triangulating three data sources strengthened my findings, allowing me to cross-check and validate them when analyzing. After reading this research, I explored the questions and success criteria from the rubric used in this study; this allowed me to notice and compare the CMG Rubric and my school's competency-based framework. This study informed my data-gathering strategies, notably the narrative reflection used to discover more about my participants' views of changemakers and their self-efficacy as changemakers. It also supported my use of a rubric to assess students' pre- and post-unit of study.

The third study explored in this subsection is a strategic case study conducted in 2010. In this research, Serriere used focus group interviews alongside observations of classrooms and student meetings to add data to a multiyear research project investigating "the process and products of civic engagement" (Serriere, 2014, p. 46). The research took place at a public elementary school in a university town in the Mid-Atlantic. Almost half the school population received free or reduced lunch. The school administration and educators valued an inquiry-based pedagogy, and this research focused on ways to foster civic efficacy in early adolescence.

The participants were six fifth-grade girls who identified an issue of injustice in their school lunch program. The students were encouraged by their teacher and principal to advocate for a more inclusive school lunch that met the diverse dietary needs of their community. Adults supported these students in conducting student polls to gather data, meeting with various people of knowledge and power, such as cafeteria managers, and designing presentations that would further their aim: to include more lunch options for their peers based on community needs. The students collaborated, persevered through setbacks, and ultimately changed their school district's menu based on their civic action.

Serriere (2014) identified several themes from this research that they posit as potential supportive practices for fostering civic efficacy conducive to ongoing engagement. These were to use “a personally relevant” curriculum to equip students for life beyond “abstract facts to be memorized” (Serriere, 2014, pp. 48-49). To achieve this goal, researchers recommended that teachers are “socially responsive” and connect to “students’ intrinsic interests” (Serriere, 2014, p. 49). Serriere argues that curriculum must place life at the center and that doing so positively impacts academic achievement.

Another theme from this study was the emphasis on inquiry to grow students’ capacity for civic engagement. The author states that approaching their cause with curiosity allowed these fifth graders to understand their issue's various perspectives and nuances. Inquiry fostered productive “empathy” and open-mindedness, arguably supporting buy-in and partnership from other stakeholders, such as the cafeteria manager (Serriere, 2014, p. 49). Using student questions to drive their learning was a well-established practice at this school site. The teacher wanted to nurture an environment that resisted “traditional hierarchical roles of teacher-expert” (Serriere, 2014, p. 50). She applied various teaching strategies to create this environment, including modeling mistake-making, facilitating inquiry through questioning, and providing time and space for students to pursue projects connected to their interests.

During this study, the researcher observed the classroom teacher and principal constructing opportunities to scaffold learning so students could grow in confidence and competence. An example was their support in creating a presentation for the school community about their issue. The thinking behind this pedagogical practice was that by modeling and providing space to make mistakes and ask questions, students would see that these were essential parts of the learning process and feel supported to do the same.

Another key finding in the research was that "diversity" is vital in encouraging engagement and efficacy in young adolescents (Serriere, 2014, p. 50). One interview with a student participant showed that working in collaboration with others from diverse experiences allowed her to understand that "it's not just about us" (Serriere, 2014, p. 50). Participants also noted that including diverse personalities, needs, and experiences helped make a wider-reaching change and affected more community stakeholders. They also stated that this collaboration enabled them to persevere through challenges and achieve things that they may not have been able to do alone. The ability to achieve something together arguably enhanced their efficacy and empowered the students to make a change more extensive than they could achieve at an individual level.

Many quotes from participants in this case study support their feeling of being efficacious. For example, one student stated, "I know that I can change stuff now, and if I try hard enough, that I can" (Serriere, 2014, p. 51). Another said, "I think now I'm not afraid to take a stand and try to change something that I think should be changed" (Serriere, 2014, p. 51). These quotes demonstrate a building of competence and confidence, which play a critical role in increasing future civic participation (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

This study informed my own as participants were the same age and attended school in an urban environment. The school site's vision and mission were like mine, with an explicit focus on inquiry and building students' capacity to lead their learning and impact their communities. A significant difference to note is the socioeconomic differences between both groups. Students in the study attended a public school, with around half of the enrolled students receiving free or reduced lunch. In contrast, participants in my research attended a well-resourced independent school and were mainly financially privileged. My site may have more room for enacting this

approach because we do not engage in national and local summative testing, which may pressure public school teachers to teach a purely knowledge-based curriculum with little room for student-driven inquiry. Additionally, Serriere found that student participants developed a sense of importance for being "a voice for people that are afraid to be their own voice or can't" and that they could stand up for others (Serriere, 2014, p. 51). This promising finding felt integral to developing my participants' allyship, defined by Swalwell as standing with others and using certain privileges to work alongside others for equity (2013).

Although the participants at my school site differ from those in this study in various ways, the approaches are likely transferable to my context. Encouragement, modeling inquiry as a learning stance, providing time and space for exploring issues of personal importance, and including diverse perspectives are practices many assert as necessary for fostering a student-centered learning environment (Alt & Raichel, 2018; Bandura, 1997; Dewey, 2018b; Swalwell, 2013). Therefore, when designing my unit of study, it was essential to incorporate these efficacy-building and engagement-enhancing practices.

The following subsection discusses recent implementations in higher education and grade-school classrooms. By reviewing previous approaches for building efficacy and engagement, my goal was to grow my understanding of ways to successfully design a unit of study that would support my fifth-grade students in developing their competence with community engagement, thereby increasing their development as civic agents.

Effective Approaches for Building Civic Engagement & Efficacy

As I developed this research project, I wanted first to explore the literature on ways practitioners are supporting civic engagement in education settings. This review supported my curriculum design, as I implemented a unit of study that was intended to promote knowledge,

skills, and dispositions, growing student competence. This segment will investigate three approaches to support civic engagement: interactive documentaries (iDocs), TED-style speeches, and community presentations.

Sharma and colleagues (2022) researched the impact of using interactive documentaries (iDocs) to promote civic engagement among university students. The sample size was 23, with 11 male and 12 female-identifying students. The study was conducted across two universities, one in the United States and one in India. Researchers designed an iDoc unit of study using Musil's "six braids" of the "Civic Learning Spiral" (Musil, 2009, pp. 61–63). They then trained faculty to teach this course to students.

In the unit, students brainstormed needs within their communities. Next, they wrote a proposal for their iDoc, identifying their approach to creating their short film. They researched the issue, identified sources of information, and selected the style of iDoc approach they would use. During the process, they had to overcome problems, including technology challenges.

Researchers used a mixed method approach, gathering data from pre- and post-surveys and through a facilitated group reflection interview after the iDoc process. Their data concluded that students participating in creating iDocs showed increased civic engagement, notably around "feeling responsible for their community" (Sharma et al., 2022, p. 271). They also noted "significant changes" (p. 271) across the six areas of community engagement. Students' comments in the group interview were positive; they discussed ways that they had become more connected to their communities and how they had also developed an increased "sense of place" (p. 266).

Some limitations of this study include a small sample size, as there were just 23 students across two universities. There may also be bias since all researchers had an interest and expertise

in media education; therefore, it was in their interest to highlight iDocs as a powerful vehicle for change.

The Sharma et al. study connects to my own in that it offers a strategy to impact student civic engagement positively. Although this study had a small sample size and was conducted with an older student population, the frameworks and approaches supported my inquiry. These included Musil's Civic Learning Spiral (2009), Doolittle and Faul's Civic Engagement Scale (2013), the questions used to measure civic engagement, and building time for student reflection. This study also offered information about "place-based pedagogy" and the potential power of engaging in local change (Sharma et al., 2022, p. 266).

Another study that supported the design of my action research unit was "The Responsible Change Project" (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 16). In this study, researchers investigated how teachers might support students in developing "a social justice mindset" by implementing a new English language arts curriculum (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 16). The researchers sought to answer two research questions, "(1) How did the combination of C3WP and RCP influence student growth in the intersections of literacy, engagement, and writing?" and (2) In what ways do middle grade students engage in research and service learning to foster inquiry and develop their own solutions?" (p. 17).

This exploratory case study was developed to test a curricular approach centered on equity and community engagement to give purpose and relevance to argument writing. It was directed by an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher who collaborated with a university professor. The participants were an "ethnically and socioeconomically diverse" class of 140 eighth-grade students at a "high needs public middle school" (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, pp. 19, 16). There was no additional information about gender representation.

In the first semester, these students worked to develop their ability to use sources to support their claims. They also explored various social justice issues, which may have scaffolded their independent work in the second semester.

The curriculum, called *The Responsible Change Project*, was designed to allow students to inquire into a cause of their choosing. Throughout this semester-long project, students progressed in their ability to analyze sources for trustworthiness, developing their media literacy skills. Learners gathered information about their cause using sources that offered diverse perspectives on their issue. They learned about how bias is woven into news and information and the importance of using other sources to check an author's claims.

When researching, the students gathered and organized their information using digital tools. They honed their argument writing, interweaving their new knowledge as evidence for their claims. During the learning process, learners made connections, conclusions, and recommendations for the future. Next, the students took action, creating a speech similar to a TED talk and delivering it to an audience connected to their issue. Later, in the last paragraphs of their arguments, some used the recommendations they generated to act and participate in their community. For example, one group of students shared a presentation with elementary school students, educating them and encouraging them to stand against animal cruelty.

The researchers used a variety of qualitative approaches to collect data. They used observations of teachers to gain insights into students' reception of this curriculum and the experience of facilitating this project. They also conducted student interviews, observed student TED Talks, and conducted formative assessments of students' writing to assess the impact of this unit.

This qualitative study was designed to empower students by facilitating their agency, building on Paolo Freire's "liberatory, critical pedagogy" (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 24). The curriculum and approach aimed to empower students to act in their communities, valuing their cultural knowledge and recognizing their power as agents for change. They found that "students develop as literate beings who value and see the purpose of reading, writing, speaking, and listening when they can use those literate practices for their own self-interests and with the purpose of enacting change" (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 24). When students felt that the learning was relevant and that they had agency, they produced "powerful" and "authentic" arguments (p. 21). Through this learning, their teacher believed that "students developed cultural capital," a reference to Bourdieu (1986) (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 22).

Although many positive outcomes were connected to The Responsible Change Project, the authors identify that this unit presented some significant challenges. Managing over 60 projects was "exhausting" due to each group's varied needs (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 20). There were unforeseen skill gaps that became evident at the beginning of the research, presenting challenges for some students. Examples included not knowing where to begin, frustrations when initial ideas were unsuccessful, and losing a "sense of direction" with their projects (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 23). Nevertheless, the authors recognized that as much knowledge can be gained from what did not work as from what did.

It is clear from this research that although this learning was "wobbly" and "messy" (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, pp. 23-24), the students had the opportunity to build many beneficial skills and dispositions. They developed their questioning and interview skills, research and analysis skills, and socio-emotional skills, in addition to strengthening their understanding of constructing written and spoken arguments. Despite encountering some difficulties in the

process, students and teachers felt that this was a valuable experience, “many students explained how this project was the most meaningful thing they did in school all year” (Coffey & Fulton, 2018, p. 21).

A limitation of this study was the likelihood of subjectivity. The implementation and reflection were both from the practitioner’s perspective, and biases may have caused blind spots in their reflection. However, I appreciated their honesty and willingness to be humble and recognize the value of collaboration and iteration in future implementation; this is another example of Freirean ideology echoing through this project - the idea of teacher reflection and “praxis” (Freire, 1970, p. 50).

Another area for me to consider when reflecting on the usefulness of this study for informing my own is the difference in educational settings. This project was conducted with eighth graders in a Title I, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse in the Southeastern United States. In contrast, my research will focus on two fifth-grade classes in an affluent independent school in Northern California, with a majority White student population. Therefore, the reception and impact of this implementation would likely be significantly different.

Upon reflection on this study, I identified some supportive approaches and ideas to help construct my unit of study. For example, learning about this class’s challenges reinforced the importance of ensuring explicit skill instruction and modeling in this unit. It also encouraged me to take a flexible approach to instruction, using formative assessments to identify students' needs and guide my facilitation. This project also helped me consider using a pre-unit assessment that would show student understanding of change-making so that I could adapt the unit and strengthen their competence. One final important takeaway from this study was that there was as

much to gain from what did not work as from what did. I hoped to hold this mindset at the center of my action research and be open-minded with the findings.

Belvins and colleagues (2021) explored the impact of a week-long action civics program for 9-14-year-olds. The authors define *action civics* as a framework that fosters a combination of learning about and engaging in civics. The "iEngage program" was developed to support adolescent participants in developing their community and political engagement (Belvins et al., 2021, p. 148). This program guided students through an inquiry-based approach, where students identified issues in their communities, selected one of personal importance, conducted research, and acted by developing a presentation to share with community members.

Researchers wanted to learn about the effectiveness of iEngage on youth community and political engagement. They also sought to explore how and if aspects of identity impacted this engagement and how data may have changed from year to year. Belvins and others (2021) collected these data through pre- and post-program surveys. These surveys asked participants to use a five-point Likert scale to self-report their "abilities, competencies, and experiences related to community and political engagement" (Belvins et al., 2021, p. 149).

Participants responded to around 25 questions modeled on Flanagan and colleagues' (2007) "Civic Measurement Models (CMM)" and adapted for adolescent respondents (Belvins et al., 2021, p. 149). In this longitudinal study, the Belvins team analyzed the responses to these questions for six years (from 2013 to 2018). They grouped the questions into three constructs: "community engagement," "political engagement," and "political activism" (p. 151).

In total, 456 participants responded to this survey. Participants' demographics were relatively balanced in terms of gender, with greater representation of younger participants (rising fifth to seventh graders). The average reported racial and ethnic identities of participants were

70% white, 11% Hispanic or Latino, and 6% Black or African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or "other" (Belvins et al., 2021, pp. 149-150). The authors do not share a geographical location for this study. However, they do identify that the racial and ethnic identities of participants do not represent the area in which iEngage occurs, with 60% of the local student population identifying as Black or Latino (p. 156).

Through the analysis of survey responses, the authors found that, overall, participants reported increased ability, efficacy, and competence with constructs indicating community and political engagement. These gains were significant over time for participants regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity. The data also show that growth in the constructs of political activism and community engagement for female-identifying participants was slightly above that of male-identifying participants. Researchers also learned that those participants who had attended the camp in prior years continued to show growth pre- and post-survey. The only area where there was no growth was for Black/African American participants' response to the inquiry about their "likelihood of participating in activism activities" (Belvins et al., 2021, p. 152). However, with only six percent of all participants identifying in this subgroup, the authors suggest further research with a larger sample size is necessary to verify this finding (pp. 152, 155, & 156).

Belvins and colleagues identify several limitations of this study, one being the size of the race/ethnicity subgroups. Although participants identifying as Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander had significantly smaller sample sizes, these participants showed overall gains in the three constructs. The authors acknowledge the need to further include students of color due to the significant difference in representation compared to the local student population (p. 156). This recognition is critical as the student population diversifies nationwide (USCB, 2021; Howard, 2019). Further research would inform future

action and implementation of the iEngage project to identify trends and make the program more equitable, supporting the transferability of this promising practice.

Another limitation the researchers noted was using a Likert scale when developing surveys. If participants responded to the pre-test prompts with the highest score, 5, there was no room to show growth in the post-test; this was problematic as some students had attended the camp for multiple years and, due to this limitation, there was no way to show growth over time. Researchers used this finding to consider an additional question in future surveys to discover more about the longitudinal impact of repeated attendance on the three constructs.

Something that might strengthen this data would be the inclusion of qualitative data from participants. In future years, it could be beneficial to use semi-structured interviews with students and facilitators to learn more about their experiences. Including space for more extended written responses alongside the Likert scale would be another way to gain illustrative, qualitative data. Qualitative data would add further description to the quantitative data so researchers could finetune the program to promote the strengths and address specific areas for improvement.

Sharing the general geographical location of this study, such as inner-city, suburban, or rural, would support other practitioners in understanding how this approach might suit their context. It would also help fellow researchers to know the participants' socio-economic status as this is another vulnerable group that is often civically excluded and disenfranchised (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008a). Adding these two pieces of information would support the transferability of this program, furthering the impact on community and political engagement for youth.

The anecdotal findings from this research study also informed my project. The authors emphasized several strategies that they believed were conducive to growth in civic engagement. One recommendation that guided my design was to include student choice, allowing participants

to select an issue of personal importance. The authors shared that this choice promoted "motivation and engagement" and a connection to their communities (Belvins et al., 2021, p. 157). They state that this was particularly supportive for participants from marginalized groups as it helped to provide an opportunity to explore issues that "are ignored, or worse yet, enabled in schools" (p. 157). I wanted to ensure that students in my study also had this opportunity.

Another finding that supported my approach was to build an opportunity to engage with community members beyond the classroom. Belvins et al. express that this allows for greater awareness of issues impacting the local community and the chance for authentic, meaningful connections. This connection may increase youth civic engagement, helping them to foster the desire to be civically engaged in the present and future.

In the next section, I identify another approach for promoting student civic engagement and efficacy: Zines.

Zines for Civic Engagement & Self-Efficacy

When exploring current research around modalities for building civic engagement and self-efficacy in students, I discovered several articles identifying zines as a promising practice. This section of the literature review will provide information about studies that center on creating zines to develop student agency and engagement.

Through their research during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gray et al. (2022) discuss the personal, practical, and political power that zines continue to hold for self-expression. The researchers conducted their study online during social distancing at the height of the pandemic. They connected with 45 adult participants using Zoom over a series of 3 two-hour long sessions. Their research inquired into how the collective act of zine-making might offer an opportunity to slow down and foster reflection, resisting traditional views of academia in a higher education

context. It also explored the value zine-making might hold in interrupting systemic oppression in a higher education context.

The researchers employed a qualitative research methodology as they gathered data through their analysis of observations they made during workshops and the analysis of the 20 zines submitted by the participants. The researchers were also active participants in this study, "participant researchers" (Gray et al., 2022, p. 893). This participation may have positive and negative implications for the validity of the findings of this research. The participant-researcher gained knowledge of what it was like to engage in this study, and their experiences may have provided them with insights that support them in fine-tuning and adapting their approach and methodology. They also had opportunities to empathize with participants while moving through the same process. Engaging in the research alongside participants may have leveled the researcher-participant dynamic, possibly increasing participant vulnerability and comfort. This approach could be compelling in such a personal and political act as zine-making. However, participant-researchers risk becoming too closely connected to their personal experiences, skewing data based on their subjectivity. Because of their positionality, the participant-researcher may find it challenging to identify blind spots in their findings.

In their analysis, Gray et al. identified that zines provided makers with time and space to pause and express parts of their identities, positioning "zine-making as feminist autobiographical acts" (p. 901). The participants also co-created meaning, shared knowledge, and challenged the status quo through their creativity.

Zines provided creators with a way to speak up and advocate for issues that are important to them. For example, one creator used a combination of photography, sketches, and words to speak out against injustice. One of the participants chose to center their zine on "silenced voices"

(Gray et al., 2022, p. 896). It could be argued that zines have a potential liberatory practice for sharing ideas or issues that affect the creator or their communities. An example of this was how one participant chose to create a zine interrogating the question, *How do we stand in solidarity with people whose voices are silenced?,* highlighting how zines may provide an avenue to "address issues of social justice" (Gray et al., 2022, p. 897), providing space for those with oppressed identities to express themselves and those with power to act in solidarity.

Zines offer participants a practical and accessible way to communicate with others. The researchers provided participants with resources needed to create zines, including "zine-making materials and instructions" needed (Gray et al., 2022, p. 893). The DIY nature and lack of rules for zine creation created differentiated entry points, allowing all participants to develop their zine successfully.

Although their research was with adults from various higher education institutions worldwide, I gained some key learnings from this study. A significant takeaway is the potential power of zines as a form of creative expression, activism, and liberation. This research confirmed that zines might support a person's self-efficacy for civic engagement, as they might also find "a collective and creative space within which we were able to say, 'we made something useful'" (p. 902). I also recognize that the civic zines that students create will "yield rich and fruitful data that capture aspects of … life" and that this might enable me to gain further insight into students' competence as civic agents (Gray et al., 2022, p. 901). Next, I will share a study focusing on how zines foster engagement and promote self-efficacy in mathematics.

Oslund and Barton (2017) explore how zines support students' mathematical engagement and help them develop their self-efficacy as mathematicians. They argue that providing students with opportunities to incorporate other skills and knowledge into their mathematical learning

fosters “powerful mathematics identities” (p. 22). In this article, the authors suggest that, due to their use as a tool for resistance, zines may allow students who feel disempowered to reimagine and discover alternative ways to feel strong in math. They propose that the unrestricted nature of zines might remove boundaries that prevent students from expressing their math identity, stifling engagement.

Participants ranged from ages eight to 14, and the action research project was conducted during a summer math camp. Researchers made decisions to enable participants to see the diversity of mathematical skills and approaches, fostering self-efficacy. They provided problems connected to the participants’ local community and emphasized the value of collaborative meaning-making. In each session, researchers provided students with time to reflect on the question, *How are you smart in math?,* adding to a “smartness wall” (Oslund & Barton, 2017, p. 23). According to Bandura (1982), regular reinforcement of capability, or verbal persuasion, allows people to build self-efficacy. Oslund and Barton believed that the smartness wall gave students a growing visual representation of the vast scope of mathematical knowledge and skills.

After this activity, participants explored models of zines, learning about the features of the genre. They reviewed topics and experiences from the math camp and decided on the format of their zine. Participants chose to work independently or in collaboration and were given autonomy around how much they wanted to share. Oslund and Barton (2017) found that all students could access zine-making and that the process allowed participants to reflect, teach others, and demonstrate less apparent yet crucial mathematical skills. The traditional math classroom emphasizes speed and accuracy, yet this project gave value to slowing down, communicating ideas, and reflecting (pp. 26–27).

Another finding was that creating zines gave students the space to connect to their "informal mathematics capabilities" (Oslund & Barton, 2017, p. 27). Through analysis of the zines, researchers found that students made connections to math they used outside the classroom. Oslund and Barton argue that this allowed students to see how they were using mathematics at home, seeing themselves as mathematicians, positively impacting self-efficacy.

A third finding was that this project empowered students to go beyond being passive consumers of mathematics; they were actively producing zines to communicate their mathematical thinking with others. It might be argued that this experience enabled the participants to build their sense of autonomy and ownership of what they would share and how they would share it, helping them feel increased capability and capacity as mathematicians as they moved from student to teacher.

A limitation of this study was that it included self-reflection evidence from participants; however, this might also have strengthened the findings. Therefore, in my research, I aimed to build opportunities for students to record ongoing reflections to gain insight into the impact of this project.

Oslund and Barton's research supported my implementation of zines to build students' self-efficacy. It showed that zines offer students choice and voice, empowering them to be active learners. In my study, I hoped to discover how this efficacy-building approach might be applied to promoting civic efficacy and engagement at my school site.

The final study that helped shape my unit design was Kawai and Cody's Civic Zines project (Kawai & Cody, 2015). In this article, the authors reflected on a unit of study that used the creation of student-generated zines to develop civic engagement. The authors shared the process and purpose of this unit and how it connected to "The New Civics and Project Citizen"

protocols and “The College, Career, and Civics (C3) Framework” (p. 22). At the time of this study, Cody was a fifth-grade teacher at a public school in Pennsylvania. Kawai was an assistant professor from the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. The qualitative data presented include student comments, observations, and teacher and student reflections. From the selected comments, students seemed passionate about the causes they researched. They built and applied various skills, including critical thinking skills when using multiple sources to check trustworthiness, reflection skills when giving “constructive feedback” (Kawai & Cody, 2015, p. 23) and communication skills when using supporting facts to present their information persuasively.

Certain aspects of this research study mirror my own. Both groups were fifth graders developing zines about civic issues, and I aimed to design opportunities for student choice and voice, just as Cody did. However, there are some differences between our studies and participants. This unit was implemented in a public school in Pennsylvania, whereas my research will take place at an affluent independent school in coastal California.

A limitation of this study is that the article does not mention any problems that arose, and the authors are published in the National Council for the Social Studies, the creator of the C3 Framework. Therefore, there is possible bias in what information was shared and what was left out. The study does not explain the research methodology, and most of the data are quotes from students or observations; both forms of data might be influenced by authors’ attitudes, opinions, and other forms of subjectivity. However, the relevance and clarity of this article's process offered some great starting points for my research design.

Summary

As I reviewed the literature discussed above, several significant themes emerged. From Dewey and Bandura's theories of inquiry and self-efficacy to more recent learning evident in current practice, data from this research provided a foundation for my study. The reviewed research showed how pedagogical approaches and a project's design impact student efficacy and engagement.

There is a clear argument for using inquiry-based learning, centered on student-generated questioning and curiosity, to increase engagement and efficacy (Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Dewey, 2018a; Serriere, 2014). When learning within a meaningful context that connects to student lives, making meaning collaboratively, and being encouraged by adults who disrupt the teacher-student power dynamic, students are more likely to feel efficacious, driving their engagement (Belvins et al., 2021; Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Serriere, 2014; Sharma et al., 2022).

Another theme was the importance of providing time and space for students to develop non-academic skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and perspective-taking (Alt et al., 2023; Dewey, 2018a; Steinberg et al., 2011). This learning supports competency-based education, fostering a blend of transferable, interdisciplinary knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for, and relevant to, life beyond school (Fullan et al., 2018; Levine & Patrick, 2019; Schaef, 2016).

For teaching to have an increased chance of building efficacy and engagement, there is a need for meaningful, regular, and constructive formative feedback (Alt et al., 2023; Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Siegle & McCoach, 2007). Additionally, for students to feel supported and confident, this feedback should connect to shared success criteria and outcomes (Steinberg et al., 2011).

The final theme echoed through the prior research was the value of diversity and inclusion of cultural knowledge to support student efficacy and engagement. When students could share their voices and experiences, they felt their power, increasing their confidence and belief that they could achieve their goals (Gray et al., 2022; Oslund & Barton, 2017; Serriere, 2014).

Literature supports using zines as a pedagogical tool to foster efficacy and engagement for students of various ages, experiences, and abilities. According to Desyllas and Synclair, "Zines can be used as a pedagogical tool for awareness, education, empowerment, and transformation." (2014, p. 296). An action-civics inquiry-oriented zine project was chosen as an accessible and tangible method for empowering students to express their voices and grow competence as civic agents (Belvins et al., 2021; Desyllas & Synclair, 2014).

The following chapter describes how this research informed the methodology and implementation design in the action research *Zines for a Means*. A pre-unit assessment, written student reflections, and an end-of-unit exit ticket were used to collectively gain insight into how zines might foster adolescents' civic efficacy and engagement.

Chapter III

Methods

In a polarized political climate saturated with information and inequity, there is a dire need to focus on educating for democracy. This is a pivotal time in U.S. history as the world continues to develop rapidly. With an increasingly diverse population, new forms of communication, and the integration of artificial intelligence, there is arguably a need to reimagine the approach to education (Fullan et al., 2018; Howard, 2020). There continues to be a civic opportunity gap for low-income students and students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008a). The current systems for teaching and assessing civics have not increased civic knowledge or participation in youth (CIRCLE, n.d.; Putnam, 2000). Citizens aged 18 to 29 are less likely to vote than older citizens, and this gap widens between young BIPOC and low-income voters and their White counterparts (CIRCLE, n.d.). This pattern of inequity continues to repeat in the results of the most recent NAEP civics test, where only 22% of students achieved "proficient" (NAEP, 2022a). Coffey and Fitchett (2015) call on educators to be courageous and to develop a more socially just curriculum that resists a culture of teaching and testing content over opportunities for mastery and increasing competence. If the education system in this country was developed to support democracy for all people, policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders must focus on its development. It is argued that this is a time for transforming "peril" into "possibility" (EAD, 2021, p. 2).

In light of recommendations by our accrediting body, my school recently shifted to implementing a competency-based framework for assessment. This framework was developed to build a shared and stable language to assess the skills and dispositions identified in our Learner

Profile. I am part of a teacher-leader team at my school known as *Early Adopters* (EAs). EAs work alongside the school's Director of Curriculum and Program Innovation and an outside consultancy to develop our familiarity with this framework, intending to support other educators in adopting this approach. This action research offered an opportunity to reinforce an understanding of ways to enact this new framework and support our students. This research sought to identify how inquiry and explicit skill instruction might scaffold students' development in the competency: *engage meaningfully in my community*.

Informed by theory and practice from past and present, this study aimed to add to a growing body of approaches that educators might implement to promote civic engagement and build student efficacy. This efficacy is an integral element for democratic participation; students must believe they can impact their community or are less likely to be active and engaged citizens (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Serriere, 2014). If we seek to build a democracy for all, with an active citizenry, there is a critical need to promote accessible and engaging civic engagement in schools. A review of the literature surrounding the use of an inquiry and competency-based pedagogical approach and strategies that encourage engagement and efficacy informed the design of the *Zines for a Means* project. Zines are short, self-published booklets often focused on a topic of personal interest or importance (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Mitre & Serriere, 2015; Pérez, 2017). The term "zine" (pronounced "zeen") stems from the term *fanzine* (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004, p. 408).

The relevance of zines as a form of political and civic engagement allows students to communicate what they care about meaningfully and authentically. Based on this understanding, I hypothesized that using this approach and building students' competence in engaging meaningfully with their community through authentic, formative tasks might strengthen their

self-efficacy. Adolescence is a formative period in which humans develop habits that shape the adults they become (Serriere, 2014). This project aimed to provide them with a learning opportunity to practice being civically engaged with their community and feel a level of success that might motivate them to continue to develop their aptitude for civic engagement beyond the classroom. The question guiding this study was: *How might an inquiry approach support fifth-grade students' competency for meaningful community engagement, and how might this impact their self-efficacy?*

Setting

This study was conducted at an accredited urban, independent school in a city in Northern California. The campus was in the heart of a vibrant neighborhood, with access to public parks, museums, and well-resourced public libraries. The school prides itself on its commitment to social justice, and its mission, beliefs, and values emphasized community, collaboration, courage, and active learning. In the hope of increasing access to this education, the school used several factors to lower the cost of tuition. The community hosted various fundraising events throughout the year, including an auction and campaign that generates funds to support this sliding-scale tuition and wrap-around support for families who need resources. The school was well-resourced, and students had access to a large yard, a school library, a librarian, a dedicated maker space, and even a farm. The middle school students also had access to 1:1 electronic devices, either an iPad or MacBook.

The school was spread across two campuses, with three programs: early childhood (preschool and transitional kindergarten), lower school (kindergarten to fourth grade), and middle school (fifth-eighth grade). Lower school and early childhood program classrooms had two teachers per class, whereas middle school had one teacher per subject. Each division had a

counselor to support students' social-emotional needs and a learning specialist who worked with educators and families to provide any necessary accommodations for students who were neurodiverse.

At the time of this study, the school enrollment was just under 500 pre-8th students. Around a fourth of students received sliding-scale tuition, and just over 6% received free or reduced-cost lunches. In addition, just under 50% identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), nearly 1% identified as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer). Regarding gender representation, 50% identified as boys, 50% as girls, and around 0.5% as nonbinary. About 7% of students came from LGBTQ-headed households, and about 10% came from single-parent families. Approximately 20% of students enrolled during this time had an identified learning disability. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the school site has not formally collected English language learner (ELL) data, so this was not included.

The school was not demographically representative of the local public school student population. In the city in which this research was conducted, roughly 14% of public-school students identified as White and approximately 80% as BIPOC. Just over 30% of students in this locality identified as "Hispanic or Latino," representing the majority (Education Data Partnership [Ed-Data], n.d.). Approximately half of the public-school students received free or reduced lunch in 2021-22, and almost 30 percent identified as ELLs (Ed-Data, n.d.).

At the time of the research, just over 50% of school faculty at the research site identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). About 20% identified as men, and almost 40% of teachers at the school held a post-graduate degree. Although there were no data collected on gender and sexuality demographics, a large number of faculty and staff identified as LGBTQ+. There was no further information about the ethnic/racial composition of the faculty.

To assess academic attainment, the school recently moved to use the Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) MAP growth test. This is an untimed, computer-based, adaptive test. Students take three sub-tests: *Reading, Language Usage*, and *Mathematics*. These summative assessments are taken twice each academic year (once in the fall and the other in the spring). Data from this testing are used in conjunction with teacher assessment to support student growth. Unlike many other forms of summative tests, the MAP is a no-stakes test (meaning that the results are purely used to gain insight into student attainment and progress). To support the comparison of the results of these tests, MAP creates a projection for how students would likely perform on widely-used summative testing, such as the California Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia (CA SBAC) and the SATs. Based on these projections, about 75% of students were projected to meet or exceed grade-level achievement expectations in math and 80% of students in reading. This was vastly higher than the state and national averages, which were about 30% and 36% in math and 45% and 33% in reading, respectively (California Department of Education [CDE], 2022; National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2022b; NAEP, 2022c). However, the nation and state used different assessments to measure achievement. Therefore, these comparisons should be considered approximate. Nevertheless, they revealed a significant difference in attainment and help describe the setting and participants studied in this research. The following section describes the demographic make-up of student participants engaged in the research implementation.

Demographics of the Classroom

The participants involved in this research were 40 fifth-grade students, so this study took place at the middle school campus. The unit of study took place in their humanities classroom, and I took on the role of teacher-researcher. Participants included two classes of 20 students.

However, 38 students were included in the study due to absences (N=38). Due to time constraints, nine students were selected as a sample (n=9) to provide a closer analysis of qualitative responses.

Fifth graders were selected as participants in this study for various reasons. The first was that these were students in my humanities class. Although civics education should arguably be taught across the curriculum, this was an authentic and relevant place to implement a civic zine project where students could develop and apply their knowledge of language arts, social studies, and civics. Another reason that this group of participants was chosen was that research asserts adolescence as a critical time for forming habits and behaviors connected to civic engagement (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Serriere, 2014). Knowing this, the *Zines for a Means* project would be a developmentally appropriate and supportive implementation for building agents for change.

Of the 40 students, about 50% identified as young men, and just under 50% identified as young women. Two students self-identified as nonbinary. The data for the school were not disaggregated by racial or ethnic group, but over three-quarters of students identified as White or Caucasian, about 16% as Multiracial (including African American, Latinx, and Hispanic), and just over 8% as Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI). Seven students had a diagnosed learning disability; this included students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and dyscalculia. Seven student participants received tuition support, and four students spoke a second language at home and might be considered English Language Learners (ELLs) with a high level of language proficiency.

The fifth-grade research participants' MAP data projects 80% as meeting or exceeding the CA SBAC (California Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment) in math, language usage, and reading. Many students achieved significantly higher achievement rates at or above grade-

level expectations than the local public school student population. This should be considered when implementing this unit and approach with different student populations as further differentiation may be required.

Data Collection Strategies

Several data collection methods were used to gain insights into student engagement and efficacy. Each was used at different points throughout the study, and data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to cross-check and verify findings. A pre-unit reflection, *Who are Changemakers?* was used to gather qualitative data about student preconceptions about the identities of changemakers (see Appendix A). Further qualitative data was obtained through reflections throughout the unit (see Appendix B). The final data collection strategy was an exit ticket that included a Likert-style scale followed by more extended written responses to teacher-generated prompts connected to efficacy and engagement (see Appendix C). This exit ticket allowed for quantitative and qualitative data to be collected after the implementation of this unit. A mixed-method approach was used throughout this unit to add detail to understanding the complex areas of civic efficacy and engagement. The following section outlines the decisions behind each of the chosen methods for collecting data, along with how each was implemented during the study.

Pre-Unit Reflection: Who Are Changemakers?

The first data collection tool was a pre-unit reflection: *Who are Changemakers?* This included students drawing and labeling a changemaker and a written reflection answering five questions (see Appendix A). The questions invited students to reflect on these people's intersecting identities, their beliefs about what activists might do, and the reasons behind their advocacy. There was also space to consider skills activists might use and questions an activist

might ask themselves. This data collection tool was developed as a formative assessment tool, helping me as a teacher to learn more about student preconceptions and knowledge to inform future lessons.

Before beginning the unit of study, it was important to ascertain prior knowledge, understanding, and conceptions of who changemakers are. The pre-unit assessment (an assessment carried out before the implementation of the unit) was multifaceted and included drawn and written components. The purpose was to gain insights into who students viewed as changemakers, what activities changemakers might do, tools and objects they might use, and their beliefs about why activists choose to take action.

First, students drew and labeled an illustration of an activist. They could draw a fictional or real activist they knew from the present or past. Additionally, students were asked to annotate their drawing with any identities this person held, objects they might use for their activism, and a caption describing what their chosen person was doing and what made them an activist. The visual method of drawing was selected due to its popularity and accessibility for students with written expression challenges (Barker & Weller, 2003; Young & Barrett, 2001). This assessment aimed not to assess students' written expression but rather to learn whom they might visualize as making a change in the community; drawings allowed students to communicate this without language becoming a barrier. A caption was included to provide students space to share their "meaning and interpretation" succinctly (Barker & Weller, 2003, p. 44.).

To add more detail to the information students provided in their illustrations, they were asked to respond to five prompts. The prompts were: *What do activists do? How do activists do this? Why are people activists? What skills do activists use/need? What questions might an activist ask themselves?* Participants were given two class periods (around 90 minutes) to

complete both portions of this assessment. It was essential to provide time so students could share as much information as possible and have time and space to reflect.

This data collection strategy was used to determine who these participants believed could make a change. I wanted to learn more about students' preconceived ideas of change-makers, and I used these insights to support the planning of the initial lessons in the unit of study. These lessons focused on providing students with models of young people enacting change as a tool for efficacy building.

Zine Project Tracker: Student Reflections

A second data collection strategy used was ongoing student reflections. Throughout this unit, students used the *Zine Project Tracker (*a form of student reflection log*)* to guide three reflections that focused on if and how they were enacting change (see Appendix B). I developed this project tracker to provide students with a single document to record their process and progress as they moved through this long unit of study. I hoped that they would see connections as they moved through and that this would provide me with a central place to gather formative data to learn more about student engagement and efficacy and development in the competency: *engage meaningfully in my community.*

When completing this tracker, students responded to several prompts that included space to reflect on the *10 Questions for Young Changemakers*, their understanding, feelings of efficacy around being a civic agent, and their purpose. Students had the option to use either Google Docs or to handwrite these reflections, with the hope of increasing accessibility and equity for learners with different literacy needs. Students reflected at the beginning, middle, and end of the unit to help me gain insight into students' efficacy and engagement at various points throughout the

unit. These reflections helped me see how students' thinking might have evolved during the unit and notice any themes relating to civic efficacy and engagement in the participants.

End of Unit Exit-Ticket: Reflecting on the Project

The final data collection tool used was an exit ticket, a form of student reflection that takes place at the end of a learning activity. This exit ticket included five statements connected to the project and learning experience, and students were asked to reflect and record how each resonated with them. A five-point Likert-style scale was used, and response options were: *strongly disagree (1), disagree, neutral, agree,* and *strongly agree (5)*. The statements were designed around my study's two main areas of focus: civic efficacy and civic engagement. Of the four questions, two were related to engagement, and two were related to efficacy. Questions connecting to engagement were: *Before this unit I felt engaged in my community* and *The publishing party helped me to share my voice and see my voice enter my community. Questions assessing efficacy were: Before this unit, I felt like my voice was visible in my community,* and *the zine-making unit helped me feel engaged in my community.* These questions were developed to see if the *Zines for a Means* project supported students' development in these two areas connected to my research question. This half of the exit ticket provided quantitative data about students' growth in engagement and efficacy through reflection on feelings from the beginning and end of the unit.

Another statement included on the exit ticket was, *I would consider using zines as a tool for engaging with my community in the future.* This was included to learn about student perceptions of the usefulness or interest in this project's specific vehicle for civic engagement: zines. Knowing that civic engagement is a habit that must be continually nurtured in multifaceted

ways, it was beneficial to learn if students felt connected to zines as a tool for civic participation, helping to see the potential of this approach as an efficacy and engagement-enhancing practice.

Other questions in the exit ticket asked students to reflect on the usefulness of resources to support their success. Resources were rated using another five-point Likert scale that included the following responses: *unhelpful (1), somewhat helpful, neither helpful nor unhelpful, helpful,* and *very helpful (5)*. This analysis was included to understand what students felt helped them to feel successful and, thereby, more efficacious. Based on the literature about efficacy-enhancing practices, I provided students with a range of resources to support their feelings of agency. These included clear success criteria, student choice, real-world experiences (e.g., a field trip to a local comic store), providing students with zine-making and youth change-making models, and interweaving regular and explicit feedback focused on knowledge, skills, and dispositions connected to the chosen competency. These data were analyzed quantitatively to get a clear picture of what strategies students felt had the most significant impact on their ability to be successful in their zine-making endeavors.

The final section of the exit ticket asked students to respond in writing to three more reflection prompts. These prompts were designed to assess student's feelings and awareness of efficacy: *Were you a change-maker in this unit? Explain your thoughts*. In addition, there was an opportunity for students to consider what worked well for them in the unit and how the unit could be adapted to support their efficacy: *What other things could be added/adapted to this unit to support you in feeling like you can make* change*?*

Procedures

The design and implementation of this unit of study aimed to develop fifth-grade students' civic agency and self-efficacy through a real-world application of written

communication. My research question was: *How does using zines in an inquiry-based unit foster fifth-grade students' community engagement?* I hypothesized that this unit would engage students and develop their ability to recognize themselves as civic agents who could enact change within their community.

This unit of study was implemented at the end of the 2022-23 school year with two classes of fifth-grade students at an independent school in a large city in coastal California. The lessons occurred during their humanities lessons, a class focused on developing reading, writing, and social studies. In addition to developing subject-specific skills, the students engaged in various projects throughout the year that sought to build their competence in our school sites' ten core competencies. These competencies offer a means to enact the school's vision of a graduate. They are rooted in research that has called for a shift to equipping students with transferable knowledge, skills, and dispositions rather than fact-based subject matter (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Sturgis & Casey, 2018). Some examples of units students explored prior to this study included learning about the U.S. government through the creation of nonpartisan voter guides for the 2022 midterm election, building criticality when learning from primary documents during a study about the relationship between the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and the Pilgrims; and developing communication and research skills through the curation of a museum that focused on highlighting the contributions of Black changemakers from the past and present. The *Zines for a Means* unit was their final project, and I hoped it might provide students with an opportunity to culminate in applying skills and knowledge from their fifth-grade year.

When designing this unit (see Appendix D), I used the literature reviewed to inform what constitutes good practice in developing student efficacy and civic engagement. I also looked closely at the skills connected to the competency *engage meaningfully in my community* to

design formative tasks (activities that allow insight into students' understanding) that would support students in their proficiency as civic actors. These included opportunities for incorporating student choice, voice, and interests, centering the curriculum design around students' lives. It also included providing students with models of other adolescents engaging in the community and learning from experts in their community.

Pre-Intervention

Who are Changemakers? Exploring Student Perceptions and Understandings. Before beginning this unit, I implemented a pre-unit assessment in which students drew a real or fictional changemaker. The purpose of this was to learn about students' preconceived notions about who changemakers are and what they do. During this lesson, students had about 40 minutes to draw and label an illustration of a changemaker, and then they responded to some reflection questions (see Appendix A). I collected these at the end of the lesson to support my unit planning and ground it in their current understanding. A big question I had was whether these young people saw themselves or people like them as changemakers because, ultimately, this was the project's aim.

The second lesson involved students reflecting on what young people can and cannot do to engage civically. This activity was entitled *Obstacles and Actionables*. Students responded independently to the questions: *What can young people do to make change? What can't they do?* They then added their ideas to a Padlet, a digital bulletin board, before discussing them in table groups of four students and finally as a whole class.

Facing History and Ourselves: 10 Questions for Young Changemakers. Due to findings in the pre-unit assessment, I wanted to include some lessons that provided students with examples of adolescents civically engaging in their communities prior to the introduction of

zines. This series of lessons was built using Facing History & Ourselves' lessons on the *10 Questions for Young Changemakers* (Nam, 2019). In this unit, students learned about two examples of adolescent activism. In the first lesson, the fifth-graders became familiar with the 10 questions. Next, they used primary sources, such as radio interviews, short documentaries, and written documents, to learn more about the experiences and impact of young changemakers involved and their actions. The first example was the *1963 Chicago Public Schools Boycott,* when over 200,000 students boycotted schools due to continued racial segregation and inequitable resourcing of Chicago's public schools. One fundamental lesson in this was that enacting change is an ongoing endeavor. I hoped that this lesson might equip students with an example to look back to about perseverance and working through challenges.

The second example of youth change-making focused on the more recent *March for Our Lives* movement. This is an initiative led by Parkland High School students to prevent future cases of gun violence through protest, lobbying, using social media to engage with the community, and registering voters. This lesson aimed to provide the fifth-graders with ways to engage in the digital age and the potential power and drawbacks of technology and risk-taking in acting on a controversial issue.

These two examples of adolescent activism sought to empower students by showing them how, why, and what they can do to stand up for their beliefs and to be civically engaged. In these lessons, students reflected on the *10 Questions for Young Changemakers* and considered how these young activists used these to support their work. These lessons sought to strengthen a foundational belief that people who share parts of the participants' identity can make change, and therefore, they could, too.

Introducing Zines: The First Rule of Punk. After these preliminary four lessons, which provided various examples of youth civic participation, students were introduced to using zines as a form of civic engagement. During our reading sessions, students had been reading the book *The First Rule of Punk* by Celia C. Pérez (2017). In this story, Malù, a Mexican-American teenage girl, uses zines as a form of self-expression and identity exploration to support her in navigating a transition to a new middle school. This book allowed students to see what zines are and how they might be used to communicate ideas and express themselves. This book was selected to give students another example of a young person using another tool to engage with their world.

As we read this story, I introduced students to the zine project, explicitly connecting the ideas of zines as a creative way to express and share voice with the world and asking students how zines might be used to engage with the community. Students offered that we could create zines about something we cared about, connecting the *10 Questions for Young Changemakers* learning to *The First Rule of Punk*. Engaging students with curiosity, rather than assigning a task to students, hoped to invite students into being co-creators of the curriculum. This was an intentional way to encourage students' engagement and ownership.

Intervention: Building Competence & Developing Zines

To the Comic Store! At the start of the intervention, I asked students to consider how we might learn more about zine-making. They suggested watching videos, reading zines, and interviewing people who make zines. Based on prior learning about research and sources, I anticipated these responses, so I set up a field trip to a local comic bookstore, a 10-minute walk from the school site. Prior to the visit, students generated questions they had about zine-making. During the visit, students read some examples of age-appropriate zines curated by the store, and

then they asked six of the employees their questions about zines. The students asked questions concerning purpose, zine creation methods, and zine-making advice. All six employees were *zinesters* (people who create zines) and had experience creating various zines, from comic to political ones. Hearing from experts and becoming familiar with models allowed students to consider what their process might be for their zine. This trip also allowed students to see that they could use zines to speak about an issue of importance, and the comic store manager and employees invited them to come and spend time in the store as a "second living room!" They were also invited to trade or sell their zines at the comic store. These invitations into the community were engaging for students, and some students started to generate zines about their topics that night.

Applying Our Zine Knowledge. Back in the classroom, students worked in groups to read, and notice features of zines and to consider the process they might use to create a civic zine (a zine about an issue of personal or public importance). Using our *zine library* (a box of various model zines collected before the project), the fifth graders identified features of zines, providing them with ideas for what they might include in their creations. Following this, each class generated a list of steps to guide them in creating a zine. This lesson was included to allow students to see an ordered route to success and to make the learning process transparent. As students generated the steps, I hoped they would feel ownership and the process would be clearer and more accessible. Their first step was to identify an issue that mattered to them.

To give students time to consider their zine's focus, I designed a lesson to create space for them to explore and articulate their chosen issue. During the first half of this lesson, students engaged in a *Chalk Talk* (Project Zero Harvard School of Education, n.d.). *Chalk Talk* is a thinking routine that encourages students to respond to prompts on large pieces of paper around

the classroom. Students add their ideas and move to the following prompt when directed. They should first read the responses of others before adding their own, and then they connect any related ideas with lines. This thinking routine asked students to consider issues of importance in several spheres. These were: issues important to me, to my school, to my city, to my state and country, and the world. Students visited each prompt and spent about five minutes at each station. This activity aimed for students to generate ideas and explore what mattered to their smaller class community, perhaps informing their zine topic choice and providing time for personal reflection.

In the second half of this lesson, students completed a reflection (see Appendix B) about their chosen issue through the lens of the *10 Questions for Young Changemakers*. The purpose was to provide time to consider what mattered to them, to offer student choice, and to consider how they might leverage the *10 Questions* to support their change-making efforts, applying their learning and drawing connections to the pre-intervention lessons. This activity also allowed me to learn more about what mattered to my students so that I could find ways to personalize resources for their individual needs. An example of this was finding books or websites for students who might have difficulty finding resources connected to their issue.

The following lessons provided time for students to move through the process that they had articulated. Each lesson started with a check-in, responding to any misconceptions and problems and highlighting success and achievements, an efficacy-enhancing strategy (Bandura, 1989). I hoped that revisiting what students had already accomplished and reminding them consistently through "verbal persuasion," another method for building efficacy, would support students in feeling capable and competent as civic agents (Bandura, 1989, p.1179).

Over the next three weeks, students engaged in various lessons with formative tasks that supported them in developing competence with civic engagement and skills needed to create a zine (see Appendix D). One lesson included explicit modeling to support their critical consumption of media when researching, questioning source reliability using the FART framework (Is the information friendly, authoritative, repeated, and timely?) (Gillespie, 2016). They honed their drafting and evaluation skills as they worked to develop mockups (draft versions or prototypes of their zines), giving and receiving peer feedback. Throughout the unit, I met with students individually to support them in recognizing prior successes and encouraging them to persevere through challenges through questioning. I hoped to build their feelings of civic efficacy through this regular formative feedback.

Another strategy I implemented from the literature review was being a *participant researcher* (Gray et al., 2022). I worked through the student-generated process alongside the students; this allowed me to empathize with the experience, offer advice, and ask for suggestions when faced with problems in my learning. I hoped that this would help to level the teacher-student dynamic. Although this was time-consuming, it was important to share in the collective effort of creating zines for our community and modeling how I might live out the competency as a lifelong learner. When modeling, I aimed to bring enthusiasm and energy to the process and share the powerful learning opportunities that mistakes provided.

Once students had created their zines, we published them using the photocopier and a long-armed stapler. This was a long process and involved me teaching students how to use this equipment and then working to support and collaborate if they encountered a problem. Each student made five copies of their zine to distribute at our *Zinefest* (a celebratory event where students share their work with others).

As a culminating activity, we held a publishing party at the local comic store we had visited earlier in the unit. We invited family, teachers, and other school community members and had an apple cider toast. The fifth-grade zinesters shared their zines with visitors, including the head of school, family members, and even the public visiting the store. I hoped that sharing zines about a topic of personal importance might help them feel efficacious, as they would see their voice go beyond the classroom walls and into their community.

In our final humanities session of the year, the students completed the Zines for a Means Exit Ticket (see Appendix C). The exit ticket included a Likert-style scale as well as written reflection prompts. The students (*N*=38, due to student absences) spent 40 minutes reflecting on their experience in the zine-making unit. I aimed to give students time to reflect and bring awareness to their civic efficacy and engagement by providing an intentional time to consider their personal development. This exit ticket also allowed me to consider what worked well and areas for improvement in future implementations.

Plan for Data Analysis

During this study, I incorporated a mixed-methods approach to gathering data to answer the question: *How might an inquiry approach support fifth-grade students' competency for meaningful community engagement, and how might this impact their self-efficacy?* The first data source I examined was the pre-unit *Who are Changemakers?* reflection. This included an analysis of participant drawings, labels, captions, and written reflections. When analyzing these reflections, I used recursive coding to support me in identifying themes around student perceptions and understandings of changemakers. I looked for ways that these pre-unit reflections might provide insight into student efficacy and engagement, asking questions such as, who do my students see as capable of change? I wondered if any students had drawn

changemakers sharing aspects of their own intersectional identities. A big question I had was about age and whether students might include examples of youth activism.

When analyzing student reflections from the *Zine Project Tracker,* I qualitatively analyzed students' ongoing written reflections. Again, I used recursive data analysis to code the written reflections before categorizing the data in search of themes. When coding, I first read the reflections closely, looking for reflections that might connect to civic-mindedness and engagement and evidence of self-efficacy development. I then used this to highlight emerging themes, adding to those from the pre-unit assessment.

Quantitative and qualitative data were used to analyze the end-of-unit exit ticket reflections. The first section of the exit ticket was analyzed quantitatively, looking at the mean response from the five-point Likert-scale prompts. I wanted to see if there was any change in students' self-reported ratings of statements connected to the areas of civic efficacy and civic engagement. I also looked at the fifth question that asked students to reflect on the usefulness of resources to support their success. Resources were rated using another five-point Likert scale that included the following responses: *unhelpful, somewhat helpful, neither helpful nor unhelpful, helpful,* and *very helpful*. This analysis was included to understand what students felt helped them to feel successful and, thereby, more efficacious. These data were analyzed quantitatively to learn which strategies students felt had the most significant impact on their ability to be successful and efficacious in their zine-making endeavors.

Qualitative coding was also implemented to analyze the responses to the three written reflections on the exit ticket. The first question was designed to learn students' perceptions and feelings of efficaciousness, the second to learn about the student experience, and the third to support the further development of this unit in developing students' self-efficacy with change-

making. After coding the data, I grouped the data into categories that umbrellaed connecting ideas. This supported me in uncovering themes, helping me to gain a deeper understanding of how participants developed civic engagement and efficacy. I hoped that this analysis might shed light on the student experience during this action research and would support future researchers in knowing what actions had the greatest impact on efficacy and engagement.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to learn how an inquiry-based approach to pedagogy, centered on efficacy-enhancing practices, might support students' competence with engaging meaningfully in their community. Inequities in educational opportunities remain not only in academic access but also in civic opportunities. If a critical purpose of education is to equip students with knowledge, skills, and dispositions that allow them to be active participants in their democracy, then we must continue to explore ways to teach these habits in our schools. This is especially important during adolescence as students develop habits that likely continue into adulthood. This unit of study hoped to offer another way to support youth in engaging in this learning and building their capacity to be active participants in their communities.

This unit was split into two phases: pre-intervention and intervention. The pre-intervention learning focused on providing participants with opportunities to reflect on beliefs around who changemakers are, what young people can do to enact change in their communities, and to provide models of youth activism from the past and present day. It also included an introduction to the use of zines. In the intervention phase, students moved through a class-generated process for zine creation, identifying issues that mattered to them and learning knowledge and skills that supported them in using zines to feel civically efficacious and

engaged. Throughout the process, I wove in efficacy-enhancing practices such as reminding students of past success and verbal persuasion to help them see themselves as civic agents.

Using three different data collection methods allowed multiple ways to gain information about student efficacy and engagement. This research investigated two complex aspects of human experience. Therefore, I felt that using quantitative data alone would not allow nuanced details to emerge during analysis. A mixed methods approach allowed the quantitative data to be in discourse with the qualitative during data analysis. The need to triangulate data is critical to developing valid findings, as each provides a different layer and perspective to "complex" participant experiences (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991, p. 263). Ensuring I had multiple methods for collecting and analyzing data supported my engaging in essential praxis and reflexivity as "rich detail of human experience that can inform our practice" (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991, p. 265).

This chapter introduced various areas that informed my study, including the setting, participants, and demographics, and a discussion of the data-gathering strategies used in this research. In addition, it shares the procedures used to implement this unit of study so that others might adapt and use the ideas shared in their practice. Finally, it outlines how the data collected was analyzed and triangulated. The next chapter will discuss the data collected during this study and share my findings in response to the research question.

Chapter IV

Findings

Many stakeholders agree that a critical purpose of education is to equip students to be knowledgeable, active citizens in society (Dewey, 2018a; Dewey, 2018b; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013; Serriere, 2014; Singer & Shagoury, 2006; Sturgis & Casey, 2018). This action research aimed to explore how a unit of study in which students generated zines about significant issues impacting their lives might support them in viewing themselves as having the voice and power to engage meaningfully in their community. The questions driving this study were: *How might an inquiry approach support students' competency for meaningful community engagement, and how might this impact their self-efficacy?* Students at my school site were building their capacity to engage meaningfully in their community; therefore, I developed and implemented a unit of study with the hopes of students seeing themselves as capable and effective civic agents.

I identified some core tenets of building student self-efficacy and civic engagement when reviewing the literature. These learnings informed my implementation and pedagogical approach. An inquiry approach, built on the foundations of student curiosity, was selected as the pedagogical approach for this project due to assertions that inquiry and student-centered teaching boost student efficacy and engagement (Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Dewey, 2018a; Serriere, 2014). Providing space for students to increase their proficiency in non-academic skills was another understanding highlighted in the literature (Alt et al., 2023; Dewey, 2018a; Steinberg et al., 2011). Therefore, I felt it important to provide students with an opportunity to practice community engagement in tandem with subject-specific skills connected to language arts. Thirdly, the research emphasizes the need to make success transparent for learners (Alt et al.,

2023; Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Siegle & McCoach, 2007). Some ways to do this include developing shared success criteria and timely, specific feedback. This transparency builds students' confidence and provides a clear path of expectations so they know what success will entail. The final takeaway from recent literature was the need for students to see their prior understandings and cultural knowledge as valued (Gray et al., 2022; Oslund & Barton, 2017; Serriere, 2014). This is a way to support students' confidence that what they have to share is of value.

Despite multiple studies on building civic agency and engagement in youth, few studies explore the capacity that creating and sharing media, such as zines, might hold for fostering both efficacy and engagement. In addition, few studies have centered on fifth-grade students attending an independent school setting. Through this study, I hoped to add to a growing body of research on building these two essential components of an active citizenry and offering possible avenues for future action.

Overview of Methods and Data Collection

Data collection for this study occurred over six weeks. The study followed a three-phase structure: a pre-intervention phase (one week), an intervention phase (four weeks), and a post-intervention phase (one week). To gather information about student participants' preconceptions of changemakers, the pre-unit assessment "Who Are Changemakers" was administered (see Appendix A). Next, I sought out student ideas around what they believed young people could and could not do to enact civic change. I collected these data using the digital bulletin board platform *Padlet*. After gathering this information, I implemented four lessons centered on supporting students in seeing how other young changemakers have impacted their world. I used

lessons from the *10 Questions for Young Changemakers* unit from the organization *Facing History and Ourselves* to support this learning.

After these preliminary lessons, I moved students into the intervention phase. This was the implementation of the *Zines for a Means* unit of study (see Appendix D). During this phase, students selected an issue of personal importance, researched their issue using various sources, explored the history and procedures of creating zines, and worked on developing and publishing their civic zine to share with their local community. Students worked for four weeks to develop their zine (around ten 45-minute sessions). Some students took their zines home to complete to be ready for publishing at the end of the unit. Data collection during this stage came from the thematic coding and analysis of three student reflections throughout the unit (see Appendix B).

After engaging in a Zinefest (a publishing party) at the local comic store, students reflected on the unit on an exit ticket generated in Google Forms (see Appendix C). This form consisted of a Likert-style scale followed by more extended written responses to teacher-generated prompts connected to efficacy and engagement.

Demographics of the Participants

Participants for this action research study included 40 fifth-grade students from my humanities class in the 2022-23 academic year. There was an almost equal number of boys and girls, and two students identified as non-binary at the time of the study. Around three-quarters of these students identified as White or Caucasian, 16% as Multiracial, and about 8% as AAPI. Seven participants had a diagnosed learning disability (LD), and four students spoke English as an additional language. As this was an independent school site, it may be important to note that seven of the students received tuition assistance. However, over 80% of students came from financially privileged backgrounds and paid full tuition.

To gain deeper insight into student experience, I selected a smaller sample of student participants for impact analysis. When choosing the nine participants for this study, I wanted to represent a broad spectrum of learners. I used recent student reading assessment data to group these participants due to the language arts context of zines. I selected an equal number of students to represent students working towards, at, and above grade-level expectations. Another factor that informed participant selection was that each had completed the three reflections, published a zine, attended the publishing party, and completed the exit ticket. Of these nine participants, four students identified racially as BIPOC and five as White. Six boys and four girls were selected. Student 2 was the only child from the sample with a diagnosed learning disability, and Student 3 was an ELL with a high level of proficiency. The figure below shares further information about these participants, including their reading proficiency, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Table 1

*Sample Group Reading Proficiency and Demographics (*N = *40,* n=*9)*

Participant	5th Grade Reading Proficiency	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Student 1	Working Towards	Boy	Latinx
Student 2*	Working Towards	Boy	White
Student 3**	Working Towards	Boy	White
Student 4	Working At	Boy	White
Student 5	Working At	Boy	Multiracial (White & Asian)
Student 6	Working At	Girl	Multiracial (Black & White)
Student 7	Working Beyond	Girl	White
Student 8	Working Beyond	Girl	Multiracial (Latinx & White)
Student 9	Working Beyond	Boy	Multiracial (Asian & White)

*Note. * =LD and ** = ELL*

Analysis of Pre-Unit: Who are Changemakers?

Before beginning the unit, I wanted to learn more about ways the fifth-grade participants saw or did not see themselves as capable civic agents. In this section, I will share the findings from my qualitative analysis of the pre-unit assessment, *Who Are Changemakers?* in which students were asked to draw and label a changemaker (see Appendix A).

Students' illustrations were varied and included both fictional and real changemakers from the past and present. Seventy-six percent of participants drew fictional changemakers, and 24% drew real changemakers. Fictional changemakers included people protesting, holding fundraisers, donating money, and public speaking. Illustrations of real changemakers from the past and present included Marie Curie, Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and Colin Kaepernick. Around 72% of student illustrations included their changemaker holding a picket sign displaying a message about an issue. Just over 58% of illustrations showed changemakers using their voices through speech bubbles, microphones, and megaphones. Three of the 38 illustrations showed changemakers using writing as a form of activism, not including speeches.

Table 2 shows the issues that the illustrated changemakers were supporting. These included anti-violence issues such as gun regulation and protesting for peace, activists fighting for racial justice, including references to the work of Black Lives Matter and other Civil Rights activists, and changemakers who were using their voices to fight for gender equality issues such as transgender rights and women's rights. Some participants drew activists standing up for multiple issues in their illustration; some wrote generally without specifying a cause.

Table 2

*Changemaker Causes by Participants in the 'Who Are Changemakers' Pre-Assessment (*N = *38)*

Cause/Issue	Frequency	Percentage
Anti-Violence/War	4	11
Black Rights and Racial Justice	11	29
Environmental Justice and Animal Rights	6	16
Gender Rights and Equality	7	18
Unspecified/Multiple Issues	10	26

Note. Percentages were rounded to one decimal place.

When analyzing student illustrations, I looked at the various identities these changemakers, fictional and real, held, including gender, race, and, most significant to this study, age. Students had started the academic year with a unit about identity and intersectionality, providing a basis for their labeling. Students labeled various aspects of their changemakers' intersecting social and personal identities. Table 3 shares this data, and Figure 1 illustrates how the represented identities connect to dominant and oppressed identities in American society.

Coding participant reflections enabled my identification of some interesting themes. I noticed that around 70% of the changemakers were BIPOC, most were cisgender males, and, for those who identified an age for their changemaker, most were adults over the age of 21. It was interesting to me that almost all these changemakers held an identity that did not align with the dominant culture of White, cisgender male, able-bodied, and heterosexual.

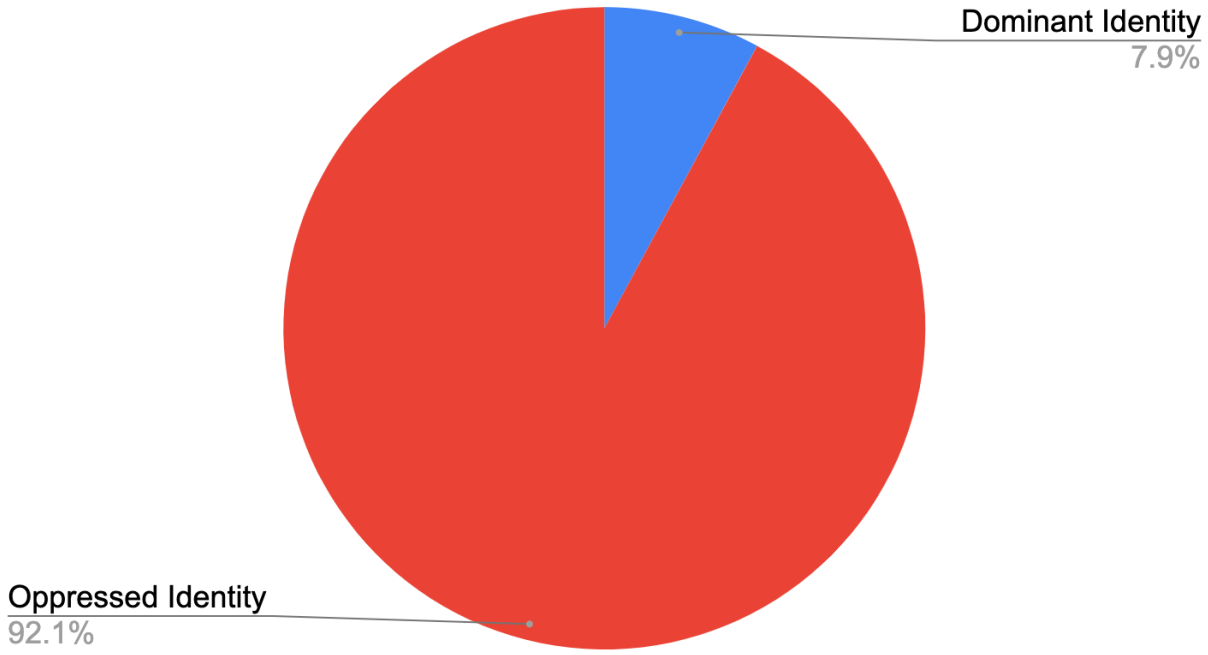
Table 3

*Identities of Changemakers from the "Who Are Changemakers" Pre-Assessment (*N = *38)*

Identity	Frequency
Race	
BIPOC	26
White	7
None Identified	5
Gender	
Cisgender Male	17
Cisgender Female	11
Transgender Male	2
Transgender Female	2
Non-Binary	2
None Identified	4
Age	
0 - 10	0
11 - 21	1
22 - 32	1
33 - 43	6
> 44	4
None Identified	26

Figure 1

Dominant Vs. Oppressed Identity Representation



Note. This figure shows the identity representation of the changemakers participants illustrated.

Analysis of Student Reflections: Checking for Impact

During the intervention phase, students completed three reflections about their engagement with the *Zines for a Means* project (see Appendix B). These reflections were staggered throughout the intervention to provide insights into student perceptions and thoughts throughout the implementation. I qualitatively analyzed the reflections of the nine sample students, using thematic coding to identify any notable throughlines. Through this analysis, five key themes emerged: zines allowed students to share something that mattered to them with their community; students saw the zine project as an accessible way to engage with their community and as a means for change-making; zines helped students see themselves as young changemakers in their community; students enjoyed creating zines as they offered them choice and voice; and

finally, students wanted more time and choice when creating zines. Table 4 presents quotes from student reflections connected to each of these themes.

The first theme I identified was that zines provided students with a means for sharing something that mattered to them with their community. Students were excited to share their voices and opinions with others, and they wanted to speak out about their chosen cause to evoke change. Participant 9 shared that they were "excited…because I have been meaning to say something about this for a long time" when reflecting on their zine about global warming. It is clear from the examples in Table 4 that each of these students had something they wanted to share with their community and that zines offered an avenue to do this.

The second theme from the student reflections was that participants felt that zines offered an accessible means for community engagement and change-making. They commented on the ability to make multiple copies of their zines, how only a few inexpensive materials were needed for zine creation, allowing many people to use them as a way to engage with the community, and that sharing the zines at the local comic store would provide a place to share information with their community so that others could be inspired to take action. Participant 7 said, "Zines… are sold or given out to many people at lots of locations, and they don't usually cost a lot. This makes it easy for people to share, to see, and to teach people about the topic." The responses in Table 4, connected to this theme, illustrate how students could see the possibilities zines might provide for young people wanting to make their voices heard.

The third theme in Table 4 was that zines helped students see themselves as young changemakers in their community. Many students responded in their reflections with the phrase "I was an activist because" or "I was a changemaker when…". Students shared that they were activists by creating something physical to share with others that might encourage them to think

or take action. Participant 9 wrote, “I am compelling my reader to make change” when discussing how they were an activist through this project. Students expressed excitement and empowerment when sharing that they could use zines to connect with their community beyond the school site.

Another theme derived from these data was that students enjoyed the project as it offered the elements of choice and voice. An example of this was when Participant 2 shared, “It was super fun because I got to choose my topic, how it looked, and also the format.” Other students referred to this unit as “engaging” and “fun.” Participant 7 shared that they “felt really good about the project” and could see how they could have a voice beyond the school walls, supporting future engagement. Participant 7 and Participant 5’s comments demonstrated that students felt a purpose and could see the benefits of engaging in this project on their growth as changemakers and their future activism. These comments support the idea that when students have choice and voice, they feel empowered and engaged and that this has the potential to drive further action.

The fifth and final theme I identified was that students wanted more time and choice when creating zines. Some students commented that they sometimes felt “rushed” and would have liked more time to research their topic and create their zine. This project had a rigid deadline because of the timing of the project (end of the academic year) and the fact that students would be sharing their zines at the comic store on a specific date. One might argue that these comments also showed that students cared about what they were putting into the world because they wanted to share something meaningful with their community.

Collectively, these themes suggest that this intervention positively impacted student engagement and efficacy. It is clear from these comments that students cared about their issue

and what they were creating for their community. These qualitative data add color to the data presented in the following section, gathered from the post-intervention reflection.

Table 4

*Common Themes from Student Reflections (*n*=9)*

Theme	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3	Example 4
1. Zines allowed students to share something that mattered to them with their community.	"I want to share my learning to everyone so they can also know about (Animal Shelter) and what they do." - Participant 3	"I wanted to write about something I noticed in the world that I wanted to change." - Participant 4	"I was an activist because I made a zine about what mattered to me, and stood up for what I believed in." - Participant 6	"I felt excited and good about my project. It was helpful because I have been meaning to say something about this for a long time." - Participant 9
2. Students saw the zine project as an accessible way to engage with their community and as a means for change-making.	"I am informing people,...changing their point of view and hopefully making…people think." - Participant 5	"My zine makes it easy for others to join in because it doesn't take a long time to read, and… I have a QR code that leads them to a website where you can learn more." - Participant 6	"Zines… are sold or given out to many people at lots of locations and they don't usually cost a lot. This makes it easy for people to share, to see, and to teach people about the topic." - Participant 7	"We will donate them to (Comic Store Name). That is a way to make change because … everyone will have access to them and… will understand more about the cause and…do what they can to support." - Participant 8
3. Zines helped students see themselves as young changemakers in their community.	"I was an activist because I made a zine about something that is a problem and I am going to try to give it to people that can make change." - Participant 2	"... by creating something to share with others which would become a small part of a change waiting to come. Even if only one person picked up my zine they might still enjoy (it) and think about ways they could help or ways they too can make a change. The person could also be inspired and create a zine about something they care about." - Participant 7	"I was an activist because I am sharing my opinion and views with people inside and outside of the (school) community." - Participant 8	"I am sharing info that others might not know. Also, I am compelling my reader to make change and donate to stop deforestation. - Participant 9
4. Students enjoyed creating zines as they offered them choice and voice.	"It was super fun because I got to choose my topic, how it looked and also the format." - Participant 2	"I felt great making change outside of (School Name) and it really helped me grow as an activist" - Participant 5	I thought this was a very fun project because it was very engaging and I loved making something." - Participant 6	"I felt really good about this project. I believe that it was helpful because we got to make changes in more than just (School Name). It also prepares us for the future." - Participant 7
5. Students wanted more time and choice when creating zines.	"Something I would change … is ask for more time because I had to take my zine home multiple times." - Participant 2	"I need a bit more time so I don't rush." - Participant 3	"A little more time because sometimes I felt… rushed." - Participant 5	"A bit more time to research about our topic." - Participant 6

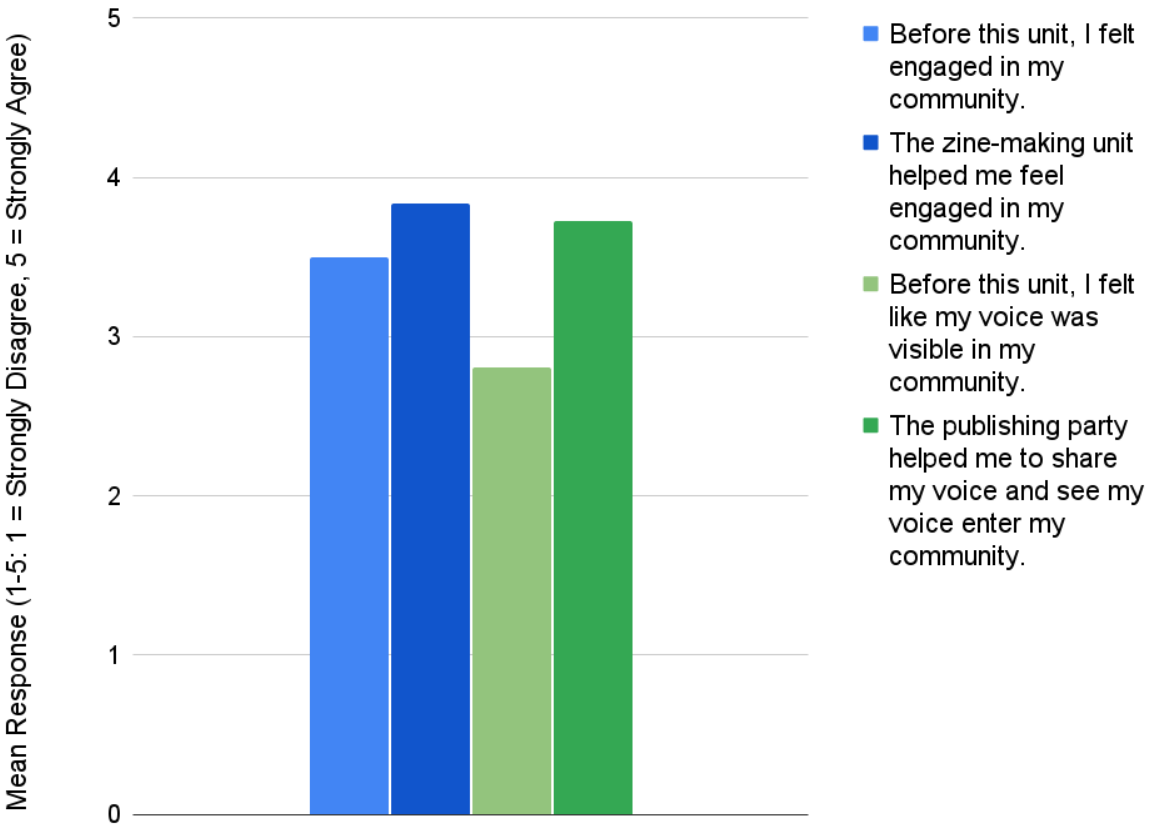
Analysis of End-of-Unit Exit Ticket

Once students had completed the intervention, they completed a reflection in the form of an exit ticket. I used Google Forms to gather this data. The form consisted of two key sections. The first was a five-point Likert-type scale in which students responded to five statements using the scale: strongly disagree (1 point), disagree (2 points), neutral (3 points), agree (4 points), and strongly agree (5 points). The questions were designed to measure feelings of efficacy and engagement before and after implementing the unit of study.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate that, for the nine selected participants and the 38 students who completed the exit ticket, there was an increased feeling of civic engagement and efficacy. Figure 2 demonstrates the responses of all 38 student participants who responded to the exit ticket reflection for this project. Although not all students were there for the entirety of the unit, there was still an increase in responses connected to engagement and efficacy. Mean responses regarding engagement rose from 3.5 to 3.83 (+6.6%), and efficacy rose from 2.81 to 3.72 (+18.2%).

Figure 2.

*Class Participant Exit Ticket Student Reflection Responses (*N*=38).*

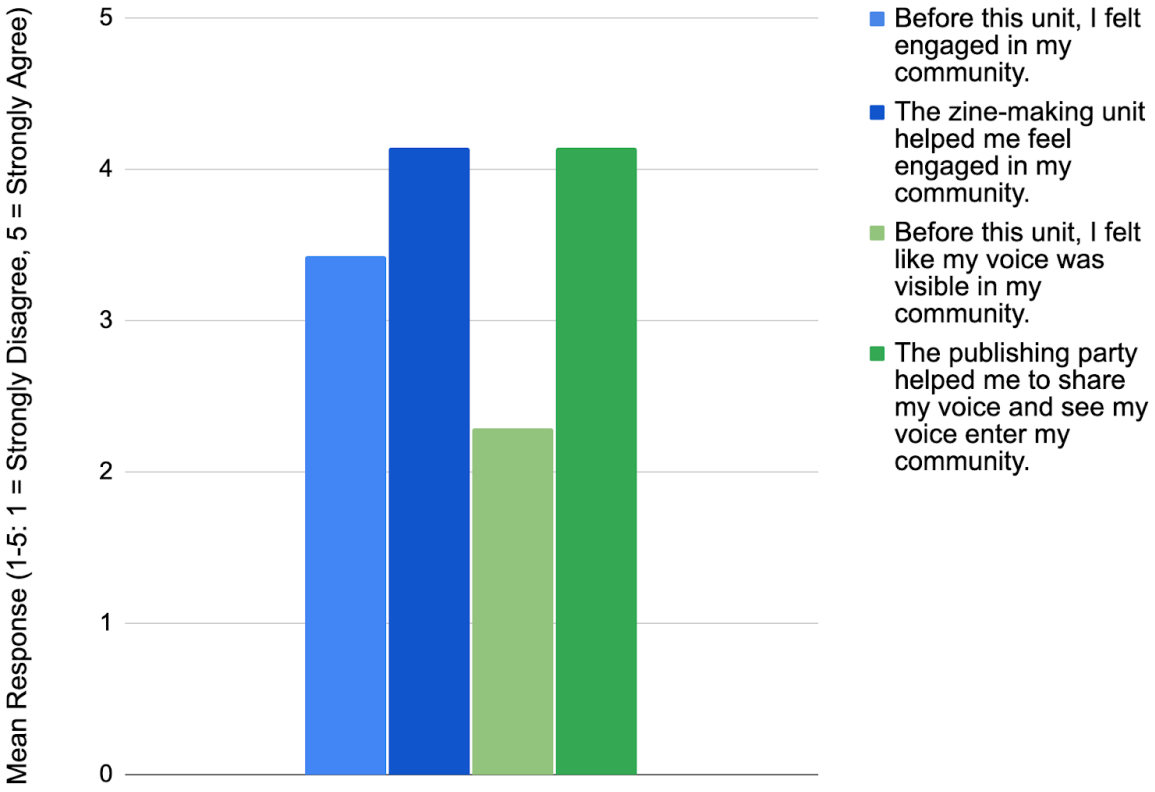


Note. This figure shows all student responses to four statements connected to civic efficacy and engagement. Blue bars connect to engagement statements, and green connect to efficacy statements.

Figure 3 shows the mean responses for the nine sample participants. For the two statements connected to engagement (e.g., *Before this unit, I felt engaged in my community,* and *The zine-making unit helped me feel engaged in my community),* responses rose from 3.56 to 4.33 (+15.4%). Efficacy statements (e.g., *Before this unit, I felt like my voice was visible in my community,* and *The publishing party helped me to share my voice and see my voice enter my community*) showed a significant increase from 2.44 to 4.22 (+35.6%). A comparison between these two data sources shows that levels of engagement and efficacy for the sample group rose by around twice the rate of the class participants.

Figure 3

*Sample Group Exit Ticket Student Reflection Responses (*n=*9).*

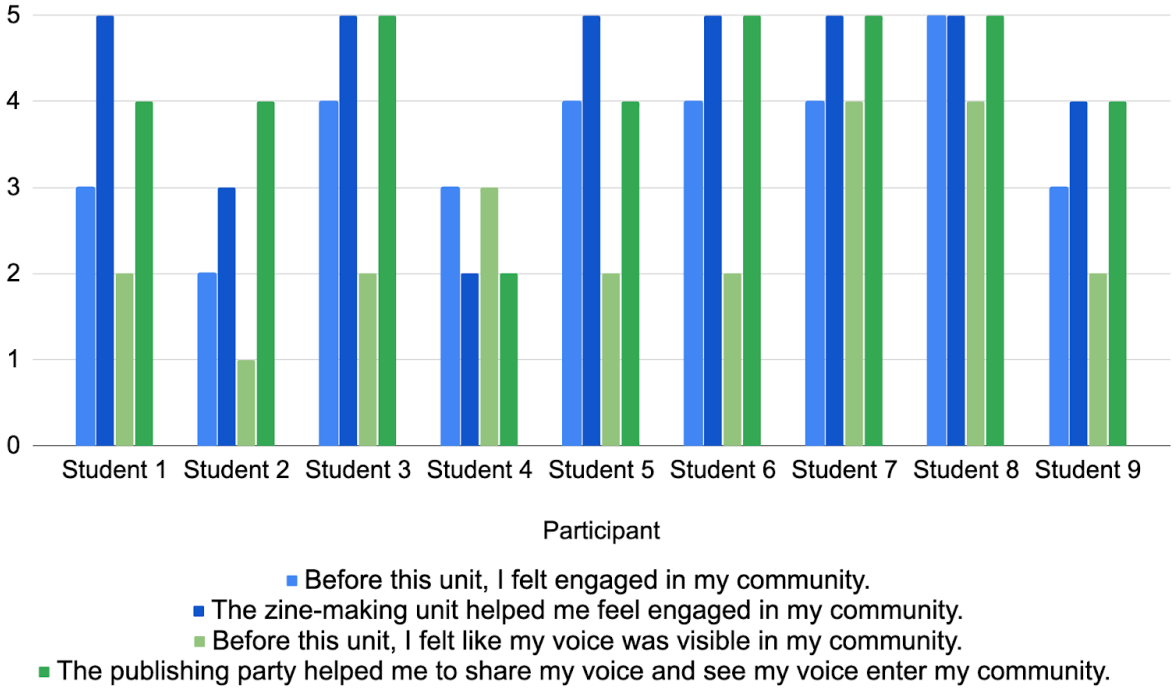


Note. This figure shows sample student responses to four statements connected to civic efficacy and engagement. Blue bars connect to engagement statements, and green connect to efficacy statements.

Figure 4 shows the individual responses to the exit ticket for the sample group. Seven of the nine participants felt that the unit increased their community engagement, with one student remaining at the same level (5 points) and one participant (Student 4) reporting a decrease in community engagement. All but one participant (Student 4) reported increased feelings of efficacy.

Figure 4

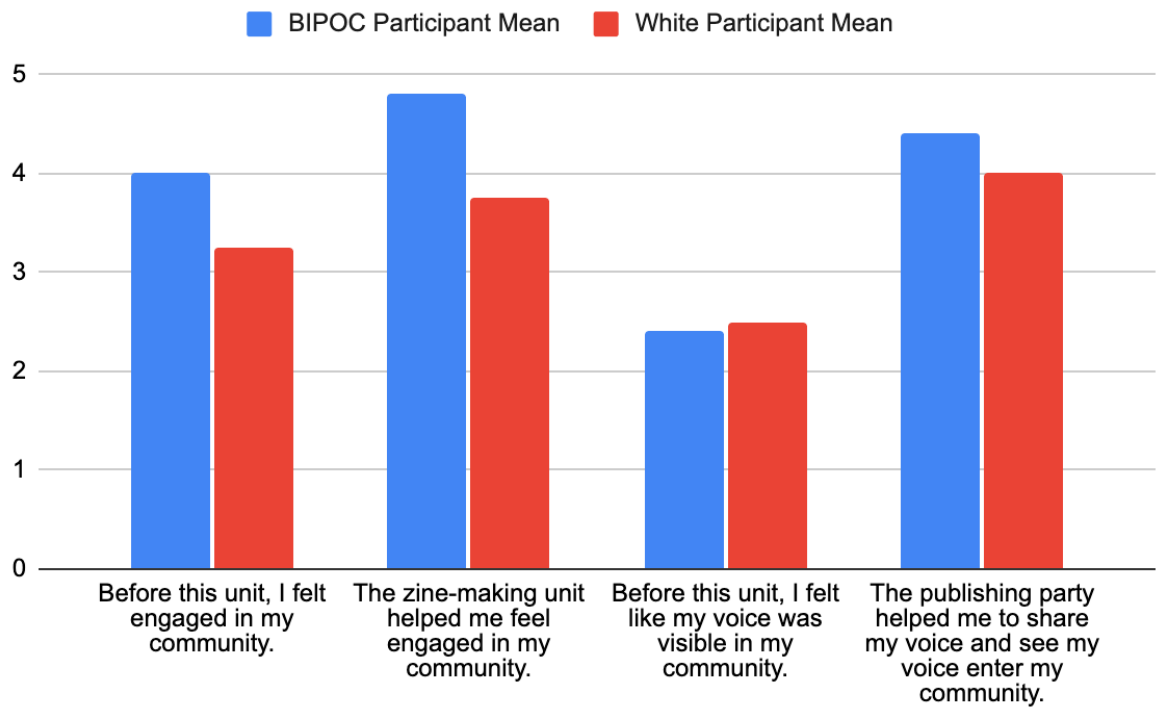
*Sample Participant Exit Ticket Student Reflection Responses (*n*=9).*



Note. This figure shows individual student participant responses to four statements connected to civic efficacy and engagement. Blue bars connect to engagement statements, and green connect to efficacy statements.

Figure 5 further disaggregates the data for this sample group into BIPOC and White students. Analysis of this data revealed that before the implementation, BIPOC participants (*n*=5) reported higher levels of engagement than their White counterparts (*n*=4), but slightly lower levels of efficacy. However, post-implementation, BIPOC students reported higher levels of both engagement and efficacy. BIPOC students also reported a more significant average increase in engagement (+16%) and efficacy (+40%). However, White student responses also showed an average increase in both areas, +10% and +30%, respectively.

Figure 5
BIPOC & White Student Mean Response Comparison



Note. This figure shows average student participant responses to four statements connected to civic efficacy and engagement disaggregated by racial identity (*N*=9). Blue bars show mean responses for BIPOC students (*n*=5) and red bars for White students (*n*=4).

The final question on the exit ticket required a longer, written response. Table 5 shares the responses to the prompt: *Were you a change-maker in this unit? Explain your thoughts.* As with the coding of qualitative data from the analysis of student reflections discussed earlier, I analyzed these responses through the lens of civic efficacy and engagement. Seven of the nine students expressed that they were making a change by sharing their voices or opinions. Students 1 and 2 seemed less confident that they were making change and that this relied on how community members received their zines and what actions they might take. This may be because there was less immediate and visible evidence of change or impact on the community than some other more apparent endeavors, such as a bake sale or fundraiser, might have. However, Student 5 noted that they "probably made a little (change), even if it was just adding one more fact to the

brain of one more person, it was change. One little thing can cause a big ripple of change on the surface of the world." This reflection showed that this student believed that not all changes are immediately visible and that even small changes have an impact. Another comment that stood out in this final reflection was from Student 9, who commented, "... it felt like I put more of my heart and effort into it because it is something I believe in." This comment bolstered the argument that the intervention contributed to students' feelings of purpose and drove their engagement. Each reflection in Table 5 supports that the *Zines for a Means* project impacted students' feelings of civic engagement and efficacy and the students felt that the unit was beneficial and meaningful in their growth as change agents.

Table 5

Sample Participant Responses to: 'Were You a Change-Maker in This Unit?'

Participant	Response
Student 1	"I think we were. Nothing hasn't happened yet, but at least a few should be a little famous or known."
Student 2	"Maybe, but it depends if someone shared out saying good stuff. So I guess."
Student 3	"I think that I was a change-maker because we were spreading something that matters to us into (the) public."
Student 4	"Yes because I was putting my voice into the world and sharing my opinion."
Student 5	"I was a change-maker in this unit because I put my voice out into the community and people listened. I tried to make change and probably made a little even if it was just adding one more fact to the brain of one more person it was change. One little thing can cause a big ripple of change on the surface of the world."
Student 6	"I was a change-maker in this unit because I got to express my voice and my opinions to others. Also, people read my zine and took some of our zines with them. That might mean that they read them."
Student 7	"I think I was a change-maker because I was able to share my voice with my community on a topic that matters to me."
Student 8	"I think that I was because I was sharing my opinions with people inside and outside of the (School Name's) community."
Student 9	"I feel like I was a change-maker in this unit because I spread the word and showed others how to help. Also, it felt like I put more of my heart and effort into it because it is something I believe in."

Summary

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how an inquiry-based civic zine project might impact student civic engagement and feelings of civic efficacy. Over six weeks, students engaged in an intervention focused on developing their sense of civic engagement and efficacy through a meaningful, student-driven project, *Zines for a Means*. I used three data-gathering strategies to gain information about the unit's impact on students' feelings of engagement and efficacy: a pre-unit to gather information about student perceptions of changemakers, three student reflections completed through the intervention phase, and a post-intervention exit-ticket reflection.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during this study. The *Who Are Changemakers?* pre-unit assessment provided quantifiable qualitative data, the ongoing reflections provided qualitative data in the form of written responses, zines provided insight into what issues students cared about and how they communicated this with their community, and finally, the exit ticket provided quantitative and qualitative data about the project's impact. Synthesis of this data allowed me to identify that the *Zines for a Means* intervention positively impacted students' feelings of civic engagement and efficacy. Although some students were unsure of their zines' impact on their community, all commented at some point that the zines unit allowed them to share their voices and opinions with others, recognizing themselves as capable changemakers who could engage meaningfully with their community.

In the next chapter, I share how the findings from this study compare to prior studies discussed in the literature review. I will identify possible limitations of the study and the impact this may have had on its results. Finally, I will consider how these findings might inform my future practice and clarify my next steps as a teacher leader.

Chapter V

Conclusions

The democracy of the United States is increasingly polarized. From the insurrection on January 6, 2021, to recurring incidents of police brutality against Black Americans to the climate crisis, there is a need to foster the development of a just, informed, and engaged citizenry. Many theorists assert the vital role that education systems play in this development. Various research supports providing authentic, student-driven learning experiences to increase civic opportunity, knowledge, and engagement (Belvins et al., 2016; Bruce & Lin, 2008; Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Levy et al., 2023). Upon reflection, nurturing civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions and supporting ongoing competence may hold significant power in healing and strengthening a "fractured" democracy (Howard, 2020, p. 92).

This action research project was conducted in a fifth-grade humanities classroom at a progressive independent school in Northern California. Students at the site regularly engage with issues of social injustice, and a central focus of the school's mission is to develop students' sense of social responsibility in addition to individual achievement. After working at the site for the past seven years, I noticed students had a limited understanding of engaging with their community beyond the classroom. Most students appeared to have a limited understanding of the myriad ways one could engage in their community as a young person. I often saw well-intentioned students organize bake sales or class fundraisers, with most of these efforts directed toward the school community. The student participants of this project were in their first year of middle school, so it felt developmentally appropriate and necessary to propel student community engagement beyond the school walls. Therefore, I developed a unit of study to promote civic engagement and foster feelings of efficacy through community engagement.

An inquiry-based, civic zine project was chosen as the intervention strategy for various reasons. Research demonstrated how student-driven inquiry, connected to real-world issues, can support students' feelings of efficaciousness or capability and that this, in turn, drives engagement (Belvins et al., 2021; Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Dewey, 2018a; Serriere, 2014; Sharma et al., 2022). Other studies revealed how zines and other creative projects could act as vehicles for student empowerment (Belvins et al., 2021; Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Sharma et al., 2022). Additional research asserted zines as a beneficial pedagogical tool across curricular areas and ages (Gray et al., 2022; Kawai & Cody, 2015; Oslund & Barton, 2017;). There are several studies indicating that zines have the potential to amplify student voices, empowering youth as civic agents (Belvins et al., 2021 & Desyllas and Synclair, 2014).

Further research posits that when students feel empowered, their confidence and sense of self-efficacy increase (Gray et al., 2022; Oslund & Barton, 2017; Serriere, 2014). I wanted to add to students' growing repertoire of skills for meaningful community engagement and find a new way to feel successful and heard. I believed that zines might provide a new and engaging means to be agents for change. Therefore, the question driving this action research was: *How might an inquiry approach support students' competency for meaningful community engagement, and how might this impact their self-efficacy?*

In Chapter IV, I presented findings from the data collected during this study. These data suggested that the *Zines for a Means* project increased students' feelings of engagement and efficacy overall. This chapter is organized into five sections: summary of findings, interpretation of findings, limitations, summary, and plan for future research. In the first section, the summary of findings, I will discuss the methods and instruments used to collect data, including the *Who are Changemakers?* Pre-unit Assessment, student reflections administered throughout the unit,

and the end-of-unit exit ticket. The following section shares an interpretation of the findings from these data. In the third section, I will explore limitations that may have affected this study. Next, I will summarize the entirety of this action research project, and in the final section, I will discuss future actions I will take concerning the findings of this study.

Summary of Findings

This study used a mixed-methods approach to gather data and explore the impact an inquiry-based civic zine project might have on students' civic engagement and feelings of efficacy. I used three measures, including a pre-unit assessment titled *Who Are Changemakers?* (see Appendix A), three student reflections that were completed during the intervention (see Appendix B), and an end-of-unit exit ticket (see Appendix C).

Although all 40 of my two fifth-grade humanities students participated in this study (N=40), only 38 students completed both the pre-unit assessment and exit ticket; therefore, only data from these students were included. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of this unit, I used a sample of nine students across the grade who had completed all aspects of the unit and had attended all sessions (n=9). I sorted students into three groups based on reading attainment: below, at, and above grade-level expectations. Next, three students were randomly selected from each level, and these students became part of the sample group (n=9).

The *Zines for a Means* project was implemented over the span of six weeks. There were three phases of this project. The first was the pre-intervention phase, which lasted one week and consisted of students sharing their thoughts about who changemakers were in a pre-unit assessment, as well as learning about young changemakers of the past and present. Over the next four weeks, students engaged in the intervention phase, researching an issue of personal importance and creating and publishing a zine about their chosen topic for their local

community. The final phase lasted approximately one week and included sharing their published zines with the wider community at a local comic store and completing a post-unit reflection about the project. The following sections will summarize the findings from these three phases of data collection.

Pre-Unit: Who are Changemakers?

The analysis of data gathered from this pre-intervention assessment helped to identify student perceptions of changemakers. Although there were a variety of fictional and real changemakers represented, several themes emerged from this data. The first was that most students drew adults, which was noteworthy because this study's focus was to get fifth-grade students (10 and 11-year-olds) to see that they were capable of taking action and impacting their communities. Another observation was that about 70% percent of the illustrations were of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) making change. This was interesting as this was not representative of the class demographics; and again, I wanted these students to see themselves as change agents. These data showed that over 90% of the illustrations included people with at least one historically marginalized identity. These included changemakers who identified as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, woman or girl identifying, or disabled. I was curious if these students believed that only those who hold a marginalized identity were responsible for sharing their voices and resisting oppression. I wanted to support them in seeing that everyone has a responsibility in the fight for justice.

Another thing I noticed from this pre-unit assessment was that students had prior knowledge and awareness of current and past issues of injustice and how people have resisted. Their drawings included activists from the past and present fighting for racial justice and civil rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmental justice. When looking at the kinds of civic action the

changemakers were taking, it was evident that many students already saw the power of voice in activism. Seventy-two percent of the illustrations depicted changemakers holding picket signs expressing their stance on an issue. Additionally, 58% showed evidence of public speaking. However, just three students explicitly showed activists using writing as a form of activism. These findings indicated that many students saw sharing their voice as a literal act, and few shared that written expression could be used to engage in civic action with the community.

Overall, the *Who Are Changemakers?* Pre-Unit provided many insights into student perceptions of changemakers and informed the design of the unit of study to include examples of youth engaging meaningfully in their communities so that they could begin to recognize their power.

Student Reflections

Five key themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of student reflections from the intervention stage. These were: 1) Zines allowed students to share something that mattered to them with their community; 2) Students saw the zine project as an accessible way to engage with their community and as a means for change-making; 3) Zines helped students see themselves as young changemakers in their community; 4) Students enjoyed creating zines as they offered them choice and voice; and 5) Students wanted more time and choice when creating zines.

The theme that *Zines allowed students to share something that mattered to them with their community* was evident across various participant responses. Students wanted to share their knowledge and opinions with their community and felt excited to have an opportunity to make a change. For instance, Participant 4 wrote, "I wanted to write about something I noticed in the world that I wanted to change." Similarly, Participant 3 shared, "I want to share my learning to everyone so they can also know about [Animal Shelters] and what they do." These comments,

and others connecting to this theme, revealed that these young people had something to say and desired an opportunity to communicate their thoughts with others. The zine project provided an outlet for this communication.

Another theme was that students saw the zine project as an accessible way to engage with their community and as a means for change-making. Students commented on how inexpensive zine creation was and how easy it was to publish multiple copies to share with others. They could see that sharing their zines at no cost at the comic store made it easy for anyone to learn about the issue in their zine and the inspirational power that this might hold on their reader's activism. For instance, Student 7 remarked, "Zines are a short self-published magazine that is easy to share and copy. These are sold or given out to many people at lots of locations, and they don't usually cost a lot. This makes it easy for people to share, to see, and to teach people about the topic that you are writing about." Student 8 shared that they could "share… my zine with someone with a lever of power so that maybe then they could make a greater change than maybe I could as a middle schooler." These comments demonstrate that participants recognized that zines had the potential to help youth share their voices with a broader audience and inspire others to take action.

A third theme identified was that zines helped students see themselves as young changemakers in their community. Students often commented on how they were making change and being activists in their reflections. Their comments also showed that they felt excited and empowered during this project, especially because they had the chance to share their thoughts beyond their school community. All nine sample students used the phrase "I was a change maker" or "I was an activist" in their reflections at some point. They commented on how they were "encouraging" and "compelling" their reader and that this was a way to support more

considerable change. This may be evidence of them beginning to internalize and recognize themselves as having the capacity to impact their community and make change.

The fourth theme was that students enjoyed the project as it offered the elements of choice and voice. Many students used the adjectives "engaging" and "fun" to describe the zine project. They spoke positively about what they were creating, and some students commented on how they felt a sense of ownership as they had a choice about what they could include and how they would communicate their information and thoughts. Some sample students shared that they understood how the project would support their growth as activists, equipping them with a new means for engaging with others. Comments showed that students felt particularly enthusiastic about sharing their voice beyond the school community and having the opportunity to publish their zines for a real purpose drove their engagement.

The final theme that emerged was that students wanted more time and choice during this inquiry. Many students shared that they felt rushed and that the time pressure may have impacted their production. This group of students clearly cared about what they were putting into the community and wanted to feel proud of what they shared. Unfortunately, the project took place at the end of the academic year, and there was no way to mitigate having a deadline as there was a publishing party. However, these comments may indicate the need to extend the time students have to work on this project; perhaps another week would have supported students' confidence in what they had created.

Analysis of these data reveals how the *Zines for a Means* intervention supported students' civic engagement and self-efficacy as young changemakers. Despite some students feeling the pressure of time, the overall impact was positive, and the project provided a welcome opportunity for students to share their voices.

End-of-Unit Exit Tickets

The end-of-unit exit tickets provided a third source of data. I collected quantitative and qualitative data from this ticket. Overall, the findings were that for all students who completed the exit ticket (*N*=38), mean engagement rose by almost 7%. Mean efficacy rose by around 18%. These data suggest that the zine project had a greater impact on students' feelings of efficacy, but both areas increased. When looking at the sample participants (*n*=9), their engagement and efficacy also grew but at almost double the rate of the whole group (+15.4% and 35.6%, respectively). The sample students were selected randomly, but completing all aspects of the intervention was a key requisite for their selection. Therefore, it may be argued that students who completed the entirety of the intervention experienced a higher rate of growth in feelings of engagement and efficacy. Therefore, the *Zines for a Means* project might be considered a supportive strategy for this development.

When looking closely at the sample and disaggregating by racial identity (BIPOC and White identifying students), another interesting finding emerged. Pre-intervention, BIPOC students (*n*=5) shared higher levels of community engagement than their White counterparts (*n*=4) but slightly lower levels of efficacy. However, post-intervention, engagement, and efficacy rose at a higher rate for BIPOC students (+16% vs +10% for engagement and +40% vs +30% for efficacy). These data suggest that although the intervention supported all students, there was a more significant increase in BIPOC students' feelings of civic engagement and efficacy. This might support the idea that the *Zines for a Means* project may hold potential as a promising practice for building equity concerning civic engagement and efficacy for historically marginalized communities.

Interpretation of Findings

From the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected during this action research project, I concluded that implementing an inquiry-based civic zine project supported students' feelings of civic engagement and efficacy. Various findings in the data support this conclusion. Information from the pre-unit assessment *Who Are Changemakers?* provided a foundational understanding of student perceptions of who can make change in their communities, and the data from both the student reflections during the implementation and the end-of-unit exit tickets provided evidence to support the positive impact of this implementation. The following discussion shares the significance of the findings and how they connect to and enrich previous research.

Who Did Students See as Changemakers?

When analyzing students' labeled illustrations of changemakers in the pre-unit assessment, it was clear that students had foundational knowledge of what a person might do to enact change in their community. They shared illustrations of protestors, people giving speeches, and fundraising. Students' illustrations were often of adult changemakers, with only one explicitly stating that the changemaker was under 21. This was an interesting finding because this action research aimed to explore ways to support youth as feeling a capacity to make change. A conclusion from the analysis of the illustrations might be that many students saw adults as having the capacity to make change. Before administering the pre-unit, I wondered if any students would draw themselves, but none did. Oslund and Barton's (2017) study discussed the potential zines held for supporting self-efficacy in students who felt disempowered as mathematicians, providing alternative ways to make mathematical success and strengths visible. From students' drawings and comments in our *Obstacles and Actionables* lesson, it was clear

that many students felt disenfranchised and experienced barriers to civic engagement. Students shared that age restrictions, lack of adult trust and support, and financial dependence were obstacles to their change-making. I hoped implementing zines would impact students' capacity to be efficacious and engaged citizens.

Another finding of interest was that over 90% of the illustrated changemakers held at least one historically marginalized identity; this made me wonder if students felt that only those marginalized in some way could take action. I wanted them to see themselves as capable of enacting change, especially because many had financial power and privilege. Therefore, when designing the unit, I ensured that students had opportunities to see examples of youth enacting change. This was informed by Bandura's research on building self-efficacy, and this is strengthened when participants see models of people who hold similar identities or have similar experiences to themselves (Bandura, 1989). Kahn and Sporte (2008) also emphasize the importance of students seeing other young people as efficacious to support feelings of capability.

From the data collected from the student reflections and the end-of-unit exit ticket, it seemed clear that many students saw themselves as having the power to make change and could identify times in which they were being change agents. One strategy that I believe played a vital role in this pivotal realization for students was that they received supportive feedback that affirmed their strengths and highlighted their capacity for success. This strategy was supported by prior research by Siegle and McCoach, who investigated the connections between self-efficacy and achievement in mathematics (2007). When designing questioning prompts for student reflections, I purposefully incorporated phrases that would direct students to consider how they had been making a change in this unit and how the zines might provide an opportunity

for them to make a change in their community. Additionally, I incorporated specific language commenting on the skills connected to change-making when providing verbal and written feedback. I hoped that this intentional, ongoing reminder to students would reinforce that they were capable of making change through this project.

Inquiry-Based Civic Zines Build Efficacy

The data collected in this action research most strongly supports the implementation of an inquiry-based civic zine project for building student efficacy. This growth was evident for all students who participated in the project, but most notably those who engaged with all components of the inquiry. From learning about other young changemakers at the beginning of the unit to choosing an issue they felt personally connected to to publishing a zine and celebrating their civic engagement at the Zinefest publishing party - students appeared to be driven by a sense of purpose. The exit ticket data clearly demonstrate this efficacy growth as the class level rose by 18.2%. The nine sample students' efficacy levels increased at almost double this rate (+35.6%), and this may be because these students engaged in all components of the intervention.

Another key takeaway was that the sample students identifying as BIPOC (n=5) had a more significant rise in efficacy when compared to their White counterparts (n=4) (+40% vs. +30%). These data align with thoughts from Gray and colleagues' (2022) study into the potential zines held for "feminist praxis" (p. 888) during the COVID-19 pandemic. They named creating zines a promising practice for supporting creative expression, activism, and liberation. Moreover, through their inquiry, the authors noted that zines provided an opportunity to create "something useful" (p. 902) for the community. Another finding was that zines provided space for self-expression, notably for those holding oppressed identities. Gray and

colleagues argued that the zine project "amplified voices that are not white, straight, male, and/or able bodied and created moments of joy…" (p. 892) and "an activist space" (p. 901). Based on the increased levels of efficacy in BIPOC student participants, I believe these descriptions would also describe the impact of the *Zines for a Means* project.

As an educator seeking to find ways to close the civic opportunity gap, it felt important to note the impact of this intervention on BIPOC student participants. Oslund and Barton's (2007) research into zines for empowering students in math also connects to this finding. They shared that zines had the potential to find alternative ways to feel strong in mathematics. The findings of my action research support that those who initially felt less efficacious (my BIPOC students) showed increased development in this area, hopefully nurturing their inner strength as young changemakers.

Adding to this quantitative data, student comments reinforced that they felt efficacious in this project. They commented that they wanted to share their ideas and knowledge on issues important to them with their community and that the zine project provided them the opportunity. Others shared how they were excited to make a change and share their voice beyond their school community. The Zinefest publishing party and partnership with the local comic store gave students a real purpose for their zine creation. Dewey (2018a; 2018b) argues for the benefits of learning in the broader environment to support students in developing skills they will use in future community engagement. In their reflection, students were asked to reflect on how this authentic purpose impacted their civic efficacy. The prompt, "The publishing party helped me to share my voice and see my voice enter my community," received an overwhelmingly positive response, with a mean response of 4.22 out of 5 for the sample group. One student said, "I think that I was a changemaker in this unit because we were sharing our voice into the community. A

bigger community than the [school] community, because that is normally who we share our voices with but now I feel much more like we tried to be changemakers outside of the [school] community." Thus, providing students more opportunities to practice skills required for future civic engagement and opportunities to be successful and to celebrate this success, along with increasing the scope of their engagement, may provide scaffolding to support future civic action in adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). This idea is supported by Serriere's (2017) study of fifth-grade students advocating for changes to their school lunch program. Serriere asserts that encouragement, providing space for students to engage in issues of personal importance, and modeling curiosity all support students in feeling capable and efficacious. The findings of this action research study support this assertion.

Inquiry-Based Civic Zines Build Civic Engagement

Responses to the prompt "The zine-making unit helped me feel engaged in my community" received the most positive ranking on the five-point scale, with two-thirds of the sample students selecting five points (strongly agree) with only one student disagreeing with the statement. This finding showed that most students felt this project was beneficial in supporting their community engagement. Further, student responses corroborated that they felt empowered to engage in their community. Some students identified future aspirations for their community engagement. Participant 6 shared, "My next step as a young changemaker would be to do a different type of protest/change than making art, a story, or going to a protest march." Similarly, Participant 9 said, "My next step as a young change maker is to find other ways to spread information and raise awareness." These comments might imply that the zine project had value in highlighting that the participants were capable of making change, spurring them forward into considering what they could do next. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory and other

recent research, various carefully considered factors may have contributed to students' increased civic engagement and feelings of empowerment. Ensuring students saw other young activists as having the capacity to change (models), ongoing affirmative and constructive feedback connecting to civic action, and ensuring they would have a positive experience in which they were successful, all had the potential to enhance feelings of efficacy in various disciplines (Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 1997; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Siegle & McCoach, 2007). My research further supported these findings.

The concrete experience of the Zinefest made it evident to students that they impacted others. At the Zinefest, people from the public, comic store employees, and others were actively reading the students' zines, making it obvious that their voices were entering the community, moving beyond the classroom walls. Therefore, applying these strategies in the *Zines for a Means* project nurtured feelings of efficacy, motivation, and engagement. From the student reflections, it was also apparent that this success may influence future actions. Students were considering their next steps as both changemakers and zinesters. Some were so excited by the project that they asked for an elective (self-selected class) the following academic year.

My action research bolsters findings from prior studies, including the iEngage Program (Belvins et al., 2021) and The Responsible Change Project (Coffey & Fulton, 2018). Belvins and colleagues found that implementing a curriculum focused on student-driven, local civic action supported authentic community connections, civic efficacy, and community engagement. Coffey and Fulton (2018) concluded that inquiry-based, language arts projects that involve students as leaders of their learning have the potential to support students' perceptions of having the capacity to make change. They also found that projects with outcomes connected to students' lived experiences were motivating and helped them to feel their civic power. My study also

demonstrates that providing an authentic context rooted in students' experiences and issues of personal importance is influential in supporting engagement and efficacy.

Meaningful Inquiry Takes Time

A fourth conclusion from this research is that meaningful inquiry takes time. Qualitative data from student reflections and prior literature support this assertion. When students were prompted to consider ways that the project could be improved (e.g., "How did you feel about this project? How was it helpful? Is there anything that could make this even better? Why/How?"), five of the nine students mentioned wanting more time to research or create their zine. The project lasted around six weeks and included at least one 50-minute lesson per school day; this was a substantial amount of instructional time. Dedicating this time to building students' capacity to build civic confidence and competence is essential. However, I recognize the privilege of having autonomy over my curriculum and my school site's flexibility in being responsive to student needs and interests.

Students' comments about time also indicate a desire to create something they felt proud of that would impact change. Student 6 said they would have liked "a bit more time to research…our topic." This may have indicated a desire to gather more information to share to support their readers' understanding and to influence change. Additionally, Student 2 shared, "Something that I would want to change if I would ever do this again is ask for more time because I had to take my zine home multiple times but overall it was super fun!" Taking zines home to work on was not a requirement. There was no consequence for students who did not finish their zine. If this had happened, the only outcome would have been that their zine would not be available at the Zinefest. Therefore, I believe that this response shows that Student 2 cared deeply about taking extra time to create something they felt proud of and that this meaningful

inquiry motivated their engagement. Both comments demonstrate that students desired more time to go further with this inquiry-based project.

Gray and colleagues (2022) share the need for slowing down or *queering* time in our education system. Although their study was of adults in higher education, there is still a push from outside organizations for students to demonstrate traditional success, "zine production does not fall within the traditional scope of work that 'counts' as academic output" (Gray et al., 2022, p. 889). However, it was clear that the project provided many benefits to participants and was responsive to the current experiences of these people. Evidence suggests that the continued emphasis on traditional measures of knowledge and understanding is not increasing national outcomes (CIRCLE, n.d.; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008a; NAEP, 2022; Putnam, 2000).

In Serriere's 2014 study, she noted that time was of great importance in building students' civic efficacy and engagement. The teacher, principal, and other staff members were flexible in providing a group of students with time to engage in something meaningful and of personal importance: a school lunch project. The qualitative responses from the study highlighted the impact that this had on their efficacy and engagement. For example, Serriere noted, "the girls reported that it helped that Mrs. C. carved out large time blocks (60 to 90 minutes) in their school day so they could work on their salad project" (2014, p. 50). The school and teachers placed significant value on providing students with time to do "something that's helping them…" and something that supports their thinking beyond test-taking (Serriere, 2014, p. 48). Serriere's research highlights the possibilities that incorporating student interests into projects may have on a student's holistic growth. My findings support that, although inquiry took a substantial amount of time, students grew in many ways. They developed digital citizenship,

written communication, reading skills, and media creation, all while growing confidence and competence as civic actors. Students in my study also valued having time to inquire into something they cared about. An example of this was when Student 9 said they were "excited [to have time to communicate their issue with their community] …because I have been meaning to say something about this for a long time." Additionally, when considering which cause to focus on, Student 8 shared, "I decided that [homelessness] was a topic that I truly care about and something that I wanted to make change." These data showed the participants' desire for dedicated time for a student-driven inquiry into an issue of personal importance because of the opportunity it provides for youth engagement and a growing capacity to take action.

Reflection on Limitations

This action research study took place over six weeks at the end of the 2022-23 academic year. Therefore, time was a limitation for this research since there was pressure to end the project in time to have the culminating Zinefest at the comic store. Multiple students desired more time to work on their research and zine creation, but this was not possible. Building in more time for implementing this project, even an extra week, may have had a more significant impact on student engagement and efficacy. However, this constraint was difficult to predict as each student worked at their own pace. This is a common limitation for inquiry projects; Coffey and Fulton (2018) noted that managing multiple projects simultaneously was challenging and that unforeseen gaps in knowledge and understanding can impact students' engagement. However, I draw a similar conclusion to Coffey and Fulton, that the positive outcomes outweighed the challenges presented, and that the challenges present learning opportunities for both students and educators. Nevertheless, building more time for this implementation may have supported the meaning and value of this project for students.

A second limitation I identified was my selection of participants, which were students in my humanities class. Social-desirability bias may have impacted their responses when responding to surveys and reflections, as noted in research by Steinberg and colleagues (2011). Students may have wanted to please me as their teacher, not showing authentic feelings about the project but sharing what they thought I would want to hear. Due to the traditional pressures of education and the belief that students must show progress from the beginning to the end of the project, they may have felt pressure to rate themselves as higher at the end of a project than before the unit. Civic engagement and efficacy growth and development are complex areas to measure, and progress may not be linear. However, students may not have this understanding. A way to mitigate this may have been to have made the responses anonymous, and to have had students reflect prior to the project and again at the end of the project, using the same questions without the context of the project, so that I could draw comparisons between these two moments in time.

A third limitation was the level of choice students received. Students were given a zine menu to select elements for their zine creation, such as poems, comic strips, and factual information. This menu was implemented to provide structured choice so that students could engage in language arts' skills, as well as those connected to meaningful community engagement. However, some students commented on their desire for more choice when designing their zines. Considering this, I wonder if giving students structured choice (the requirement to include certain elements from the zine menu) may have limited some students' communication with their community, making them believe there was a 'right way' to engage civically. This went against the belief that there was no correct way to be an active citizen and the liberatory idea that students should co-create their learning experiences. Choice has been

noted as a way to promote "motivation and engagement," and I am left wondering how I might create more space to trust students in leading their learning, demonstrating skills connected to standards, and the competency we were developing (Belvins et al., 2021, p. 157). Perhaps developing a co-created rubric, in which students employed their understanding from analyzing other civic zines, might support them in considering what makes for an effective zine while sharing the power to decide what makes for a successful zine. The anecdotal findings from this research study also informed my project. The authors emphasized several strategies that they believed were conducive to growth in civic engagement.

The final limitation I believe impacted the results of this study was that the students attended a well-resourced independent school in a city that was located near a comic store. We could collaborate with the comic store and walk to the location, so it was relatively easy to set up. The students also had prior experience with civic engagement, including fundraising, service learning, and a curriculum centered on social justice. Therefore, it might be argued that these students had a pre-disposition to civic-mindedness (Steinberg et al., 2011). It would be important to check the validity of the results with students in other contexts to see how location, access to resources, and social demographics might impact findings.

Summary

Research supports the need to develop students' capacity and efficacy to be engaged citizens and rethink our approach to this development (CIRCLE, n.d..; Coffey & Fitchett, 2015; Putnam, 2000). Opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, and dispositions for civic engagement in childhood support the likelihood that they will grow into civically engaged adults (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). A variety of recent research supports that meaningful inquiry connected to students' experiences and lives has the potential to drive engagement and

motivation (Belvins et al., 2021; Serriere, 2014; Sharma et al., 2022). Therefore, I sought to implement a unit of study that aimed to provide students with space and time to have a voice and share about an issue of personal importance, having an opportunity to engage meaningfully with their community. I decided to implement this through the implementation of an inquiry-based civic zine project.

Both Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Dewey's theory of inquiry influenced the design of this action research. When considering both theories, it was clear that an inquiry-based and equity-centered pedagogical approach held the potential to support civic agency and engagement in youth. Additionally, after a review of more recent literature, I concluded that an inquiry project in which students developed zines about an issue of personal importance and sharing this at a comic store (providing an authentic purpose) might support students' civic efficaciousness and engagement. I believed that providing students with the opportunity to create something for their community would help them recognize their ability to have an impact and provide them with a safe, scaffolded place to build skills, knowledge, and dispositions that would support future civic engagement.

The research was conducted over a six-week period. Student participants learned about young changemakers from the past and present, identified issues impacting various communities to which they belonged, researched an issue of personal importance, and designed and produced zines to share with their local community. The unit of study was received with enthusiasm and excitement by student participants. The unit gave students time and space to hone and build various skills, knowledge, and dispositions connected to language arts, digital citizenship, communication, and civic engagement. Each student worked diligently to research and produce their zine, and some commented on how they put in more effort because the project was

meaningful to them. Students came to lessons excited, ready to share ideas, and with a collaborative energy. They regularly reflected on how they were changemakers, which was facilitated by regular teacher and peer feedback in light of research by various scholars (Alt et al., 2023; Coffey & Fulton, 2018; Siegle & McCoach, 2007). The publishing party, or *Zinefest*, provided a sense of purpose and a buzz of excitement. Seeing community members taking copies of the students' zines, reading them, and celebrating them allowed students to see their voices enter the community. Having such a successful experience may impact students' efficacy for further civic engagement as success breeds success; as a person's efficaciousness grows, so do their goals and commitment to realizing them (Bandura, 1989; Siegle & McCoach, 2007).

My analysis of qualitative and quantitative data gathered throughout the project indicated that the *Zines for a Means* project increased students' feelings of civic efficacy and engagement. Due to the limitations of this study, more research is needed to gain further insight into how this project might impact students in different settings, including public schools, schools in suburban and rural areas, and other age groups. When planning for future research, the timing of the implementation should be considered as this may impact the value and meaning of this inquiry for participants, affecting their civic efficacy and engagement. Another consideration would be to further include students in constructing what constitutes success to develop this unit into a more liberatory practice.

Plan for Future Action

When triangulating the results from this action research project, there is evidence that implementing a unit of study in which fifth-grade students engage in an inquiry-based civic zine project and share an issue of personal importance with their local community beyond the school promotes civic efficacy and engagement. Due to these encouraging findings, I plan to share this

study with the school site's faculty members. I hope that showing how student-driven inquiry projects, such as the *Zines for a Means* project, can foster efficacy and engagement might inspire others to design opportunities for students to build civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions in other grade levels and subject areas.

Zines offer an accessible and engaging opportunity for students to express their voices with their community, and they have the power to drive student efficacy and engagement. We need to continue to find ways to build students' repertoire of skills and capacity to engage as active citizens in their communities. Zines are just one way - documentaries, murals, letters, service learning, and so many other means might support students in developing habits for the future.

Building the capacity to be an active citizen is a lifelong process, and research shows the importance of scaffolding this in childhood and adolescence (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Serriere, 2014). As an integral part of my school site's mission is to develop equitable teaching practices, sharing how the framework and approach implemented within this unit impacted all students, especially students of color, self-efficacy is a supportive finding. Sharing ways to build efficacy may help other teachers employ tangible strategies to facilitate this growth. I believe that practical and concrete experiences in which students practice being civically engaged will encourage future action and support the building of a knowledgeable and active citizenry. If students have further opportunities to add to their civic toolkit, they might be better equipped to apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to improve and develop a more equitable democracy for all.

When considering the development of the *Zines for a Means* unit, I plan on making some specific changes to bolster its effectiveness. I plan to give this project an extra week or two of

learning time to ensure all students have the time they need to feel the most successful. I also plan on providing students with various examples of zines, including the zines from the participants of this study, to consider what a successful zine might include so that we can collaboratively build success criteria, inviting students to be co-creators of their learning. Another thing that could be powerful is to invite zinesters who create zines that focus on civic action, engagement, and social justice to meet with students. I am already in the process of organizing this for the next academic year. If students see that their zine-making skills can continue to impact the world beyond school and that this is a true example of civic action, the learning may be even more authentic and motivating to youth.

Another future action is to develop a zines and comics elective for the next academic year, continuing the partnership with the local comic store. After the project, multiple students asked for more space to make and share zines; I want to be responsive to this desire and continue to foster their motivation to be creators of media, as well as consumers. I hope some of them continue to use zines to communicate what they care about with their community, but I also recognize that some may want to explore different subjects when sharing zines. Even if they do not share zines about issues connected to civic action, they will hold an extra set of skills they can utilize in the future. I hope that this metaphorical toolbox continues to grow and that they find a way to have a voice and impact in their communities beyond this project.

A final takeaway from this project is that students have something to say. They see what is happening in their world and want to do something. Sometimes, they feel disenfranchised and incapable of making change. They feel like they are not taken seriously as young people, they feel financially dependent, and they feel it might be unsafe to speak up. As educators, I believe that it is our responsibility to support students in feeling empowered to say something, to know

how to do so safely, and to use their voices for good. As a transformative teacher leader, I aim to continue seeking ways to support students in developing into engaged and informed citizens. If we want to strengthen and develop a more equitable democracy, we as educators must weave ongoing opportunities for students to practice being active citizens. This has the potential to heal and nurture wounds left by the dehumanizing systems and legislation of today.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Pre-Unit Reflection: Who Are Changemakers?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Pre-Unit Reflection: Who are changemakers?

Directions: Draw a picture of an activist (either fictional or real)

Musts:

- Add color
- label with identities
- Include any objects they might use
- Add a caption that describes what they are doing and what makes them an activist.

Stick this in your PINK social studies journal when you're done!

Caption:

Appendix B

Student Reflection Packet

Reflection 1

1. What are zines and how might we use them as a way to make change?
2. What matters to you and why? List some possible topics for your zine:
3. How do I make it more than myself? Why does this matter beyond you? Who are some specific people this zine might matter to/impact? Why would others read your zine?
4. Where can I start? What might you do in order to create your zine? What will you need? Who can help? How can you draw on the wisdom from crowds?

Reflection 2

1. Share three elements that you are including in your zine. Why did you choose to include these three?
2. How can you use your zine to make it easy for others to join in?
3. How are you being a change-making zinester?

Reflection 3

1. How did you use the 10 Questions for Young Changemakers when creating your zine?
2. Which question from the 10 questions stood out to you as important/helpful and why?
3. How were you an activist? What is your next step as a young changemaker?
4. If you made another zine, what would it be about and why?
5. How did you feel about this project? How was it helpful? Is there anything that could make this even better? Why/How?

Appendix C

End of Unit Exit Ticket

Zine Project: Exit Ticket

Yesterday, you shared your zine! Today you'll share your thoughts about the project!

* Indicates required question

1. Email *

2. Name *

3. Before this unit, I felt engaged in my community. *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ Strongly disagree
   - ◯ Disagree
   - ◯ Neutral
   - ◯ Agree
   - ◯ Strongly agree

4. Before this unit, I felt like my voice was visible in my community. *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ Strongly disagree
   - ◯ Disagree
   - ◯ Neutral
   - ◯ Agree
   - ◯ Strongly agree

5. The zine-making unit helped me feel engaged in my community. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

6. The publishing party helped me to share my voice and see my voice enter my community. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

7. I would consider using zines as a tool for engaging with my community in the future. *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

8. Which of the following resources did you use to support you in this project? Rate how helpful each thing was in feeling like you could be a successful change-maker. Rank them 1-5 (1 = unhelpful, 2 = somewhat helpful, 3 = neither helpful or unhelpful, 4 = helpful, 5 = very helpful *

Check all that apply.

	Unhelpful	Somewhat Helpful	Neither Helpful or Unhelpful	Helpful	Very Helpful
Zine menu	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rubric for the project	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Visiting the comic store	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Seeing models of zines by experienced zinesters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My teacher's model zine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feedback from my peers (WWWs & EBIs)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feedback from my teacher (verbal feedback & WWWs & EBIs)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Seeing examples of other young changemakers from the past and present.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. Reflect: Were you a change-maker in this unit? Explain your thoughts. *

10. What worked well for you in this unit?

11. What other things could be added/adapted to this unit to support you in feeling like you can make change? *

Appendix D

Unit Plan: Project Pathway

My Project Pathway
Zines for a Means: How Can I Make My Voice Visible in My Community?

DESCRIPTION

In this unit, we will work as a class to create a collection of zines for our community about issues that are important to us, and supportive ways to be a changemaker. Throughout this unit, you will explore how young people have changed their worlds and the strategies they used to do so. You will use what you learn from their actions, along with the '10 Questions for Young Changemakers,' to support your own change-making project (the zine). This unit gives you the chance to inform others about issues on your heart and mind, and also a way to stand up and take action for yourself and others.

FINAL PRODUCT	COMPETENCY	RUBRIC
Civic Zine	Engage Meaningfully in my community	Rubric Here

Tune In	Find Out/Sort Out	Go Further	Reflect & Act

UNIT/PROJECT PATHWAY

STAGES	FORMATIVE TASK
Explore the Task: What are Zines? • What is the history of zines? • Why do people make zines? • What elements and features do zinesters include?	**Chalk Talk:** Features of Zines
Explore the Topic: What Matters to My Community? • What matters to me? • How can I make it more than myself? • How can I draw on the wisdom of crowds?	**Chalk Talk:** Values, Issues, and Causes. Me, My School, My City, California/USA, and the World!
Where do we start? • What might be some steps for making a zine? • What order should the steps be? • How do zinesters plan a successful zine? • What will my process be?	**Walking Field Trip:** Visit to Comic Store and/or Zinester interview **Collaborative Zine Process Planning** (Post-it Notes)
Planning my zine: What will I include and why? • What is my topic? • What is my message? • Who is my audience? • What is my purpose?	Zine Planner GO
How can I draw on the wisdom of crowds? • What do others know about my topic? • How do I know if a source is credible?	Interactive Modeling: FART Test FART Test Brainstorming GO
How will I share with my audience? • What format will I use? • What will my tone be and why? • What elements will I choose for sharing my message? • What design choices will I use and why?	Interactive Modeling: Zine Mockup Zine Mockup Homework: Zineception (a Zine about the zine process).
Have I been successful? • I can give and receive constructive feedback using the rubric. • I make decisions for my final zine, based on feedback I receive.	Reflection GO Pt.1 WWW & EBI
How can I share my message with my community? • I can use the photocopier to make copies • I can create a pdf of my zine	Zine Copies
Celebration of Learning: Publishing Party at Comic Store	
Reflect: • What have I learned? • What are my next steps?	Reflection GO Pt.2