

Evidence-Based Practices, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and 21st-Century Skill Development in Social Studies Education: A Mixed-Methods Praxis-Oriented Study

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ABSTRACT

Social studies educators in the United States are increasingly tasked with preparing students to navigate environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), intensified by sociopolitical polarization and systemic inequities. These conditions challenge compliance-driven reform and technical instructional solutions that fail to account for cultural context, political contestation, and institutional constraint. This mixed-methods study examines how high school social studies teachers understand and apply Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs), how these practices align with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), and how educators perceive their effectiveness in developing the 6Cs—Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Connectivity, and Culture.

Survey data were collected from 105 high school social studies teachers, with 95 complete cases retained for regression analysis and 67 cases used for bootstrapped mediation and moderation modeling. Results indicated a strong positive relationship between EBPs and student preparedness for the 6Cs ($r = .682$, $p < .001$), with CRP partially mediating this relationship ($ACME = 0.254$, $p = .004$).

Qualitative findings revealed that political polarization, cultural contestation of CRT, institutional constraints, and wicked problems significantly shape how instruction is enacted in practice, often constraining risk-taking and instructional coherence. Teachers who demonstrated adaptive leadership practices were more likely to integrate inquiry-based learning, deliberative dialogue, real-world application, and student voice and choice to support sensemaking and civic reasoning.

Drawing on these findings, the study advances the BE–KNOW–DO framework as a praxis-oriented synthesis model integrating educator identity (BE), professional knowledge (KNOW), and instructional and policy action (DO). Grounded in Adaptive Leadership Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, the framework positions educators as adaptive leaders and policy actors who translate evidence and values into coherent instructional practice within contested environments. The study contributes an empirically informed model for strengthening instructional coherence, equity, and civic readiness in complex educational systems.

Keywords: Evidence-Based Practices, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Social Studies Education, 21st-Century Skills, Adaptive Leadership Theory, Policy Entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

Public education in the United States is increasingly situated within environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), where technical solutions are insufficient for addressing deeply

embedded social and institutional challenges (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2022; Coyne, 2005; Lake & Pillow, 2023; Stein, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic exemplified such a wicked problem, exposing systemic economic, political, social, and cultural vulnerabilities across American institutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Weick, 1993; Heifetz, 1994; Stein, 2021). Within public education, the pandemic revealed longstanding inequities in access to technology, stable learning environments, and the alignment of instructional resources with student needs (Schleicher, 2020).

These challenges have been further intensified by escalating political and cultural polarization, particularly around issues of race, history, and civic identity. As a complex public system shaped by diverse stakeholders with competing values and interests, education has not been insulated from these broader sociopolitical dynamics. Recent efforts to restrict or dismantle programs associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) illustrate how political, social, and cultural forces increasingly shape instructional priorities, professional practice, and policy direction within schools.

Within this context, social studies education occupies a particularly critical role. Teachers are expected to prepare students not only for academic success, but also for democratic participation, civic reasoning, and engagement with contested social issues. This expectation has heightened attention to 21st-century competencies, conceptualized in this study as the **6Cs: Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Connectivity, and Culture**. These competencies are essential for navigating civic life in VUCA environments; however, the instructional pathways through which they are developed remain unevenly understood.

Although a growing body of research examines Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs), Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), and 21st-century skills, these constructs are most often studied in isolation. Limited empirical work explains how instructional leadership, pedagogy, and classroom practice interact to support student readiness in complex and polarized educational environments. In particular, there remains insufficient understanding of how teachers operationalize EBPs through culturally responsive leadership and adaptive decision-making in response to systemic disruption, sociopolitical polarization, and institutional constraints.

In the absence of such integrative inquiry, reform efforts risk advancing fragmented, compliance-driven approaches that prioritize technical implementation over instructional coherence, cultural responsiveness, and professional judgment. These approaches frequently fail to address the adaptive and emancipatory dimensions of teaching and learning necessary for equitable and effective social studies instruction. To address this gap, the present study employs a mixed-methods design to examine how high school social studies teachers understand and apply EBPs, how these practices align with CRP, and how educators perceive their effectiveness in preparing students for the 6Cs.

Drawing on these findings, the study advances the **BE-KNOW-DO framework as a praxis-oriented model for translating theory into practice in complex educational environments**. Grounded in Adaptive

Leadership Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, the framework positions educators as adaptive leaders and policy actors capable of integrating evidence, values, and contextual judgment into coherent instructional action. This study contributes to social studies education by offering an actionable model for strengthening student engagement, developing 21st-century skills, and supporting civic readiness in contemporary, politically contested contexts.

Literature Synthesis: Evidence-Based Practices, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, And 21st-Century Skills

Evidence-Based Practices in Social Studies Instruction and Political Polarization

Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) have become central to instructional reform, emphasizing empirically supported strategies such as explicit instruction, formative assessment, scaffolded discussion, and inquiry-based learning. In social studies, these practices support disciplinary literacy, civic reasoning, and higher-order thinking when enacted with professional judgment and contextual awareness.

Political Polarization and the Limits of Technical Implementation

Findings from this study extend the literature by demonstrating that the effectiveness of EBPs is significantly influenced by political and cultural conditions within schools. Quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between teachers' use of EBPs and perceived student preparedness for 21st-century skills ($r = .682$, $p < .001$), indicating that evidence-based instruction remains a powerful predictor of student readiness even amid challenging instructional environments (Moses, 2025). However, mediation analysis further demonstrated that **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)** partially mediated this relationship ($ACME = 0.254$, $p = .004$), suggesting that instructional effectiveness is conditioned by contextual and cultural factors rather than determined by technical practice alone (Moses, 2025).

Qualitative findings provide critical insight into this mediation effect by identifying **political polarization** as a recurring barrier to instructional enactment. Teachers described heightened scrutiny of curriculum content—particularly related to race, history, and civic discourse—which constrained instructional risk-taking and limited opportunities for open dialogue. Participants emphasized that polarization increased the emotional, professional, and institutional costs associated with culturally responsive instruction, often forcing educators to navigate competing expectations from administrators, parents, and community stakeholders.

These findings align with **Adaptive Leadership Theory**, which conceptualizes polarization as an adaptive challenge requiring sense-making, relational work, and judgment rather than technical compliance (Heifetz et al., 2009). Within polarized contexts, teachers who successfully implemented EBPs did so by adapting instructional strategies through culturally responsive decision-making, reframing civic content, and balancing instructional integrity with political realities. This underscores the limitation of compliance-driven reform models and reinforces the need for integrative frameworks that support adaptive, context-aware enactment of evidence-based instruction.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, DEI, and Cultural Contestation

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), originally articulated by Ladson-Billings (1995), emphasizes academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness by centering students' identities, lived experiences, and community knowledge within instruction. In social studies education, CRP is particularly salient given the discipline's engagement with history, power, civic identity, and democratic participation. By design, CRP challenges deficit-based instructional models and affirms students as capable, culturally situated learners whose experiences are integral to meaning-making and civic learning.

Findings from this study reinforce the instructional value of CRP while simultaneously illuminating the challenges associated with its enactment in politically polarized environments. Quantitative results demonstrated that CRP functioned as a **partial mediator between Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) and student preparedness for the 6Cs** ($ACME = 0.254$, $p = .004$), indicating that evidence-based instruction is strengthened when enacted through culturally responsive approaches (Moses, 2025). Teachers who reported higher alignment between EBPs and CRP also reported higher levels of student engagement and preparedness for critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and civic reasoning, underscoring the role of cultural responsiveness in translating instructional rigor into meaningful learning outcomes.

Qualitative findings further contextualize these results by revealing widespread cultural contestation surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. **Participants described persistent ambiguity regarding what constituted "acceptable" culturally responsive practice, noting that CRP was often conflated with ideological agendas rather than understood as an evidencebased pedagogical approach.** This politicization generated uncertainty, constrained instructional risk-taking, and discouraged open engagement with topics related to race, identity, and systemic inequity. Teachers reported heightened scrutiny from parents, community members, and administrators, which frequently resulted in cautious or fragmented instructional practices despite recognition of CRP's educational value.

In the absence of coherent national or system-level policy guidance, teachers relied heavily on individualized professional judgment to navigate these contested spaces. **While some educators employed adaptive**

leadership strategies—such as reframing content, building relational trust, and engaging in reflective practice—others described risk aversion, self-censorship, and instructional retreat. These patterns suggest that when CRP is left solely to individual interpretation, it becomes vulnerable to inconsistency, inequity, and political pressure, limiting its potential to support equitable and culturally sustaining instruction.

These findings align with Adaptive Leadership Theory, which conceptualizes polarization and value conflict as adaptive challenges requiring sensemaking, relational work, and professional judgment rather than technical compliance (Heifetz et al., 2009). **Within this framework, culturally responsive teaching is not a technical strategy to be implemented, but an adaptive practice** that requires educators to navigate competing values, community expectations, and institutional constraints. Teachers who were most effective in enacting CRP did so by diagnosing contextual dynamics, engaging stakeholders, and balancing instructional integrity with political realities.

Collectively, the literature and empirical findings support the argument that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is not an ideological add-on but a pedagogical necessity for equitable and effective social studies instruction. Integrating CRP with EBPs—rather than positioning them as competing approaches—provides a pathway for maintaining instructional rigor while addressing cultural relevance, identity development, and civic engagement. This integration is particularly critical in VUCA environments, where educators must navigate contested values, shifting policy signals, and heightened scrutiny of instructional content. The need for such operational clarity directly informs the development of integrative models, such as the BE-KNOW-DO framework advanced in this study, which seeks to translate culturally responsive pedagogy into sustainable instructional and policy practice.

21st-Century Skills, VUCA Contexts, and Institutional Constraints

The growing emphasis on 21st-century skills reflects recognition that students must be prepared to navigate complex civic and social environments. Conceptualized in this study as the 6Cs—Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Connectivity, and Culture—these competencies are essential for democratic engagement and workforce readiness.

Quantitative findings from this study reinforce the instructional conditions under which 21st-century skills are most effectively developed. Results indicate that **Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)** significantly predict perceived student preparedness for the 6Cs, particularly when enacted through **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)** (Moses, 2025). This relationship suggests that skill development is not an automatic outcome of curricular exposure but is shaped by how instruction is designed, enacted, and contextualized within students' lived experiences.

Institutional Constraints and Instructional Coherence

While quantitative data demonstrate the efficacy of EBPs aligned with CRP, qualitative findings highlight **institutional constraints** as persistent barriers to instructional coherence and sustained skill development. Teachers identified time limitations, standardized accountability pressures, curriculum pacing mandates, and resource disparities as factors that frequently forced prioritization of content coverage and assessment performance over depth, inquiry, and student engagement. These constraints limited opportunities for collaborative learning, critical discourse, and real-world application—key instructional conditions for developing the 6Cs.

Despite these constraints, some participants described engaging in **reflective practice and adaptive instructional design** to mitigate institutional barriers. Teachers with higher levels of instructional self-efficacy reported greater willingness to modify pacing, integrate inquiry-based strategies, and connect content to students' cultural and civic contexts. This finding aligns with **Self-Efficacy Theory**, which posits that individuals' beliefs in their professional capabilities influence persistence, adaptability, and instructional decision-making within challenging environments (Bandura, 1997).

However, participants consistently emphasized that such adaptive practices were difficult to sustain or scale in the absence of structural and policy-level support. Without aligned professional development, administrative

backing, and flexible accountability structures, teachers' efforts to foster 21st-century skills remained isolated and vulnerable to burnout or reversal. These findings suggest that while individual teacher efficacy plays a critical role in navigating institutional constraints, systemic conditions ultimately shape the durability and equity of instructional innovation.

Collectively, the literature and empirical findings underscore the need for integrative frameworks that address instructional practice, educator beliefs, and institutional context simultaneously. Supporting 21st-century skill development in VUCA environments requires not only effective instructional strategies, but also leadership and policy structures that enable educators to enact those strategies coherently and sustainably.

Wicked Problems, Problematization, and Social Studies Instruction

Social studies instruction is situated within the context of **wicked problems**—complex, persistent challenges characterized by ambiguity, competing values, and the absence of clear technical solutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Examples include the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic social and educational inequities, and ongoing sociopolitical instability. These challenges resist linear problem-solving approaches and instead require adaptive responses, critical inquiry, and collaborative sensemaking. As such, wicked problems align closely with the purposes of social studies education, which emphasize civic reasoning, ethical judgment, and engagement with contested public issues.

Qualitative findings illustrate that teachers enacted **inquiry-based learning, deliberative dialogue, and realworld applications as problematization strategies**, subsequently enabling students to engage productively with ambiguity, multiple perspectives, and contested knowledge (Moses, 2025). Rather than avoiding controversial or complex topics, participants described creating instructional spaces where uncertainty was treated as a learning opportunity. Teachers emphasized that addressing wicked problems required students to interrogate assumptions, examine power relations, and consider competing interpretations of social reality.

Participants consistently linked these instructional approaches to the development of the 6Cs, particularly critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and civic reasoning. **Teachers reported that engaging students with wicked problems fostered adaptability, perspective-taking, and ethical reasoning—competencies essential for democratic participation in volatile and polarized contexts.** These findings indicate that creativity in social studies is not merely expressive, but functions as a cognitive and civic capacity for problem construction, sensemaking, and interpretive judgment.

Collectively, the literature and empirical findings underscore that wicked problems cannot be addressed through technical solutions or compliance-driven instructional models alone. Instead, they require adaptive, culturally responsive, and leadership-driven instructional frameworks that support educators in navigating uncertainty while maintaining instructional coherence and equity. This insight reinforces the need for integrative models—such as the BE-KNOW-DO framework advanced in this study—that align evidencebased instruction, culturally relevant pedagogy, and adaptive leadership to prepare students for complex civic and social realities.

SUMMARY

Collectively, the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that political polarization, cultural contestation of CRT, institutional constraints, and wicked problems significantly shape instructional conditions in social studies education. While EBPs positively predict student preparedness for 21st-century skills, their effectiveness is strengthened—and in some cases constrained—by cultural and systemic variables. By explicitly accounting for these external forces, the **BE-KNOW-DO framework** responds to the complex realities identified in this study and provides a coherent, praxis-oriented model for aligning instructional leadership, pedagogy, and policy in support of equitable and effective education in VUCA contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to examine how high school social studies teachers understand and enact Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs), how these practices align with Culturally Relevant

Teaching (CRT), and how educators perceive their effectiveness in preparing students for the 6Cs—Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Connectivity, and Culture. A mixed-methods approach was selected to capture both the measurable relationships among instructional practices and student preparedness and the contextual, adaptive, and interpretive dimensions of instructional enactment in politically contested environments.

The design integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data to generate a comprehensive understanding of instructional practice, leadership behavior, and contextual constraint. This approach aligns with the study's grounding in Adaptive Leadership Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, both of which emphasize the interaction between individual agency, contextual conditions, and adaptive action.

Theoretical Foundations

This study is grounded in four complementary theoretical traditions—**Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)**,

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), **Adaptive Leadership Theory (ALT)**, and **Self-Efficacy Theory**—that cooperatively explain how instructional practice, leadership, and teacher belief systems interact to support student learning in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) educational environments. Collectively, these theories shape the **BE–KNOW–DO framework** as a praxis-oriented model that supports social studies instruction aimed at preparing students for complex and uncertain contemporary contexts.

Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)

Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) are instructional strategies validated through rigorous empirical research and shown to improve student learning outcomes across diverse educational contexts. Within social studies education, EBPs include explicit instruction, inquiry-based learning, scaffolded discussion, formative assessment, and strategy instruction (Whitehurst, 2002; IRIS Center, 2025). These practices emphasize instructional clarity, cognitive scaffolding, and feedback mechanisms that support higher-order thinking and skill acquisition.

Findings from this study provide strong empirical support for the effectiveness of Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs). Quantitative analysis revealed a **robust positive relationship between teachers' use of EBPs and student preparedness for the 6Cs** ($r = .682, p < .001$), indicating that evidence-based instruction is a significant predictor of students' readiness to navigate complex civic and social challenges (Moses, 2025). However, EBPs alone did not fully account for instructional effectiveness, particularly in culturally and politically contested environments.

Mediation analysis further demonstrated that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) partially mediated the relationship between EBPs and student preparedness, underscoring that instructional impact is shaped not only using empirically supported strategies, but by how those strategies are enacted in culturally responsive and context-aware ways. These findings suggest that technical instructional solutions, when applied in isolation, are insufficient for preparing students to engage with the uncertainty, ambiguity, and value-laden complexity inherent in wicked problems.

Within the BE–KNOW–DO framework, EBPs operate primarily within the **KNOW (Epistemology)** and **DO (Methodology)** dimensions, representing both the professional knowledge educators must possess and the instructional actions they enact. The findings suggest that EBPs are most effective when applied adaptively and in conjunction with culturally responsive practices rather than implemented as prescriptive, compliance-driven techniques.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), originally conceptualized by Ladson-Billings (1995), emphasizes three core goals: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. CRP challenges deficit-based instructional models by positioning students' cultural identities, lived experiences, and community knowledge

as assets for learning. In social studies education, CRP is particularly meaningful, as the discipline inherently engages questions of identity, power, history, and civic participation.

This study's quantitative findings indicate that **CRP functions as a partial mediator** between EBPs and student preparedness for the 6Cs ($ACME = 0.254, p = .004$), providing empirical evidence that culturally responsive enactment strengthens the impact of evidence-based instruction (Moses, 2025). Qualitative findings further revealed that teachers who intentionally integrated CRP reported higher levels of student engagement, relevance, and participation, particularly through real-world connections, student voice, and collaborative learning.

Within the BE–KNOW–DO framework, CRP is rooted in the **BE (Ontology)** dimension, reflecting educators' beliefs about students as capable, culturally situated learners, and extends into **KNOW** and **DO** through culturally responsive curriculum design and instructional practice. The study's findings underscore that CRP is not an ideological addition, but a pedagogical necessity for equitable and effective instruction in diverse and polarized educational contexts.

Adaptive Leadership Theory (ALT)

Adaptive Leadership Theory (ALT), advanced by Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz et al. (2009), distinguishes between **technical problems**, which have known solutions, and **adaptive challenges**, which require shifts in values, beliefs, roles, and relationships in support of effective problematization. Education policy, instructional reform, and culturally responsive teaching are illustrative adaptive challenges, particularly in VUCA environments marked by political polarization and institutional constraints.

ALT provides a critical leadership lens for this study, as teachers are positioned not merely as implementers of policy, but as adaptive leaders navigating contested instructional spaces. Qualitative findings identified **political polarization, cultural contestation of CRT, and institutional constraints** as recurring barriers that required educators to engage in sensemaking, reflection, and adaptive decision-making rather than technical compliance alone.

Within the BE–KNOW–DO framework, ALT operates at the intersection of **KNOW** and **DO**, emphasizing leaders' capacity to diagnose challenges accurately and mobilize stakeholders toward adaptive solutions. The framework thus aligns instructional leadership with public administration praxis, positioning educators as agents of change capable of translating evidence and values into sustainable instructional practice.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-Efficacy Theory, articulated by Bandura (1977, 1997), explains how individuals' beliefs in their capacity to succeed influence motivation, persistence, and behavior. In educational contexts, teacher self-efficacy has been shown to predict instructional innovation, resilience, and willingness to implement inclusive and studentcentered practices (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Findings from this study indicate that teachers with higher levels of perceived instructional self-efficacy were more likely to adapt EBPs and CRP despite institutional and political constraints (Moses, 2025). These educators described engaging in reflective practice, experimenting with instructional strategies, and sustaining culturally responsive teaching even amid uncertainty and resistance.

Within the BE–KNOW–DO framework, self-efficacy is embedded within the **BE (Ontology)** dimension, shaping educators' professional identity, confidence, as well as conviction; while directly influencing their capacity to act within the **DO (Methodology)** dimension. The study's findings suggest that strengthening teacher self-efficacy is essential for scaling culturally responsive, evidence-based instruction in complex educational systems.

Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was employed, allowing quantitative and qualitative data to be collected concurrently and integrated during analysis. This design enabled triangulation of findings and strengthened the validity of interpretations by examining instructional practice from multiple analytic perspectives.

The quantitative strand focused on identifying relationships among EBPs, CRP, and perceived student preparedness for the 6Cs. The qualitative strand explored how teachers interpreted, enacted, and adapted these practices in response to sociopolitical context, institutional constraint, and classroom dynamics.

Participants and Sampling

Survey data were collected from **105 high school social studies teachers (n = 105)** across diverse school contexts. Following data cleaning procedures, **95 complete cases (n = 95)** were retained for multiple regression analysis. Participants represented a range of years of experience, school settings, and community contexts, providing variation in instructional environments and policy conditions.

For qualitative analysis, a purposive subsample of participants was selected to capture variation in instructional approach, community context, and perceived institutional support. This sampling strategy ensured representation of educators working in both supportive and contested environments.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were collected using a structured survey instrument measuring teachers' use of EBPs, alignment with CRP, self-efficacy, and perceptions of student preparedness for the 6Cs. The instrument was developed based on existing validated scales and aligned with the theoretical constructs guiding the study.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Interview protocols focused on instructional decision-making, experiences with political and cultural contestation, leadership behavior, and adaptive responses to institutional constraint. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted using the **95 complete cases (n = 95)** to examine the relationship between EBPs and perceived student preparedness for the 6Cs. Mediation and moderation analyses were conducted using bootstrapped resampling procedures with an **analytic subsample of 67 cases (n = 67)** to test the indirect effect of CRP and the moderating influence of sociopolitical and cultural context. Bootstrapping was selected to enhance robustness given the sample size and to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding procedures. An initial open coding phase identified emergent patterns related to instructional practice, leadership behavior, and contextual constraint. Axial coding was then used to cluster codes into higher-order themes aligned with the theoretical framework, including adaptive leadership, problematization, cultural responsiveness, and professional judgment. Analytic memos were used to support reflexivity and pattern identification.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation, allowing for convergence, divergence, and expansion across data strands.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To enhance quantitative rigor, the study employed established statistical procedures, transparency in sample reporting, and appropriate treatment of missing data. For qualitative rigor, credibility was supported through thick description, systematic analytic documentation, and alignment between data excerpts and thematic claims. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through audit trails and reflexive documentation. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the mixed-methods design strengthened validity through both triangulation and complementary analysis.

Summary

EBPs, CRP, Adaptive Leadership Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory collectively provide a coherent theoretical foundation for understanding how instruction, leadership, and belief systems interact to support student development in VUCA environments. The integration of these theories within the BE–KNOW–DO framework offers a robust, empirically grounded model for aligning instructional practice, leadership action, and policy implementation in support of equitable and effective social studies education.

Proposed Framework: The Be–Know–Do Model For Social Studies Education



Figure 1: Evidenced-Based Practices for Enhancing Social Studies Concept Map (BE, KNOW, DO) (Moses, 2025).

Rationale for the BE–KNOW–DO Framework

The **BE–KNOW–DO framework** provides a conceptual and operational model for translating EvidenceBased Practices (EBPs) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) into coherent instructional and policy action within the complex, politically contested, and institutionally constrained environments in which social studies educators work. Grounded in Adaptive Leadership Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, the framework positions educators not merely as implementers of policy, but as adaptive leaders and policy actors who integrate evidence, values, and contextual judgment in service of equitable and effective instruction.

Findings from this mixed-methods study demonstrate that improving social studies instruction in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments requires more than the isolated application of instructional strategies. **Quantitative results established that EBPs significantly predict student**

preparedness for the 6Cs ($r = .682, p < .001$), while mediation analysis confirmed that CRP strengthens this relationship (ACME = 0.254, $p = .004$) (Moses, 2025). Qualitative findings further revealed that political polarization, cultural contestation of CRT, institutional constraints, and wicked problems shape how instruction is enacted in practice. Collectively, these findings indicate that instructional effectiveness is conditioned by educator beliefs, professional judgment, and sociopolitical context, thereby necessitating a coherent, praxisoriented framework that integrates identity, knowledge, and action.

Clarifying the Status of the BE–KNOW–DO Framework

It is important to note that the BE–KNOW–DO framework was not tested as a discrete causal model in this study. Rather, the framework is derived inductively and deductively from the empirical relationships identified among Evidence-Based Practices, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and student preparedness for the 6Cs, as well as from qualitative patterns observed in teachers' adaptive instructional practices. **In this sense, BE–KNOW–DO functions as a praxis-oriented synthesis model that integrates educator identity (BE), professional knowledge (KNOW), and instructional and policy action (DO) to translate theory into practice.** The framework is therefore presented as an empirically informed interpretive model rather than a statistically validated structural framework. Future research should explicitly operationalize and test the BE, KNOW, and DO dimensions as independent constructs to examine their causal relationships and predictive validity.

The BE–KNOW–DO framework responds to the empirical and theoretical needs identified in this study by aligning three interdependent dimensions of professional practice. The **BE (Ontology)** dimension reflects educators' professional identity, beliefs, and ethical commitments, including how they view students, equity, and civic purpose. The **KNOW (Epistemology)** dimension represents the professional knowledge base educators draw upon, including disciplinary understanding, instructional design, cultural competence, and assessment literacy. The **DO (Methodology)** dimension captures the instructional and policy actions through which educators enact their beliefs and knowledge in classrooms, schools, and broader systems.

Loosely informed by the U.S. Army's BE–KNOW–DO leadership doctrine and adapted for educational contexts, the framework situates teaching as both professional practice and public leadership exercised within complex institutional environments (Department of the Army, 1999). Within this study, educators are positioned as adaptive leaders who diagnose instructional challenges, navigate contested values, mobilize stakeholders, and exercise professional judgment in response to shifting policy conditions and community expectations.

By integrating identity (BE), knowledge (KNOW), and action (DO), the BE–KNOW–DO framework provides a structured pathway for operationalizing EBPs and CRP in ways that are responsive to sociopolitical context and institutional constraint. It moves beyond compliance-driven reform by acknowledging that instructional improvement is shaped not only by what teachers do, but by who they are, what they believe, and how they interpret their professional responsibilities within broader social systems. In this way, the framework offers a scalable, praxis-oriented model for strengthening instructional coherence, equity, and civic readiness in contemporary social studies education.

BE (Ontology): Educator Identity and Systemic Context

The **BE (Ontology)** dimension reflects educators' professional identity, beliefs, and ethical commitments, as well as the broader institutional and sociopolitical contexts in which they operate. Qualitative findings revealed that teachers who viewed students as capable, culturally situated learners were more likely to design instruction that emphasized trust, belonging, and shared responsibility. These ontological commitments shaped how educators interpreted EBPs and CRP, particularly in politically contested environments where culturally responsive instruction is scrutinized.

From a systems perspective, BE also encompasses laws, as well as normative and institutional values that define the boundaries of acceptable practice. Chapter 5 findings indicate that ambiguity surrounding CRT and DEI policy contributes to uneven implementation, requiring educators to exercise professional judgment and moral courage. Within the BE–KNOW–DO framework, identity is not neutral; it serves as the foundation that determines whether evidence and policy are enacted in ways that promote equity and democratic participation.

KNOW (Epistemology): Professional Knowledge and Competencies

The **KNOW (Epistemology)** dimension represents what educators must understand to teach effectively in VUCA environments. This study identified four interrelated domains of professional knowledge:

interpersonal skills (communication and collaboration), **conceptual skills** (curriculum coherence and disciplinary understanding), **technical skills** (instructional design and technology integration), and **functional skills** (classroom management and engagement strategies).

Quantitative findings demonstrated that teachers with stronger alignment between EBPs and CRP reported higher levels of student preparedness for the 6Cs, subsequently underscoring the importance and need for epistemological consistency and coherence. Qualitative themes further indicated that knowledge of CRP, inquiry-based learning, and assessment literacy enabled educators to connect content to students' lived experiences while maintaining academic rigor. Within the BE–KNOW–DO framework, KNOW functions as the bridge between identity and action, thereby ensuring that instructional decisions are both evidenceinformed and culturally responsive in nature.

DO (Methodology): Instructional Action and Policy Praxis

The **DO (Methodology)** dimension focuses on how educators put their professional beliefs and instructional knowledge into practice. In this study, teachers implemented Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) through ongoing reflection, real-world learning experiences, differentiated instruction, and flexible instructional design, adapting their approaches to meet student needs rather than relying on inflexible, one-size-fits-all models. Core strategies included explicit instruction paired with inquiry-based learning, scaffolded deliberative dialogue, formative assessment aligned to civic contexts, and opportunities for student voice and choice.

Qualitative findings emphasized that effective enactment required ongoing reflection and adaptation, particularly in response to political polarization and institutional constraints. Chapter 5 further positions DO as extending beyond the classroom into **policy entrepreneurship**, where educators act as change agents by aligning stakeholder interests, mobilizing support, and advocating for systemic adoption of CRT. In this way, DO section of the triadic model represents both instructional methodology and public administrative praxis necessary for effective implementation.

Integrative Role of Adaptive Leadership Theory

Adaptive Leadership Theory (ALT) occupies the **KNOW–DO intersection** of the BE–KNOW–DO framework. Findings indicate that teachers face adaptive challenges such as contested values, ambiguity around CRT, and resource constraints that cannot be solved through technical solutions alone. ALT provides the leadership logic for aptly diagnosing these challenges, facilitating dialogue, and mobilizing stakeholders toward shared educational goals.

By embedding ALT within the framework, the model explicitly acknowledges that teaching in VUCA environments is an act of leadership. Educators are positioned not merely as implementers of policy, but as adaptive leaders who translate evidence, values, and context into coherent instructional practice.

Framework Summary and Contribution

The BE–KNOW–DO framework integrates **educator identity (BE)**, **professional knowledge (KNOW)**, and **instructional and policy action (DO)** into a unified, praxis-oriented model for social studies education. Grounded in empirical findings and supported by established theory, the framework provides a practical guide for aligning Evidence-Based Practices, Culturally Relevant Teaching, and leadership action to support the development of the 6Cs.

By explicitly addressing external variables and systemic complexity, the **BE–KNOW–DO framework** effectively theory into practice by moving beyond compliance-driven reform and providing a scalable approach

for strengthening instructional consistency, equity, and civic readiness in contemporary educational environments.

Policy Entrepreneurship And Implementation: Strategic, Operational, And Tactical Level Alignment

Implementation of the BE–KNOW–DO framework requires coordinated action across **strategic, operational, and tactical levels** to ensure coherence between instructional practice, organizational leadership, and policy direction. Findings from this mixed-methods study indicate that instructional improvement in social studies cannot be achieved through isolated technical reforms alone. Rather, effective enactment of Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) and Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) depends on deliberate alignment across educator identity (**BE**), professional knowledge (**KNOW**), and instructional and policy action (**DO**), particularly within politically and culturally contested educational environments.

This section positions educators and educational leaders as **policy entrepreneurs** who exercise agency within bounded systems to frame problems, mobilize evidence, align stakeholders, and advance adaptive instructional reform. Drawing on Adaptive Leadership Theory and policy entrepreneurship scholarship, the analysis demonstrates how multi-level alignment enables the translation of empirical evidence and professional values into sustainable instructional practice.

Strategic-Level Implementation: Vision, Identity, and Policy Direction

Strategic-level implementation centers on clarifying institutional purpose, instructional vision, and long-term policy direction. This level aligns primarily with the **BE (Ontology)** dimension of the framework and addresses foundational questions of identity—who educators are, what they stand for, and why social studies instruction matters within democratic systems.

Findings indicate that teachers' beliefs about students as capable, culturally situated learners significantly shaped instructional decision-making and willingness to enact CRT. Where identity was grounded in equity, civic purpose, and democratic participation, educators demonstrated greater readiness to integrate EBPs with culturally responsive practice. Conversely, misalignment between institutional messaging and professional values resulted in fragmented, compliance-driven implementation.

From a **policy entrepreneurship** perspective, strategic leadership involves framing instructional priorities in ways that resonate with diverse stakeholders and align with institutional missions, legal frameworks, and community values. Participants described engaging in agenda-setting behaviors by reframing CRT as an evidence-based instructional approach rather than an ideological initiative, thereby reducing resistance and building legitimacy. This strategic reframing enabled educators and leaders to navigate polarization while maintaining instructional integrity.

At the policy level, strategic implementation requires establishing conditions that legitimize and protect culturally responsive, evidence-based instruction. This includes advocating for coherent policy guidance on CRT, safeguarding instructional autonomy within statutory boundaries, and positioning social studies education as essential to preparing students for VUCA environments. These actions reflect policy entrepreneurship in practice—leveraging evidence, narrative, and relationships to influence policy discourse and institutional direction.

Operational-Level Implementation: Organizational Capacity and Professional Learning

Operational-level implementation focuses on building the organizational capacity necessary to sustain instructional coherence. This level aligns most directly with the **KNOW (Epistemology)** dimension of the framework and addresses what educators and organizations must collectively understand and be able to do to support effective teaching and learning.

Findings indicate that professional learning was most effective when it moved beyond compliance-oriented training toward instructional design literacy, collaborative inquiry, and reflective practice grounded in EBPs, CRT, and the 6Cs. **Participants reported that isolated workshops and scripted professional development**

failed to produce meaningful change, while sustained, collaborative learning structures strengthened coherence between instructional knowledge and classroom practice.

Operational leadership therefore involves **aligning professional development systems, curriculum frameworks, and evaluation practices with the principles of the BE–KNOW–DO framework.** Leaders who allocated time for collaboration, fostered professional trust, and supported instructional risk-taking created conditions under which educators were more willing to integrate inquiry-based learning, culturally responsive strategies, and real-world applications. These actions reflect the mobilization of organizational resources in service of adaptive instructional reform.

From a policy entrepreneurship lens, operational leaders function as brokers who translate strategic vision into organizational routines. By aligning structures, incentives, and supports with instructional goals, they reduce friction between policy intent and classroom enactment. Where such alignment was absent, effective practices remained isolated, fragile, and difficult to sustain.

Tactical-Level Implementation: Classroom Practice and Instructional Action

Tactical-level implementation occurs within classrooms and corresponds most directly to the **DO (Methodology)** dimension. This level captures how educators translate professional identity and instructional knowledge into day-to-day instructional action in response to student needs and contextual demands.

Qualitative findings identified a consistent set of strategies that supported student engagement and development of the 6Cs, including **inquiry-based learning, deliberative dialogue, collaborative problemsolving, real-world applications, differentiated instruction, and structured opportunities for student voice and choice.** Teachers described enacting EBPs through flexible, reflective instructional design rather than rigid, standardized implementation models.

Tactical implementation requires continuous sensemaking and adaptation. Educators adjusted instruction based on formative assessment, student feedback, and sociopolitical context, integrating students' cultural identities and lived experiences while maintaining academic rigor. This aligns with quantitative findings demonstrating that EBPs significantly predicted student preparedness for the 6Cs, with CRT strengthening their effectiveness.

At this level, instructional leadership is enacted through relational engagement, reflective practice, and deliberate alignment between learning goals and civic relevance. **Teachers who were supported at the strategic and operational levels were more likely to sustain adaptive instructional practices that fostered critical thinking, collaboration, and civic reasoning in VUCA environments.**

Policy Entrepreneurship Across Levels

Policy entrepreneurship functions across strategic, operational, and tactical levels, linking instructional praxis to broader systems change. The study positions educators and leaders as policy entrepreneurs who identify windows of opportunity, mobilize evidence, and build coalitions to support culturally responsive, evidence-based instruction.

At the strategic level, policy entrepreneurship involves agenda-setting and reframing instructional priorities. At the operational level, it includes aligning organizational practices and resources with instructional goals. At the tactical level, it is enacted through classroom-level innovation that generates exemplars and evidence for broader adoption. This multi-level engagement reflects Adaptive Leadership in action—diagnosing adaptive challenges, engaging stakeholders, and advancing incremental change within politically contested environments.

Addressing Barriers Through Multi-Level Alignment

Findings indicate that political polarization, cultural contestation of CRT, resource constraints, and accountability pressures operate across all three levels. Educators who navigated these barriers successfully did so by aligning strategic vision, operational support, and tactical practice. This included reframing CRT as

evidence-based instruction, grounding decisions in institutional values and legal frameworks, and engaging families and communities as partners.

By explicitly accounting for external variables rather than treating them as peripheral concerns, the BE–KNOW–DO framework provides a shared structure for responding to resistance while maintaining fidelity to professional and democratic commitments. This alignment enables leaders to mitigate risk, sustain momentum, and protect instructional innovation.

Evaluation and Scaling Across Levels

Evaluation of the **BE–KNOW–DO framework** should occur across strategic, operational, and tactical levels to capture its full instructional and organizational impact. Mixed-methods evaluation approaches are recommended, incorporating indicators such as student engagement, civic reasoning, collaboration, and cultural competence alongside traditional achievement measures.

Scaling the framework requires cultivating shared understanding of BE–KNOW–DO principles while supporting localized adaptation. Rather than mandating uniform practices, leaders are encouraged to scale core values, professional knowledge, and implementation processes that promote contextual responsiveness and instructional coherence across educational systems. This approach balances fidelity with flexibility, enabling sustainable reform within diverse contexts.

SUMMARY

System Level	BE (Ontology) Identity & Context	KNOW (Epistemology) Professional Knowledge	DO (Methodology) Instructional & Policy Action	Intended Outcomes
Strategic (Vision & Policy Direction)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educator and institutional commitment to equity, civic purpose, and democratic education • Belief in students as capable, culturally situated learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared understanding of EBPs, CRT, 6Cs, and VUCA conditions • Knowledge of legal, institutional, and policy frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulation of coherent instructional vision • Policy framing that positions CRT as evidence-based practice • Advocacy and Agenda-setting (Policy Entrepreneurship) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional coherence across systems • Legitimization of CRT and EBPs • Alignment of policy, values, and instructional priorities
Operational (Organizational Capacity & Professional Learning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective professional identity oriented toward collaboration and continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of interpersonal, conceptual, technical, and functional competencies • Instructional design literacy and shared pedagogical language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligned professional development • Collaborative inquiry and reflective practice • Supportive structures (time, trust, evaluation alignment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained instructional capacity • Reduced fragmentation and compliance-driven practice • Scalable professional learning models
Tactical (Classroom Practice & Instructional Action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational trust and culturally responsive classroom environments • Teacher self-efficacy and adaptive mindset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogical knowledge of EBPs integrated with CRT • Understanding of student needs, context, and assessment data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry-based learning, deliberative dialogue, collaboration • Differentiated instruction, real-world applications • Reflective and adaptive instructional design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased student engagement and relevance • Development of the 6Cs • Improved civic reasoning and readiness for VUCA environments

Table 1. Strategic–Operational–Tactical Alignment of the BE–KNOW–DO Framework and Intended Outcomes.

Section 5 demonstrates that effective implementation of the BE–KNOW–DO framework depends on coordinated leadership and policy action across strategic, operational, and tactical levels. By integrating educator identity (BE), professional knowledge (KNOW), and instructional and policy action (DO), the framework provides a coherent model for translating evidence and values into practice. **Through policy entrepreneurship, adaptive leadership, and multi-level alignment,** educators and leaders can move beyond compliance-driven reform toward sustainable, equity-centered instructional improvement in social studies education.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to social studies education by demonstrating that instructional improvement in complex, polarized, and volatile contexts requires more than the adoption of isolated strategies or compliance-driven reforms. Findings indicate that **Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)** are most effective when intentionally aligned with **Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT)** and enacted through adaptive instructional leadership. The **BE–KNOW–DO framework** offers a praxis-oriented model that integrates educator identity, professional knowledge, and instructional and policy action to support student engagement, academic rigor, and the development of the 6Cs necessary for democratic participation and civic problem-solving.

Implications for Instructional Practice

For classroom educators, the findings underscore the importance of viewing EBPs not as prescriptive tools, but as adaptable practices that must be interpreted through students' cultural identities, lived experiences, and community contexts. Instructional strategies such as inquiry-based learning, deliberative dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, real-world applications, differentiated instruction, and structured opportunities for student voice were most effective when enacted flexibly and reflectively. Teachers who approached instruction as adaptive work—rather than technical compliance—were better able to sustain engagement, navigate controversy, and support higher-order thinking.

The BE–KNOW–DO framework provides a practical guide for aligning instructional decisions with professional values (BE), disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge (KNOW), and responsive classroom action (DO). In this way, instructional practice is repositioned as an act of professional judgment and civic leadership rather than routine delivery of curriculum. This framing is particularly important in social studies, where educators must balance academic rigor with sensitivity to contested content and diverse student identities.

Implications for Leadership and Professional Learning

For school and district leaders, the findings highlight the need to move beyond compliance-oriented professional development toward **instructional design literacy, collaborative inquiry, and reflective practice**. Professional learning systems that emphasized sustained collaboration, inquiry cycles, and alignment with EBPs, CRT, and the 6Cs were more effective than isolated workshops or scripted training. Leaders who created conditions of trust, psychological safety, and professional autonomy enabled educators to engage in instructional risk-taking and adaptive problem-solving.

Leadership in VUCA environments requires more than managerial oversight; it requires the capacity to diagnose adaptive challenges, mobilize stakeholders, and hold space for professional learning in contested contexts. Aligning evaluation systems, curriculum frameworks, and accountability structures with the BE–KNOW–DO framework can strengthen instructional coherence and reduce fragmentation. Such alignment also signals institutional legitimacy for culturally responsive, evidence-based instruction, thereby reducing uncertainty and risk aversion among educators.

From a policy entrepreneurship perspective, leaders function as brokers who translate strategic vision into operational capacity. By aligning professional learning, resource allocation, and organizational routines with instructional goals, leaders reduce friction between policy intent and classroom enactment. Where such alignment is absent, effective practices remain isolated and vulnerable to political and institutional disruption.

Implications for Policy and Systems-Level Reform

At the policy level, this study suggests that instructional reform efforts are more likely to succeed when policies explicitly acknowledge systemic complexity, sociopolitical dynamics, and external variables influencing teaching and learning. Framing CRT as an evidence-based instructional approach—rather than an ideological initiative—can reduce polarization and support broader stakeholder alignment. Policymakers and system leaders should avoid prescriptive mandates that constrain professional judgment and instead provide flexible guidance that legitimizes culturally responsive, inquiry-based instruction.

The study further positions educators and leaders as policy entrepreneurs who can leverage empirical evidence, narrative framing, and coalition-building to influence policy discourse and advance equitable instructional reform within bounded systems. In politically contested environments, incremental change and strategic reframing are often more effective than sweeping mandates. Supporting educators as adaptive leaders requires policies that protect instructional autonomy while establishing clear commitments to equity, civic readiness, and democratic participation.

System-level reform should therefore prioritize coherence over compliance. Aligning standards, accountability systems, professional learning, and curriculum guidance around shared values—rather than fragmented initiatives—creates conditions for sustainable instructional improvement. The BE–KNOW–DO framework offers a structure for such alignment by integrating identity, knowledge, and action across policy and practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue to examine how integrative frameworks such as BE–KNOW–DO function across diverse educational contexts, grade levels, disciplines, and communities of practice. Longitudinal studies are recommended to explore the sustained impact of aligning EBPs and CRT on student civic outcomes, engagement, and postsecondary readiness. Research designs that incorporate student artifacts, performance-based assessments, and community perspectives would strengthen understanding of how culturally responsive, evidence-based instruction operates within broader social systems.

Additionally, future studies should explicitly operationalize and test the BE, KNOW, and DO dimensions as independent constructs to examine their causal relationships and predictive validity. Such work would strengthen the empirical foundation of the framework and support its transferability across educational and organizational contexts.

Limitations and Generalizability

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the quantitative measures relied on teacher perceptions of student preparedness rather than direct assessments of student performance. While teacher judgments provide valuable insight into instructional conditions and classroom dynamics, they may not fully capture students' demonstrated competencies. As such, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of instructional environments that support creativity, civic reasoning, and problematization rather than definitive evidence of student outcomes.

Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference and does not account for developmental changes over time. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs to examine how creativity, civic reasoning, and problematization develop across instructional contexts and schooling trajectories. These approaches would strengthen external validity and enhance the generalizability of findings.

CONCLUSION

Social studies educators are increasingly tasked with preparing students for democratic participation within educational environments shaped by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, intensified by sociopolitical polarization and systemic inequities. These conditions expose the limitations of compliance-driven reform and technical instructional solutions that fail to account for cultural context, institutional

constraint, and the adaptive nature of civic learning. This study responds to these challenges by examining how Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs), Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT), and adaptive leadership interact to support student preparedness for the 6Cs in complex educational settings.

Findings from this mixed-methods study demonstrate that while EBPs are significant predictors of student preparedness, their effectiveness is strengthened—and in some cases constrained—by cultural responsiveness, educator beliefs, and sociopolitical context. The partial mediating role of CRT underscores that instructional rigor alone is insufficient for equitable and meaningful learning. Rather, effective social studies instruction

requires culturally responsive enactment, professional judgment, and adaptive decision-making in the face of contested values and institutional pressures.

The BE–KNOW–DO framework advances this understanding by providing a praxis-oriented model that integrates educator identity (BE), professional knowledge (KNOW), and instructional and policy action (DO). Grounded in empirical findings and informed by Adaptive Leadership Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, the framework positions educators as adaptive leaders and policy actors who translate evidence and values into coherent instructional practice. In doing so, it moves beyond fragmented initiatives and offers a structured pathway for aligning instruction, leadership, and policy in support of civic readiness and equity.

Importantly, this study reframes teaching in social studies as both professional practice and public leadership. Educators are not merely implementers of curriculum or policy, but sensemakers who navigate ambiguity, mobilize stakeholders, and exercise judgment within complex systems. This framing has significant implications for leadership preparation, professional learning, and policy design, suggesting that sustainable instructional improvement depends on developing educators' capacity for adaptive leadership as much as on providing technical resources.

For educational leaders and policymakers, the findings underscore the need to create conditions that legitimize culturally responsive, evidence-based instruction and protect professional autonomy within bounded systems. Policies that prioritize coherence over compliance, support professional learning communities, and acknowledge sociopolitical realities are more likely to sustain instructional innovation and equity. The BE–KNOW–DO framework offers a structure for such alignment by connecting identity, knowledge, and action across strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

Ultimately, preparing students for civic life in VUCA environments requires more than curricular adjustment or programmatic reform. It requires an integrated approach to teaching, leadership, and policy that acknowledges complexity, centers equity, and empowers educators as adaptive leaders. By advancing the BE–KNOW–DO framework, this study contributes a theoretically grounded, empirically informed model for navigating the challenges of contemporary social studies education and strengthening democratic capacity in an increasingly complex world.

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