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STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

Research Identity and Foundation

My scholarly work is grounded in a sustained question: what does it take for learners at any stage of life to develop the higher-order thinking skills that education, career, and civic participation demand? That question first took shape through a Bachelor of Arts in History, where primary source analysis, archival research, and disciplinary argumentation introduced me to how complex understanding is built and how differently people engage with evidence when instruction does not explicitly develop those capacities. A Cleared California Single Subject Teaching Credential in Social Science extended that foundation into practice, grounding my professional work in the systematic study of people, institutions, and the structural forces that determine who has access to rigorous academic preparation. My research interests have never been bounded by grade level. The same questions that apply to a tenth-grade AP student apply, in different forms, to a college freshman, an adult learner re-entering the workforce, and a graduate student navigating disciplinary writing for the first time.

A Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Concordia University Portland added theoretical scaffolding for examining how curriculum design, instructional coherence, and assessment alignment interact across educational contexts. My master's thesis, *Sheltered Instruction: Equipping Teachers for Language and Core Education* (2016), investigated how to combine core content instruction with language acquisition to better serve ELL students, a population that spans secondary classrooms, community colleges, and adult education programs alike. That research was grounded in a conviction that continues to drive all of my work: access to quality education is the most powerful equalizer a society can offer, and the learners most in need of rigorous preparation are consistently the least likely to receive it. That conviction now drives my doctoral work at Liberty University, where I am completing a Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction.

Current Research

My dissertation, *Recommendations for Solving the Problem of Inconsistent AP World History Exam Pass Rates at The Rock Academy*, investigates a measurable problem at the intersection of secondary and postsecondary education: why do students in the same course, taught by the same instructor, with access to the same resources, produce inconsistent exam outcomes across academic years? The aggregate pass rate at the study site across three exam years (2023 to 2025) is 53.1%, against a national benchmark of approximately 64 to 65 percent. AP World History is most students' first encounter with college-level expectations, meaning this performance gap has direct implications for postsecondary access, college persistence, and long-term academic identity.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach: semi-structured alumni interviews, a Likert-scale survey on instructional preparedness, and a systematic document analysis of instructional materials benchmarked against the College Board's AP World History Course and Exam Description. The central theoretical concern is the transition from content recall to disciplinary analytical reasoning, a challenge that does not resolve at the end of high school but persists into undergraduate coursework and beyond. Drawing on the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2018), scholarship

on disciplinary thinking skill development (Monte-Sano and De La Paz, 2019), and contemporary research on instructional factors in AP performance variability (Ponisciak and Morris, 2023; Lee et al., 2025), the study frames inconsistent outcomes as a structural and instructional problem with practical, evidence-based solutions relevant across educational levels.

Future Research Agenda

The question of how learners develop complex thinking skills is not static, and it does not stop at the secondary level. Artificial intelligence is reshaping the cognitive landscape across K-12 classrooms, college campuses, and adult learning environments simultaneously. Learners who have grown up with on-demand information retrieval, AI-generated content, and algorithmically mediated knowledge are arriving at college and entering the workforce with different patterns of attention, reasoning, and knowledge construction than previous generations. The implications for how institutions at every level design instruction, assess learning, and define readiness are significant and underresearched. My future research agenda is organized around three intersecting questions: how is AI adoption affecting the development of analytical reasoning across educational levels, and does it accelerate or erode the higher-order thinking that rigorous coursework and professional environments demand; what instructional frameworks are most effective at developing critical thinking that is both AI-augmented and AI-resilient, from secondary through postsecondary and into workforce training; and what are the equity implications of differential AI access across school types, income levels, and demographic groups, and how do those disparities compound existing gaps in college and career readiness?

These questions sit at the convergence of curriculum theory, cognitive development, educational technology, and equity research. They are relevant to K-12 administrators, higher education faculty, workforce development practitioners, and policymakers alike. My background positions me to pursue this agenda with both scholarly grounding and practitioner experience. The commitment to understanding how people learn that began with a history degree and has deepened through every credential since now turns toward the most consequential shift in learning environments in a generation. Across all of my research, the through-line is consistent: when learners are not adequately prepared for what comes next, the problem is rarely the learners. It is the gap between what instruction offers and what the world demands. Closing that gap is the work.