

Diversity Curriculum Development Grant Report
2020 - 2021
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Project Overview

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the original project titled, *Learning to Teach Hard History at Montpelier*, changed as we sheltered-in-place, taught virtually, and were unable to visit Montpelier during the fall 2020 semester. The main goal of the project, however, was still met given that I was still able to work with my secondary social studies education graduate students on learning about and considering how to confront hard history in the virtual classroom space. The project took place in two sections of the course, MSSE 570H: Secondary Social Studies Teaching Methods, Grades 9-12. The course occurs every fall semester and enrolled 35 students during the fall 2020 semester.

I re-designed the secondary social studies methods course to focus on teaching hard history and culminated in the implementation of a curriculum project titled, *Teaching for Racial Healing: Lynching in Virginia Curriculum Development Project*. We partnered with Dr. Gianluca De Fazio in Justice Studies and JMU Libraries to prepare curriculum materials for his website, *Racial Terror: Lynching in Virginia*. While we were unable to visit Montpelier, we discussed, reflected, and implement the concepts of teaching hard history as developed by Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries (2018) by engaging my class discussions about how to teach the very difficult, hard, and traumatic topic of lynching in VA and in the U.S. We also learned how to teach about lynching in Virginia by developing lesson plans and curriculum materials.

Overall, the outcomes for this project included the following:

- Challenging future social studies teachers' perceptions of how hard history, e.g., lynching in Virginia, has been/is taught, by reflecting on ideas and critical ways of engaging with counter-narratives in U.S. and Virginia history.
- Reflecting on how to connect the past to the present.
- Transforming future teachers' ways of thinking and being from the inside-out – as people, community-members, and educators. For example, asking questions like, “what do I do with my emotionality or with what I am feeling right now, and what does this mean for me as a social studies educator?”
- Reflecting on, envisioning how, and developing curriculum materials for teaching hard history.

Project Details

Given the events surrounding the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery, among countless others, I wanted to consider how and why the social studies class and curriculum was indeed the space to discuss what was going on in the U.S. and around the world related to racial injustice and white supremacy – specifically related to discussing these current events and the context of these events in the social studies classroom. In past semesters we were able to travel to Montpelier to see, feel, and engage with teaching hard history (Jeffries, 2018), but due to COVID-19, this was not possible this year. That being said, we were able to talk about and consider the implementation of teaching hard history through a collaborative project titled, *Teaching for Racial Healing: Lynching in Virginia Curriculum Development Project*.

Though the Inquiry Design Model (IDM), we created curriculum for the JMU *Racial Terror* website, engaged in discussion with Dr. De Fazio on this topic, and developed a work flow for ongoing curriculum work into the spring and summer terms with the JMU Libraries team. This project is critically important to telling narratives that have largely been erased from U.S. collective memory, quite purposefully, and left out of the U.S. History VSOLs. We read about the history of racial terror and lynching, talked about how to teach this history in social studies classrooms, and reflected on how to teach this history and connect it to contemporary issues in culturally responsive ways. We began to actually do the work of challenging and changing the narrative in U.S. History classrooms.

Specifically, the goals of the lesson plans students' developed were to change the narrative of how U.S. History is currently taught in Virginia, to transform social studies teaching and learning, and to develop a framework for and methods that center equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice in social studies classrooms. With this goal in mind, the social studies graduate students used the IDM format to create an inquiry that told the story of one individual who was the victim of lynching in Virginia. Student used documents, narratives, and graphics featured on the *Racial Terror* website to construct their narrative. The inquires began by asking compelling questions, including: "How is the media used to influence social perception," "How do we combat the master narrative," "Is racial violence a societal norm", and "How has the media challenge racism in the U.S.?" The compelling question provides an overarching framework for a number of supporting questions wherein students were asked to use the documents from the *Racial Terror* website as evidence to answer the questions and construct an argument about Virginia's past and contemporary racial violence and injustice.

The lesson plans and curriculum materials are in the final stages of development and will be published on the *Racial Terror* website in early fall 2021.

Student Feedback

I am very proud of what the students accomplished this year – I asked a lot of them, emotionally, intellectually, and cognitively, and they rose to the challenge and produced some incredible work. As reflected in numerous comments in my final course evaluations, students found this project and how to go about teaching hard histories in social studies classroom as the most helpful/impactful part of the class:

- *I have always said that when I have my own classroom, I want to ensure to incorporate multiple perspectives, tell the real story of history, and tell the stories of those who are often overlooked. When I found out that this is what we would be spending the semester talking about, I was thrilled. Everything we learned in this course directly tied into what I want to do in my future classroom. However, prior to taking this course, I did not know how to do any of it effectively. Now, I have strategies and resources to create a social justice centered classroom and achieve the goals I set for myself early on in my decision to become a teacher. Everything was so interesting and useful, especially the discussions on teaching hard history and controversial issues.*
- *The Racial Terror project was definitely the most impactful for me. I didn't realize I would be as stirred as I was from doing research on this subject, and can't help but think about how students who have experienced similar things firsthand or have been told real*

stories about their elders who had to go through these atrocities might handle talking about issues such as systemic racism as a topic.

- *This class gave me the confidence and encouragement I needed to add hard to talk about topics into my curriculum. I feel that since most of the teachers we had before did not talk about hard history so we were also wary about using it in our own lessons. But Dr. Jaffee has given us the instructions and resources needed for us to create a better and more responsive curriculum for our students.*

Works Cited

Jeffries, H.K. (2018). "The Courage to Teach Hard History." Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/the-courage-to-teach-hard-history>