

Primary Sources, Early Education, Imperial Spain, and Teacher-Centered Instruction

Kelley Zipp

9th-12th grade US History and Government and Politics Teacher

Heritage High School, Ringgold, GA

It would be very difficult to select any one session over the others as more valuable to me in the classroom as there are aspects of all of them that I know will benefit me as an educator. I have already shared many of the things that we discussed at the conference with other teachers which has led to engaging discourse on the topics. The conference was extremely enlightening, and I appreciate having been selected to participate; here is how I intend to incorporate what I learned from each session into the classroom.

Race and Historical Literacy: Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln

I am a huge proponent of students reading primary sources, analyzing historical political cartoons, and evaluating the music of the era under study as much as possible. If students read the primary documents of the time period, they can make up their own minds about the events without it being filtered through any biases or viewpoints of others. However, these historical records can often seem like a foreign language to students, thus they must be taught how to read and discern what is before them as well the context in which they were written. This is a skill that takes time to build but is immensely rewarding for both the student and the educator when the student has a “lightbulb” moment. Myers linked several readings together - some that I use

regularly when teaching this time period - that when read and analyzed in their totality were particularly illuminating to me. I need to do a better job of thoughtfully putting multiple readings together to allow students to gain a deeper insight into the topics or issues that are integral to understanding our history and ourselves. I often assign several small readings together, but I learned from Myers that I need to rethink how I group primary sources. Thanks to him, from now on I will assemble documents with an eye for more complexity and centered around a fundamental or key idea, issue, or event that will excite students to read more deeply and more profoundly.

Civic Education: Addressing K-12 Student Knowledge Deficits

Ellington astutely articulated the problem that students who lack literacy face significant barriers within the school and in the wider world. As a high school teacher I see this daily in the classroom when we are tasked with not only teaching the content for state testing but are asked to substantially improve the literacy of students who are below grade level.

Content-Rich History Curriculum: Elementary and Middle Schools

I have long been an ardent fan and follower of E. D. Hirsch Jr. and unequivocally agree with him that background knowledge, as well as a shared national cultural language, matters. Without basic content knowledge in any academic subject, students will have a difficult time at best learning more complex subject matter, concepts, and generalizations. The content rich curriculum presented by Erland and Terrell spoke to my heart since it is a comprehensive and proven approach that will help students succeed in high school and enable secondary school instructors to significantly enrich students' historical knowledge. I was very impressed by the depth of the curriculum and how it builds on itself; I would love nothing more than to see it used

in the Catoosa County Public School System. In my classroom I will use some of the middle school readings and accompanying questions presented by Erland and Terrell to assist my students who are below grade level.

How Imperial Spain Influenced the U.S.

It was a pleasure to listen to Dr. Cortest as he was a truly captivating speaker. His talk on Spain's early effect on the development of the United States and Latin America's ongoing influence was very enlightening. While I cover some of what he discussed in my lessons, I took away from his talk a need to emphasize the Spanish influence in American history in a much more comprehensive and substantive manner. Given the increasing numbers of Hispanics who now live in the United States and the political controversies relating to immigration issues, it is incumbent upon me to make sure that I take more time and thoroughly educate my students in this area so that they can make mature and sound decisions based on evidence and not on hyperbole. I have always spent a good amount of time on the Spanish Conquest and exploration of South and North America through Pope's Rebellion. Among the many things that the students do is an activity in which they role play the explorers, which is a path for them to better understand the motivations, goals and accomplishments of these men.

While I have always focused on the involvement of France in the American Revolution, I now plan to go into more detail about the Spanish influence in the Revolution and concomitantly on the Treaty of Paris. At this point the students will have enough background knowledge to begin creating a wall-sized graphic organizer that they will continue to build on throughout the semester that will trace Hispanic history in the United States and answer the question: If Latinos have been in North America longer than English speakers, then why do Americans speak English and not Spanish? While this seems deceptively simple to answer it will require the students to

make connections across time as well as understand cause and effect within an historical framework. The culminating activity will be to engage in a Socratic Seminar at the end of the semester that will focus upon Hispanics in American history and contemporary life. My expectation of the seminar is that students will base their discussions on historical evidence rather than uninformed opinions.

Educating Aspiring Teachers in U.S. History and Civics

Stacy's main point in his presentation was the importance of the marriage of content and skills in teacher education. I could not agree more with that point. Student teachers need extensive content knowledge to be successful in the classroom as well as ample time to apprentice to master teachers who can help them understand the art of the teaching-learning dynamic. Without a doubt, Stacy's background as a high school teacher helps him in innumerable ways as a social studies pedagogy professor.

I found Stacy's article in support of lecturing to be affirming because it is common for so-called educational experts to criticize teachers who lecture for not creating a strictly student-centered classroom, but instead engaging in substantial teacher-centered instruction. I believe that history is a story, therefore, lecture is one of many useful tools in my teacher toolkit. I already use several of the lecture techniques that Stacy explained – the problem centered model, the comparative model, and the thesis driven model have all proven to be very effective for me and are integral to the teaching-learning dynamic in my classroom. What I am looking forward to incorporating is Stacy's recommended instructional strategy that begins with a short lecture on a topic, then allows 2-3 students to engage in short discussion of the topic and conclude instruction with a whole class discussion. I believe that this structured content chunking will be beneficial to my students regardless of their ability level. It will help students below grade level to have the

time to absorb new knowledge, process it through dialogue in small group discussions, and then fully assimilate the content through whole class discussion. Typically, this generation (Gen Z) of students have grown up with smart phones and have difficulty concentrating on a topic for sustained periods of time. This strategy appeals to me because strong incentives are created for students to retain their focus in order to more coherently understand a key historical concept, generalization, or event.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity provided by the Center for Reflective Citizenship in selecting me to participate in the conference.

KELLEY ZIPP is a high school teacher at Heritage High School in Ringgold, Georgia. She currently teaches 9th grade American Government and 10th-12th grade US History, AP US History, and AP Government and Politics. Additionally, she has taught Dual Enrollment US History for two years.