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A Multiple Perspective Approach to Teaching History in a Modern World

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Abstract

Providing a comprehensive study of the history of the world allows for students to see and experience various perspectives. History classes are often Eurocentric, providing only one view of a historical event causing voices to be forgotten and cultures to be cast aside. This lack of exposure is detrimental to personal growth and society. Establishing an inclusive curriculum allows for societal change and fights for power against the “attempts made by dominant social groups to maintain control” (Sleeter, 2018). Being culturally aware and accepting allows a community to be established in the classroom, it allows students to think more open mindedly, and it encourages tolerance and respect. This paper will focus on the impact studying multiple perspectives of historical events has on 10th grade students.

Keywords

History education, culturally responsive teaching, inclusive classroom, high school education

Introduction

In order for students to be successful, there must be equity in not just educational opportunities but in the content itself. History curriculum has only ever focused on “socially acceptable” events in history, causing many people’s cultures and identities to be lost (Dozono, 2017). Studying history through alternate perspectives grants students the opportunity to learn how others have perceived various events in history; it allows them to walk in their shoes (Belanger, 2021). This opportunity inspires students to hear the other sides of a story, to critique and analyze history as well as to make their own judgment on the authenticity of historical events being taught. Teaching history through the eyes of the victor benefits no one; it only waters down the magnificent colors of the past.

Literature Review

When creating a history curriculum, one must consider the extent to which all groups, cultures, and voices are being represented. For too long has curriculum in the American school system been Eurocentric, whitewashed, and discriminatory (Schrum et al., 2018).

It is essential that history curriculum be diversified and inclusive of all perspectives of a given event; only then can students be exposed to the most authentic version of historical events (Milner, 2013). Other benefits include exposing students to cultures apart from their own, raising awareness

of social injustices, as well as telling the stories of those that can no longer tell them. In order to provide the most effective version of history, teachers have to be properly trained on inclusivity as well as how to recognize and combat their own biases (Halvorsen et al., 2019). Teaching history through a variety of perspectives aids in the fight against injustice. Studying history through alternate perspectives grants students the opportunity to learn how others have perceived various events in history; it allows them to walk in their shoes (Belanger, 2021). This opportunity inspires students to hear the other sides of a story, to critique and analyze history as well as to make their own judgment on the authenticity of historical events being taught. Analyzing and sharing the voices of those alienated in society opens the doors for change (Belanger, 2021). For example, in a study conducted by Milner, a positive correlation was found regarding the more students learn through another lens, the more likely they will become less ignorant to systemic racism and poverty. Teaching students about critical race theory is not only an important aspect of history, but essential in the fight against poverty (Milner, 2013).

Inclusivity and diversity are important when teaching history because it exposes students to other cultures and allows all voices to be heard. When “Europe remains as a focal point of world history with less attention to the contributions and developments of other cultures and societies” discrimination and exclusivity is bound to flourish (Abushouk, 2017, p. 403). Providing students with the necessary tools to analyze and question history is just as important as the history itself. Acquiring skills such as analyzing, open-mindedness, and reading between the lines are all advanced tools that all students of history should obtain (Schrum et al., 2018). Lockyer and Tazzymant (2016) mention that students need to “think about the past lives of both men and women” in order to ensure that they are not “presented in a binary opposition and that the diversity of experience across genders is explored” (p. 14). Exposure is a major benefit of a multiple perspective approach and key to bringing about societal change.

Establishing a more inclusive history curriculum would be beneficial to all students in the classroom despite it being a huge undertaking (Dennis, 2016; Namala, 2017). This approach to history has allowed the British to not only recognize their wrongdoings, but to educate their students of all backgrounds in a more accurate and impactful way. Doing so, “allows students to consider the ethics of the history and enables them to see how one story can come into conversation, and indeed conflict, with another” and that is okay (Dennis, 2016). An authentic and complete version of historical events is the key to understanding.

Collaboration, critiquing of current historical interpretation, and self-reflection are essential in keeping history relevant in the fight against injustice (Belanger, 2021). Providing teachers with modern professional development that allows time to reflect on their teaching styles and personal biases, as well as how to utilize history as a tool to build a more inclusive and communal environment, is crucial to student success (Halvorsen et al., 2019). For teachers to properly implement a multiple perspective viewpoint, they themselves have to receive training on how to do so. This training includes guiding teachers to be reflective of their own practices, recognize their own biases, and work through them so that they do not influence their classroom environment or curriculum (Schrum et al., 2018).

Context for the Study

The school in this study is a high school located in the Southeast United States. The student body of this school is immensely diverse, as are the staff that works there. Overall, the environment of the school is progressive, innovative, and welcoming. With such diversity, the students and staff are exposed to many different cultures and beliefs. This allows students to learn with others that may differ from them, rather than being in a culturally homogenous environment.

In terms of this specific study, the students being observed are 10th grade World History students. This particular classroom is a warm and welcoming environment that celebrates the diversity each student brings to the classroom. Within this classroom, it is believed that history should be taught in an authentic and truthful way where lectures are stories that allow us to relive the past. Being a project-based learning school, we work with the community allowing our students to take what is learnt in the classroom and apply it to the real world.

Methodology

This study was conducted to analyze the effects of implementing a multiple perspective approach to the teaching of history, particularly focusing on student understanding, personal growth, and overall interest in the content. Exposing students to history through a racial lens and/or injustice lens is beneficial for everyone (Milner, 2013). This approach believes that teachers and curriculum “empower students to change inequitable, unfair policies and practices as they encounter them” due to exposure and listening to all viewpoints and voices (2013). To resolve a problem, one must first get to the root of it and break the chains of generational poverty and systemic racism. Below is a chart depicting the strategies used in a multiple perspectives approach:

Table 1

Teaching Strategies of the Multiple Perspective Approach

Learning the who, when, how, and WHY: Knowing the why allows for deeper understanding of that event as well as why the world and its people are what they are today.
Focuses on all people and cultures: particular attention is paid to the voices often suppressed or erased by others.
Establishes a more inclusive and culturally accepted environment due to exposure to cultures that differ from one's own. Diversity exists and that is okay. Supports the development of students becoming more globally oriented.
Allows for all of the "puzzle pieces" to be collected, analyzed, and put together by students for a more complete depiction of the event.
Equips students with real-world skills such as researching, analyzing, critiquing, forming and supporting one's opinion, and hearing all sides of a story before coming to a conclusion.
Prepares students for the real-world. It is extremely interconnected and diverse; they need to be accosted to cultures and people that differ from their own.

Timeline

Data in this study was collected over a six-week period, every week and was obtained from three World History classes during the Fall 2022 semester. A timeline of the study can be seen in Appendix A, which depicts the data that was collected from each class period and the week in which it took place. Due to the school being on a block schedule, data was not collected every day but instead on a weekly basis.

Data Collection

Data was collected through various means, each serving a particular purpose. The quantitative data that was collected was from student assessments and student reflections. The various assessments consisted of quizzes, exit tickets, and presentations. The qualitative data that was collected primarily came through reflection questions from students, teacher observations during various exercises, as well as written responses in surveys given to a variety of subject area teachers at the school.

Exit tickets were utilized at the end of lessons to evaluate the level of understanding as well as the interest level of students. Reflections were used throughout the study, the most important being at the beginning, serving somewhat as a baseline, and the other being at the very end of the study. Reflections allow students to express themselves, as well as demonstrate the effects of learning through multiple lenses has had on their understanding.

Data Analysis

Each source provided useful qualitative and quantitative data. Having both quantitative and qualitative results, the quizzes given to students presented the effectiveness of content being taught in class and the level of which understanding took place. Rubrics were used in the assessing of the presentations to ensure equitable assessment and whether standards were met. The scores on these various assessments were collected and analyzed throughout the six weeks. Averages were compared with quizzes from previous units prior to the application of the multiple perspectives approach as well as compared with those taken throughout the study. This allowed the ability to compare results prior to the implementation of the approach as well as throughout it.

Lastly, being the teacher of the classroom, notes were taken during observations of the students throughout the study. Student comments and statements were recorded, as well as what they were doing, and the emotions and reactions observed. All observations were written down in a notebook. This collection served as more qualitative data.

The data collected was broken down into various categories or themes. These included data that supported student understanding and achievement, exposure to other cultures, as well as the creation of a more inclusive and welcoming class environment. All data was analyzed and applied to a category, sometimes multiple categories. This allowed for focus on each theme and the ability to find patterns in the data.

Findings

The research question was, “What impact does studying events in history through a multiple perspectives approach have on 10th grade world history students?” The results of this question were broken down into three categories: student understanding and achievement, exposure to other cultures and celebrating diversity, and the creation of a more inclusive classroom environment. This study was conducted during the Fall 2022 semester. During this time, curriculum restrictions were just beginning to be put into place by the Florida Department of Education. Since then, these restrictions have only been tightened, making teaching through a multiple perspective lens near impossible. Despite these constraints, the approach is still possible although not in its most ideal and beneficial form.

Student Understanding and Achievement

Teaching world history through a multiple perspectives approach increased student understanding of the material and overall student achievement. Traditional approaches focus on the memorization of facts, who won each war, and what made Europe and the United States so successful. The multiple perspective approach allows students to determine the who, when, how, and why of everyone involved in the events, allowing for deeper comprehension. Observations conducted throughout the 6-week study found that students were engaged, participating in class discussions, as well as working well together in small groups to complete presentations. Throughout the observations, notes of various conversations were recorded which included, “I never knew that these people even existed,” “I feel like I am starting to get history,” and “this is all starting to make sense now” (Week 4 & Week 5, Period 6). These quotes tell us that students are intrigued, they are learning world history, and growing as people. On average, students scored an 88% on assessment quizzes as compared to past quizzes where the average was around 72%. These quizzes were taken by all class periods during weeks 2 and 4. The growth in student achievement is not to be taken lightly and is a direct result of the effectiveness of the multiple perspectives approach of teaching World History.

The reflection conducted at the end of the study gave students the ability to reflect on the multiple perspective approach and discuss their biggest takeaways. One response stated that “Multiple perspectives helped my point of view because hearing and learning about what others say can actually benefit you and can also have a positive impact on your life so me doing that helped me a lot,” and the student went on to say, “it also helped me in history because I learned about different historical events from my classmates which encouraged me to also say my perspective” (Week 6, Period 7). This student felt that they were gaining something from class, that they were able to understand history now, and they felt encouraged to voice their opinions. Another student that reflected stated that the multiple perspectives in World History approach “helps me better understand and comprehend what actually happened” (Week 6, Period 6). In fact, 98% of all students stated in their week 6 reflection that they were in favor of the multiple perspective approach. The 2% that were not in favor were asked why and the common response was, “the approach requires a lot of work,” and they were not always willing to put forth that much effort (Week 6, all periods).

Lastly, another student in their reflection stated that the approach “has taught me that in any event that occurs in the world there is always more than one way that people are going to see it. And seeing it in those ways will help someone better understand the event” (Week 6, Period 5). Again, the approach is meant to present all elements of a given event, and in doing so it provides students with a more honest and raw version. In fact, 92% of students felt that the approach was increasing their understanding of history (Week 3, all periods). During the week 3 reflection, 95% of students found that history became more relatable and therefore more understandable, which encouraged them to perform better. This approach forces students to conduct research, analyze their findings, view events through other lenses, piece together the views they collected, and determine the near truth of an event.

Exposure and Application

Teaching World history through a multiple lens approach exposed students to various cultures and people of the world. When given the opportunity to hear another side to a story, humans can often struggle due to their own bias and the lack of experience with being open to other opinions and perspectives. The multiple lens approach challenges students to become more open minded and flexible. The approach also requires students to recognize bias in others as well as themselves. For example, a student from period 5 stated, “I never thought about their viewpoint,” and continued with, “I wonder how different life would be if only all people were studied and appreciated” (Week 3). Their realization is the exact reason why this approach to teaching history is beneficial for everyone. Even during week 1 of the study, students began to open up to the possibility that history is much more complex than they ever imagined and that there is a high chance that they were never told the entire story. This was clearly demonstrated by a 7th period student’s initial reflection (baseline) response when they stated, “there isn’t always just one version of an event and you have to be open minded” (Week 1). That same student went further and used WWI as an example and discussed how “you could be learning about the war and seeing it from the perspective of one side and not the other” which could lead to “not knowing the true version of it” (Week 1, Period 7). When just given the opportunity to think about others and posed with questions that required critical thinking, many students began to open up and were intrigued to learn more.

Throughout the study, students were engaged, participating in sharing their findings with their classmates and most were excited to reflect and present what they have learned from this “new” approach to history. A student from period 6 stated that the approach “taught me that there are multiple sides to a story that we should take into account instead of solely our own.” Another student from period 5 stated that, “there are multiple perspectives of the world and different points of views,” and went on further to mention that “Learning through multiple perspectives forces you to not to be biased on the different ways that you can view things.” Both of these students have had many takeaways from this experience, most of which are mindsets and tools that can be applied to all aspects of life. Understanding that other views and opinions exist, that there are many beautiful and exciting cultures in the world, and that accomplishments of all of the world’s people must be appreciated, recognized, and celebrated. In an exit ticket given during week 3, 93% of students stated that they felt more exposed to the real world and 100% of students that they felt

that the approach was beneficial. These results are extraordinary and represent the effectiveness of teaching history through multiple lenses.

Inclusive and Welcoming Environment

Lastly, teaching World History students through a multiple perspectives approach aided in the establishment of a more inclusive and welcoming classroom environment. History is a mystery to be solved, students studying it have to conduct research, uncover clues, and piece together information to discover the truth. These tasks force students to work with others and learn about others. Students learn that their viewpoint is not the only one that exists, and more importantly, that is okay. As students worked with others during weeks 2 through 5, the rising of comfort levels was observed as well as general intrigue in one another. Conversations which included questions such as, “What do you do on the weekends?” and, “What kind of food is eaten during that celebration?” as well as more personal questions like, “how do you pronounce...” and, “do you ever miss home?” These questions demonstrate the connectedness between students and most importantly, the interest and respect they have for each other. Student collaboration is expected in the classroom but appreciation and interest in one another is an entirely new level. These students are not only learning real history, but they are also acquiring skills that all humans need in order to combat ignorance and form a more accepting world.

All world history students were required to conduct research regarding any given event in world history and present their findings during week 6 of the study. The students had to present the event through various perspectives, explain why the various perspectives existed, determine the most complete version of the event, and reflect on why the approach is beneficial. During the presentation, one student from period 7 stated that the approach “has shown me that there are so many different sides to a story then just the one we were told in textbooks,” and it has “helped me get closer to a clearer truth.” Another student from period 5 said that it is beneficial to study through multiple lenses because it “helps people better understand everybody’s perspective as well as understand more cultures and people.” Lastly, a student from period 6 mentioned that it “helps me figure out hard situations and complex events in history.” Students recognize that other opinions, lenses, people, and cultures exist and that everyone has the right to exist. At the end of the study, all students reflected and were asked various questions regarding the impact of the experience. The results found that 100% of students felt more comfortable in class, 100% of students felt welcome in class, and 100% of students felt that they learned more about the various cultures within the classroom. These results speak for themselves. Teaching history through a multiple perspective lens is effective, impactful, and beneficial.

Recommendations and Implications

The results of the study imply that teaching world history through a multitude of perspectives needs to be implemented immediately in all courses, everywhere. This approach is beneficial to every single student and combats the ignorance and hate that often plagues our society. In order for society to grow and people to understand one another, true history must be learned; even when it’s hard and uncomfortable.

Being able to recognize your own biases, understand where they stem from, and how to combat them is something that every human needs to be capable of. There are many ways to do this, some being by simply educating yourself. Read books that focus on a culture that differs from your own, touch up on your history, challenge yourself to step out of your comfort zone by visiting a different neighborhood and trying their food, or even travel. Exposure is key to recognizing one's own biases and breaking those preconceived notions you might have had. Being able to properly conduct research, listen to all sides of a story, analyze all pieces of evidence, and determine the most accurate version of a given event are just some of the skills acquired in the multiple perspective approach. Students are exposed to events, people, and beliefs that may differ from their own which challenges them to accept that differences exist and that is okay. This mindset is an acquired skill that many students are rarely given the opportunity to develop, leaving them unable to navigate the real-world.

This approach also created a more inclusive and welcoming classroom environment. Students were engaged and intrigued by one another's culture and felt more comfortable in class than ever before. Student achievement also rose as did their overall interest in learning history. As an educator, this approach is not just successful but is the future of education. Regardless of the constraints made by state governments, it is possible to implement the multiple perspectives approach. The more it is implemented, the more well-rounded and less ignorant society will be, causing curriculum restrictions to eventually be lifted.

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Appendix A

Timeline Study

Week #	WH Period 5	WH Period 6	WH Period 7
1	Initial Reflection via Google Forms: personal bias, what do they know about multiple perspectives, why is history written by victors, etc.	Initial Reflection via Google Forms: personal bias, what do they know about multiple perspectives, why is history written by victors, etc.	Initial Reflection via Google Forms: personal bias, what do they know about multiple perspectives, why is history written by victors, etc.
2	Various Assessments collected (current events article, historiography assignment, class discussion on perspective), & quiz on historiography	Various Assessments collected (current events article, historiography assignment, class discussion on perspective), & quiz on historiography	Various Assessments collected (current events article, historiography assignment, class discussion on perspective), & quiz on historiography
3	Pocahontas exercise: age of exploration through multiple perspectives (students worked alone and then in groups) Data was collected through observation, participation in the activity, class discussion, as well as an exit ticket regarding the exercise)	Pocahontas exercise: age of exploration through multiple perspectives (students worked alone and then in groups) Data was collected through observation, participation in the activity, class discussion, as well as an exit ticket regarding the exercise)	Pocahontas exercise: age of exploration through multiple perspectives (students worked alone and then in groups) Data was collected through observation, participation in the activity, class discussion, as well as an exit ticket regarding the exercise)
4	Various Assessments collected: quiz on the age of exploration (multiple perspectives version), determining ways in which to raise awareness regarding past events exercise, and exit ticket regarding project status). Data was also collected through observation from myself as students worked on their projects and completed the exercise.	Various Assessments collected: quiz on the age of exploration (multiple perspectives version), determining ways in which to raise awareness regarding past events exercise, and exit ticket regarding project status). Data was also collected through observation from myself as students worked on their projects and completed the exercise.	Various Assessments collected: quiz on the age of exploration (multiple perspectives version), determining ways in which to raise awareness regarding past events exercise, and exit ticket regarding project status). Data was also collected through observation from myself as students worked on their projects and completed the exercise.
5	Student Presentations on Events in World History Through Multiple Lenses: students chose an event in history, presented the various perspectives of the event, determined the most complete version of that event, determined ways in which to raise awareness of the complete version and discussed the importance of studying through a multiple perspective approach.	Student Presentations on Events in World History Through Multiple Lenses: students chose an event in history, presented the various perspectives of the event, determined the most complete version of that event, determined ways in which to raise awareness of the complete version and discussed the importance of studying through a multiple perspective approach.	Student Presentations on Events in World History Through Multiple Lenses: students chose an event in history, presented the various perspectives of the event, determined the most complete version of that event, determined ways in which to raise awareness of the complete version and discussed the importance of studying through a multiple perspective approach.
6	Final Reflection & Teacher surveys were dispersed and analyzed	Final Reflection & Teacher surveys were dispersed and analyzed	Final Reflection & Teacher surveys were dispersed and analyzed

Appendix B

Quarter 1 Reflection

* Required

Name (first and last) *

Your answer

Period *

☐ 5

☐ 6

☐ 7

1. When studying history in previous years, have you ever experienced *
learning about multiple perspectives of a given historical event?

Your answer

2. What has learning through a multiple perspective lens taught you *
about history and the world?

3. How has studying all perspectives helped you as a student? *

Your answer

4. What has been your most favorite topic taught in class and why? *

Your answer

5. What are you looking to learn from our South American unit? *

Your answer

6. What people, events, cultures, viewpoints would you like me to *
cover in our future African unit?

Your answer


Submit

Clear form

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix C

Exit Tickets



Exit Ticket - Columbian Exchange

Answer the question in paragraph form (5 sentences)

Name (first and last) *

Your answer

Period *

☐ 5

☐ 6

☐ 7

The effects of the Columbian Exchange were massive. Explain how it impacted * and forever changed the world (Africans, Native populations, and Europeans).

This response needs to be a minimum of 3 sentences.

Your answer

Submit [Clear form](#)

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Exit Ticket - Empathy vs. Sympathy

Use your notes to guide you.

Email *

Your email

Name (first and last) *

Your answer

Period *

☐ 3

☐ 4

1. Describe the difference between empathy and sympathy. *

Your answer

1. Describe the difference between empathy and sympathy. *

Your answer

2. Give an example of a time you were either sympathetic or empathetic in another person's situation. *

Your answer

3. Why is it important to be sympathetic and/or empathetic towards other's peoples situations? *

Your answer


4. How might being sympathetic and/or empathetic help you in your understanding of our upcoming unit on genocide and human rights violations? *

Your answer

Submit

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Exit Ticket - Stereotypes, Prejudices & Privilege

Answer each question below

Name (first and last) *

Your answer

Period *

☐ 5

☐ 6

☐ 7

1. How do stereotypes and prejudices hurt individuals and society? *

Your answer

2. Why are stereotypes formed? *

Your answer

3. Have you ever felt the effects of prejudice? How did that make you feel? *

Your answer

4. What can we do to stop/prevent the spreading of stereotypes and prejudice? *

Your answer


5. What did you learn from the privilege activity? *

Your answer

Submit

Clear form

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Exit Ticket - Ethnocentrism & Cultural Relativism

Answer the questions below

Period *

☐ 5

☐ 6

☐ 7

Name (first and last) *

Your answer

1. Do people within the same country always share the same attitudes and beliefs? Why or why not? *

Your answer

2. Is any one culture really better than another? *

Your answer

3. What are things you can do in your life today to become more culturally relative? *

Your answer

Submit

Clear form

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Appendix D

Pocahontas Activity

<p>Song Lyrics Analysis</p>	<p>Song #1 - Virginia Company</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. When does this take place?2. Why do these people want to sail across the sea?3. According to the song, what is the new world like? How accurate is this?	<p>Song #2 - Savages!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. According to the song, who are the savages?2. Why are the savages evil?3. What is said about the white colonists? Why do you think that is?
1	2	3

In sixteen hundred seven
We sail the open sea
For glory, God, and gold
And the Virginia Company

For the New World is like heaven
And we'll all be rich and free
Or so we have been told
By the Virginia Company
So we have been told
By the Virginia Company

For glory, God and gold
And the Virginia Company

On the beaches of Virginny
There's diamonds like debris
There's silver rivers flowin'
Gold you pick right off a tree

With a nugget for my Wendy
And another one for me
And all the rest'll go
To the Virginia Company
It's glory, God and gold
And the Virginia Company

We'll kill ourselves an injun
Or maybe two or three
We're stalwart men and bold
Of the Virginia Company

It's glory, God and gold
And the Virginia Company

What can you expect	Killers at the core
From filthy little heathens?	They're different from us
Their whole disgusting race is like a curse	Which means they can't be trusted
Their skin's a hellish red	We must sound the drums of war
They're only good when dead	
They're vermin, as I said	They're savages! Savages!
And worse	First we deal with this one
	Then we sound the drums of war
They're savages! Savages!	Savages! Savages!
Barely even human	Let's go kill a few, men!
Savages! Savages!	Savages! Savages!
Drive them from our shore!	Now it's up to you, men!
They're not like you and me	
Which means they must be evil	Savages! Savages!
We must sound the drums of war!	Barely even human!
	Now we sound the drums of war!
They're savages! Savages!	
Dirty redskin devils!	Savages!
Now we sound the drums of war!	Savages!
	Demons!
This is what we feared	Devils!
The paleface is a demon	Kill them!
The only thing they feel at all is greed	
Beneath that milky hide	
There's emptiness inside	
I wonder if they even bleed	
They're savages! Savages!	
Barely even human	
Savages! Savages!	