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EDU 380: *Culturally Relevant Teaching*

Dr. Fairbrother

Single Group Study

I-search

Fall 2015

Assignment:

i-search

An i-search paper is a research paper where

**YOU**

describe the steps you went through

as you figured out what you would research,

where you would research it, and

what you made of what you found out.

**SINGLE GROUP STUDY INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT (3-5 pages):**

Write an I-search paper entitled: My journey to understanding the history/culture and social issues of\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, (with a focus on the Group’s perspective about itself), and my reflection on what I learned and how it will impact my teaching.

***1st Section***

Which Group’s history and experiences are you researching? What did you know already?

***2nd Section***

How did your group divide the work and decide on the process? What questions do you have? How will/did you get your information?

***3rd Section***

Tell me what you found out and where and how!

***4th Section***

What do you think about what you found? How will it impact your teaching? What questions do you still have?

***5th Section***

What do you think about the process you went through? What would have made it easier/better?

My journey to understand the history/culture and social issues of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a focus on the group’s perspective about itself, and my reflection on what I learned and how it will impact my teaching.

1. **Which group’s history and experiences are you researching? What did you know already?**

My partner and I decided to research more about Congo and Somalia. We both have a number of students in our student teaching placements that are refugees from these countries. We felt that it would be a good choice to further investigate the social issues and history surrounding the group. If I am more educated about the culture and history of a group represented in my classroom, then I feel better equipped to support my students in the classroom. Many of the countries these students come from are not a part of mainstream curriculum in schools. If the history of their people is included in curriculum, often it is not told from the perspective of the group but rather from a dominating group’s perspective of events.

 My goal for this project was to examine the history and culture of my students from the perspective of their people. I know very little about Congo right know. I know that the Belgians colonized Congo and I know they are involved in ongoing wars. I also know that Congo is rich in natural resources. I think at one point the DRC was called Zaire, but I’m not positive about that. My hope for the research is to uncover history and culture from the perspective of the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), not the groups dominating those people.

1. **How did your group divide the work and how did you decide on the process? What questions do you have? How will/did you get your information?**

Jen and I talked about the students in our classroom. She had a majority from Somalia, while I had the majority from DRC. We decided it would be best if we each focused on one country. Picking the group that we had more access to in terms of representation in our classrooms seemed like a logical idea, so that we could discuss our findings with students and try to get their ideas and opinions about the information we collected.

I started my research by looking at a map online and realized there are actually two countries that are named Congo. I did not realize this, so that is something I want to know more about. One of my students told me to research King Leopold of Belgium, who had control over Congo for many years. This student’s attitude towards King Leopold was very negative, so I am anxious to learn more about his role in Congo. Furthermore, I want to learn more about U.S. involvement in Congo and how our country has impacted the social issues and history of the DRC.

1. **What you found and how!**

I started out on a research journey with very little prior knowledge. I started with a simple Google search to establish a timeline of events in the DRC. Turns out, it is not so simple. The history of the DRC is complex and multifaceted. There are many sides to every event and many different groups fighting for different things. After an unsuccessful Google search, I took my student’s advice and looked into King Leopold II. This brought me to the resource that guided most of my project: *Friends of the Congo. Friends of the Congo* is an organization that aims to raise awareness about the social, historical, and political issues of Congo. I liked that it provided resources that were authentic and resources that were from the Congolese perspective. From this website, I found a really awesome documentary from the BBC called *Congo: Red Rubber, White King, Black Death* that unpacks the atrocities King Leopold II committed in the Congo. According to the documentary, King Leopold II had absolute power over Congo--or Congo Free State as it was known at the time—for a number of years. He turned Congo into a massive labor camp, and forced the Congolese to collect rubber and ivory for Belgium and his own personal profits (Pauwels, 2006). Many enslaved Congolese were victims of brutal punishment and treatment if they were unable to collect the required amount of resources. The documentary showed graphic images of Congolese with their hands cut off. This inhumane treatment and exploitation of the Congolese continued until a British journalist, E.D. Morel, set out on a mission to expose the King. He published strategic propaganda and collected reports from missionaries to show the world how King Leopold mistreated the Congolese (Pauwels, 2006). Soon, the international response urged Belgium to make Congo a Belgian colony. While exploitation of resources and people continued, more efforts to establish health care and education systems were made by the Belgians.

The documentary chronicled colonial history nicely. I liked the fact that it looked at history from the perspective of the Congolese and provided many historical accounts from the people. The film, made by The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), idolized E.D Morel and gave him credit for the exposure of King Leopold II. While I believe that Morel was a true activist, I found it hard to believe that he was the sole reason that King Leopold II was exposed. I tried to find more information about Morel from the perspective of the Congolese, but was unsuccessful.

The Congolese Nationalist Movement was one of the most inspiring and interesting things I found in my research. Many sources I found portray Patrice Lumumba as a historical hero in the eyes of the Congolese. His efforts and ideas promote global awareness of European oppression by dominating groups. Unfortunately, according to some Congolese historians, the U.S. played a role in his assassination, as they feared he supported the Soviet Union and communist values. Western powers feared they would lose control of the valuable resources Congo had access to if Lumumba was truly a communist (*Friends of the Congo*, "Raising consciousness about the challenge of the Congo"). They supported the leaders who followed Lumumba and led the nation further into economic, political, and social despair. Mobutu, the dictator that held power in Congo for over 32 years, gained personal profits at the expense of his people. He sold his nation’s resources to places like the United States, amassing a personal fortune of 5 billion U.S. dollars (French, N.D.). His people continued to live in poverty.

The next period of history in Congo was very complicated and there are several different opposing viewpoints about the issues. The next leader of Congo was Laurent Kabila. Most sources I read on the Internet portrayed him as less than average. Through conversations with my Congolese students I learned that many of the Congolese thought Laurent Kabila was a strong and revered leader. My students detested the next leader of DRC, Laurent’s son, Joseph. It is interesting to note that all research I found said that Joseph was a stronger and more ethical leader than Kabila (Ntalaja, 2002).

While the history of Congo was very interesting and informative, I had the most fun learning about the culture of the Congolese. My students were most helpful to me in this process. They taught me a lot about the different languages spoken in Congo. They told me that Lingala is spoken in the capital city, Kinshasa. They also said the Tshiluba and Kikongo are difficult to understand if you are not from the region that it is spoken in. They told me that Swahili is the most widely understood and spoken language. When I asked about French as the official language, they told me that most people speak some French and that the more school you go to, the more French you learn. Through further research I concluded that French is the language of power in DRC; it is used in business settings, legal settings, and academic settings. This is most likely due to the country’s colonial roots.

In addition to language, I found a lot about Congolese art. There are several notable Congolese artists like painter Cheri Samba (*Friends of the Congo*, "Raising consciousness about the challenge of the Congo - Home"). Her paintings depict cultural scenes and often make political messages. I also learned about Soukous, or Congolese Rumba, a genre of music that mixes Cuban rhythms with African drum beats (Stewart, 2002). My students listen to dance music that originated from the Soukous genre. Finally, I realized there are many notable Congolese authors such as Patrice Lumumba, Léonie Abo, and poet Kama Kamanda (*Friends of the Congo*, "Raising consciousness about the challenge of the Congo").

1. **What do you think about what you found? How will it impact your teaching?**

I can see many ways I could utilize my new knowledge in the classroom. Even in my discussions with my current students, I could see their excitement when I spoke about their languages and culture. They were impressed that I knew about the different languages spoken in Congo. It was nice to see them so engaged in a discussion and I realized that if their cultures were more present in curriculum then they might be more interested in class all the time! The history of the Congolese National Movement and Patrice Lumumba would be an excellent topic of study. Lumumba was also a writer, so his literary works could be tied into the history. Furthermore, all of his writings are available in Swahili and French, making it more accessible to the students as well as promoting L1 literacy. Cheri Samba’s artwork could easily be analyzed for political and social messages. I would really like to use her paintings in my future classroom as a medium to discuss the social and political issues in Congo. Finally, the lyrics of Soukous are typically written and sung in Lingala, the native language of many of my students. Assuming the lyrics are appropriate for school, Soukous songs could also be another way to support L1 literacy and multicultural curriculum.

Although I learned a lot about the Congolese, I still worry that the information I found was not accurate. There are so many sources and differing opinions about events and leaders in Congo. I tried my best to find the resources that told history from the perspective of the marginalized group. I also tried to check in with my Congolese students to gain more insight. Hopefully I’ve done justice to the Congolese.

1. **What do you think about the process you went through? What would have made it better?**

This process was extremely enlightening and helpful to my training as a teacher. I have always felt that one of my shortcomings of a teacher was my limited knowledge about the histories and backgrounds of diverse students. I am excited to hear my classmates speak about the groups they researched! I liked that we were able to explore on our own. Instead of being given a strict list of questions to answer, we were able to do some investigating and let our research unfold organically. I think this process allowed me to delve into the history of Congo and attempt to see social issues from a different perspective.

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found this particularly useful when trying to understand causes of the Congo Conflict.

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helpful in this project. It aims to raise awareness of the perspective of the

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