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Emergency Remote Learning in Social Studies Methods: Seeing, Understanding, and Disrupting Racism

Linda Doornbos
Oakland University

Abstract:

COVID-19 shut down our university and sent us into remote learning. My elementary social studies methods teacher candidates and I sought to make sense of the ensuing chaos. Fueled by the threat of COVID-19 and growing issues of racism, I designed a focused, inquiry-based lesson using the Inquiry Design Generator of the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013) to revisit our work in Takaki's (2012) *A Different Mirror for Young People: A History of Multicultural America*. The inquiry invited the teacher candidates to grasp the significance of the past in shaping the present and to engage in informed action using children's literature.

Introduction

On March 12, 2020, COVID-19 shut down our university and sent us reeling into emergency remote learning. We—my social studies methods elementary teacher candidates (TCs) and I—sought to make sense of the ensuing chaos and the rising fear and anger, for as the virus spread, so did issues of racism and xenophobia. People of Asian descent were targets of racist comments and accused of being associated with the disease. Additionally, just 35 miles from our campus, in one of America's poorest big cities, the virus was spreading faster than nearly anywhere in the United States, disproportionately affecting Black and Brown people.

With a renewed sense of urgency, I knew we needed to press on in the difficult and uncomfortable work of seeing, understanding, and disrupting racism. Specifically, this work requires: 1) interrogating the whiteness of teacher education and the dominant narrative portrayed in social studies education; 2) exposing the systemic marginalization of certain ethnic

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and racial groups; 3) disrupting pedagogical practices in schools that perpetuate white superiority, and; 4) committing to ensuring that all students thrive, not merely survive.

Throughout the semester, TCs were challenged to think differently about the purposes of social studies. We participated in numerous activities and critical conversations to struggle with the complexities of human interactions with each other and the environment, to expand our pedagogical content knowledge, and to be informed, critical participants taking action toward a more just and equitable society. Specifically, we used Takaki's (2012) *A Different Mirror for Young People: A History of Multicultural America* to situate our own narratives within the larger narrative and to understand the systemic racism embedded within our country. Pedagogically, we interacted with the Inquiry Arc as represented in the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013) to design student-centered lessons to enact in our field-based assigned classrooms.

Therefore, fueled by the growing issues of racism and xenophobia, I developed a focused, inquiry-based lesson using the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) Generator of the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013) to revisit our work in Takaki (2012). The compelling question—"What does COVID-19 reveal about what it means to see, understand, and disrupt systemic racism?", investigated through supporting questions, tasks, and sources—invited the TCs to grasp the significance of the past in shaping the present and to engage in specific action to uplift traditionally marginalized groups using children's literature.

Perspective

As a white, heterosexual, female citizen of the United States, I recognize white supremacy and systematic oppression that dehumanizes individuals from marginalized groups. As a social studies teacher educator, I acknowledge the role schooling plays in perpetuating this white supremacy, and I seek innovative teaching methods so that in my work with TCs, we might deconstruct, dismantle, and disrupt racism.

Whiteness, as a social construct of hierarchical and hegemonic power structure, informs the way people see themselves and their roles in society. This way of knowing and being continues to systematically marginalize and dehumanize those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Swartz, 2007). Whiteness permeates social studies education, and the K-16 social studies curriculum reinforces the "hegemonic notion that whiteness is synonymous with American citizenship while positioning everyone else as noncitizens who exist only in the margins" (Vickery & Duncan, 2020, p. xvi).

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Systematic whiteness in education, if left unexamined and uninterrupted, will continue to implicitly and explicitly harm those in the margins. Love (2019) powerfully names this harm as spirit-murder. Spirit-murdering racism "robs dark people of their humanity and dignity and leaves personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries" (p. 38). The devastating results of constant harm lead to a lack of learning, a lack of thriving, and a lack of mattering as human beings.

Disrupting this harm requires abolitionist teaching. Abolitionist educators acknowledge the unjust policies and practices in schooling that commit daily spirit-murder and keep marginalized people from mattering. They work tirelessly to pursue educational freedom—freedom built on "the creativity, imagination, boldness, ingenuity, and rebellious spirit and methods of abolitionists to demand and fight for an education system where all students are thriving, not simply surviving" (Love, 2019, p. 11).

Critical social studies teacher educators must be abolitionist teachers. First, we must be vigilant in discovering how whiteness manifests itself in visible and invisible ways in what Chandler and Branscombe (2015) define as White Social Studies (WSS). WSS, as the traditional approach to teaching social studies content, systematically marginalizes the histories of people of color. Then, using critical whiteness pedagogy (CWP), we must actively seek to disrupt and dismantle structures, policies, and pedagogies that cause harm to others (Hawkman, 2018).

One particular CWP stance I use to disrupt white supremacy within my social studies methods courses is to utilize Takaki's (2012) "different mirror." With language geared toward middle-level readers, Takaki disrupts the master narrative of white European-Americans by telling stories of Indigenous, Jewish, Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, Irish-American, and Black peoples. These counternarratives make visible the social construction of race and the systematic inequalities that continue to marginalize racial minorities in our country. Through various activities and discussions of Takaki's text, space is provided for teacher candidates to: 1) see themselves critically as they situate their own narratives within the larger narrative; 2) understand the systemic racism embedded within our country, and; 3) engage in strategic actions that uplift humanity as the center of all pedagogical decisions.

TCs first use the mirror to see the familiar—their lived experiences—in order to better see themselves and to analyze the lens through which they see others. Then, as they encounter the counternarratives and interact with quotations, personal stories, excerpts from folk music, and forms of poetry, they begin to wrestle with the unfamiliar. Essentially, we question the dominant narrative of what it means to be an American citizen. Collectively, we examine systemic racism

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and expose how master narrative ideals withhold inalienable rights needed for all to thrive. Importantly, we discover ways to disrupt educational harm and creatively pursue freedom.

This type of teaching and learning is difficult. Researchers have documented common forms of resistance that white pre-service teachers exhibit when looking in the mirror and seeing their whiteness, possibly for the first time, during teacher education courses (Busey & Vickery, 2018; Crowley & Smith, 2015; Garrett & Segall, 2013; Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016). Teacher educators need to provide space for TCs to become comfortable with the uncomfortable. Additionally, TCs need opportunities in the university classroom to work with others on how to engage elementary students in controversial and difficult topics (Alarcón, 2018, p. xvi).

Therefore, the following lesson highlights how I utilized the Inquiry Arc and counternarratives to engage TCs in thinking historically about the rising spread of COVID-19 and issues of racism. In this endeavor, I invited them into seeing, understanding, and disrupting systemic racism, and to develop pedagogical practices where students thrive, not merely survive.

Lesson Context and Overview

The following lesson was taught in week four of COVID-19 remote learning in a social studies methods course made up of 28 female students—27 White and one Black—at a Midwestern U.S. university. Fueled by the rapid spread of the virus and ensuing issues of racism, and drawing on the use of critical pedagogical knowledge, this lesson continued work done in the previous 10 weeks of using counternarratives to think historically. The lesson positions teachers and students to actively engage in seeing, understanding, and disrupting racism.

To navigate the tension of content coverage, traditional textbook instruction, and bringing controversial topics into the classroom, I intentionally used the inquiry blueprint template as offered in *C3 Teachers: The Inquiry Design Model (IDM)* (www.c3teachers.org). Specifically, a focused inquiry narrows the instructional focus to a one- or two-day lesson, as opposed to the broad structured inquiries that typically take four to seven days. The strength of using the IDM blueprint is how it draws attention to the important elements of the inquiry—moving from the compelling question, through the tasks and sources, constructing an evidence-based argument, and taking informed action—all on a single page. The flexibility of the IDM allows for adapting the lesson as needed across geographic and grade level contexts.

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Figure 1 Focused Inquiry: Using Takaki (2012) to See, Understand, and Disrupt Racism

Compelling Question: What does COVID-19 reveal about what it means to see, understand, and disrupt systemic racism ?	
Standard	D2. His.3-5: Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today. CCSS: ELA-Literacy. RI.4.9: Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably. Teaching Tolerance Anti-bias Framework. Justice 12: Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).
Disciplinary Practice	History: Change, Continuity, and Context
Staging the Question	Padlet: Respond to a quote from Takaki's *A Different Mirror*

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2
What historical knowledge have we gained from examining Takaki's (2012) different mirror regarding U.S. history of Navajos, Blacks, Asians, and Mexican migrant workers?	How are each of these groups—Navajos, Blacks, Asians, Mexican migrant workers— experiencing COVID-19 in Spring 2020?
Formative Performance Task 1	Formative Performance Task 2
Create a Mentimeter Word Cloud to indicate your assigned ethnic/racial group's historical experiences of inequality and dehumanization.	Write a three-sentence summary connecting your historical knowledge of the assigned group to how this group is experiencing COVID-19.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources
A Different Mirror for Young People (Takaki, 2012) Navajos: Chapter 2, 9, 14 Blacks: Chapter 3, 5, 14 Asians: Chapter 8, 10, 14 Mexican Migrant Workers: Chapter 7, 12, 14	Select News Articles Navajos: NPR Blacks: Bridge: Michigan News Sources Asians: USA Today Migrant Workers: Politico

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Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT: What does COVID-19 reveal about what it means see, understand, and disrupt systemic racism? Construct an argument (e.g., paragraph, diagram, bulleted list) that addresses the compelling question using specific, evidence-based claims.
	EXTENSION: Design a read-aloud lesson using an age-appropriate children's literature book that speaks into and disrupts the master narrative (i.e., voices not heard, voices that have been silenced, or voices that are told they don't matter).

Lesson Narration

Inquiry Description and Compelling Question

This inquiry lesson leads TCs through an investigation of using the past to understand the present. By investigating the question—"What does COVID-19 reveal about what it means to see, understand, and disrupt racism?"—TCs use the knowledge gained from studying the history of marginalized racial groups in the United States (Takaki, 2012) to better understand how each of these groups experienced COVID-19 in Spring 2020. The formative performance tasks build on knowledge and skills throughout the course of the inquiry and help TCs better understand the manifestations of systemic racism. For the summative task, they create an evidence-based argument to answer the compelling question, and take action by designing a read-aloud lesson using an age-appropriate children's literature book that speaks into and disrupts the master narrative.

Staging the Question

Padlet, an online bulletin board, connected us virtually and prompted us to see through Takaki's different mirror. We first responded to a quote taken from Takaki's (2012) last chapter: "The future is in our hand. The choices we make will be shaped by our view of our own history. A history that leaves out minorities reinforces separation, but a history that includes everyone bridges the divides between groups" (p. 339). Then, we read and responded to each other's posts. Lastly, TCs were invited into the compelling question, "What does COVID-19 reveal about what it means to see, understand, and disrupt systemic racism?"

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Supporting Question 1

The supporting question—"What historical knowledge have we gained from examining Takaki's different mirror regarding U.S. history of Navajos, Blacks, Asians, and Mexican migrant workers?"—allowed TCs to revisit Takaki. In Zoom breakout groups, small groups reviewed the assigned chapters and previously completed guided reading notes (Appendix A) related to their assigned racial group. Each individual then contributed four words representative of the historical experiences of this racial group. These words were collectively used to generate a Mentimeter Word Cloud. Back in the Zoom main meeting, groups shared their word clouds. A short discussion of observed similarities and differences across the word clouds highlighted the particular historical context of each marginalized group.

Featured Sources SQ1:

- Padlet: https://tinyurl.com/yamb4hww
- Mentimeter: https://www.mentimeter.com/features/word-cloud
- Selected Chapters in Takaki (2012)

Navajos

Chapter 2: Removing the "Savages"

Chapter 9: Dealing with the Indians

Chapter 14: WWII and America's Ethnic Problem (pp. 286-289)

Blacks

Chapter 3: The Hidden Origins of Slavery

Chapter 5: Life in Slavery

Chapter 14: WWII and America's Ethnic Problem (pp. 278-281)

Asians

Chapter 8: From China to Gold Mountain

Chapter 10: The Japanese and Money Trees

Chapter 14: WWII and America's Ethnic Problem (pp. 274-278, 281-283)

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Mexican Migrant Workers

Chapter 7: The War against Mexico

Chapter 12: Up from Mexico

Chapter 14: WWII and America's Ethnic Problem (pp. 284-286)

Supporting Question 2

Building on the historical context, TCs used news articles to explore the second supporting question, "How are each of these groups—Navajos, Blacks, Asians, Mexican migrant workers—experiencing COVID-19 in Spring 2020?" Back in the breakout rooms, TCs read corresponding news articles and generated a three-sentence summary to share in the main meeting room. Guided questions within the whole group discussion prompted the TCs to think historically, to use the past to better see and understand the present, and to critically analyze the manifestations of embedded systemic racism. Connections were made to the historical context of immigration, slavery, indigenous removal, and associating groups of people with diseases.

Featured Sources SQ2:

- Navajos

https://www.npr.org/2020/04/04/826780041/as-coronavirus-cases-rise-navajo-nation-tries-to-get-ahead-of-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR0QOdedCYX0rnm_KezmUkshlvItxByp4oq1oBS7N1s8gEzcJWHGaaVfoUc

- Blacks

https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-health-watch/black-communities-hit-harder-coronavirus-michigan-not-just-detroit

- Asians

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/28/coronavirus-racism-asian-americans-report-fear-harassment-violence/2903745001/

- Migrant Workers

https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/02/trump-immigrant-workers-coronavirus-162177?fbclid=IwAR0p9G04tqQUE5hTuZZrkVgmshjMvCOtaLmjsc9lh2YP-jNezsirBmun9BU

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Summative Task

The inquiry into the supporting questions prepared TCs to formulate a response to the compelling question, "What does COVID-19 reveal about what it means see, understand, and disrupt systemic racism?" Using our university online platform, they individually constructed arguments using a paragraph, diagram, or bulleted list to address the compelling question, using specific evidence from the sources to back up their claims.

Informed Action

Our online session ended with a recap of what it means to be on a journey to expose whiteness in social studies education and subsequent pedagogical practices that cause harm to children. I highlighted my intentional pedagogical decisions using the IDM template for the day's session. I then challenged the TCs to come the following week with an online-accessible, age-appropriate children's literature book that offers a counternarrative, one that challenges the dominant narrative of U.S. history and prompts readers to make connections to contemporary racism and xenophobia. I described how our work together would provide the opportunity

to develop a read-aloud lesson to enact virtually with students in their field-based classrooms. Albeit a small step, we would be consciously developing our ability to see, understand, and disrupt racism. In developing and enacting inquiry lessons on thinking historically using counternarratives, we will be taking strategic, informed action toward ensuring that all students thrive, not merely survive.

Informed Action Sources

- Extraordinary Black Mighty Girls and Women

https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=14276&fbclid=IwAR3SRco33EZPuo_jkRGNP7kOHLTA7gOi32sl0Ea3GKRfM7GQXAdSzri3NNM

- Indigenous

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/1/d/12AKDfXOICKMg5IgD-QKNJlYHYbCdzufE0gVQMj_PO-4/htmlview

- Multicultural Children's Literature Best Books

https://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?wid=82

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- Young Readers Celebrating Asian Pacific American Heritage

https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=great-books-asian-pacific-american-showcase&utm_source=editorial&utm_medium=SLJTW&utm_term=&utm_content=&utm_campaign=articles&fbclid=IwAR1j_JS9M7cNN5jRxxSdJ6zbFIqed_46DnSdUAUpzVdUHdg4yF6-GlbHLP4

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Appendix

Ethnic/Racial Group:
Use the following graphic organizer to take notes as you read the assigned chapters.

Factors to Consider	**Chapter:** (include page numbers)	**Post WWII:** (include page numbers)
Push/Pull Factors		
Location		
Employment		
Education		
Housing		
Government Policies/Laws		
Resistance		

Briefly describe how looking through a different mirror helps expose systems of oppression that have historically marginalized this particular ethnic/racial group in America.

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About the Author:

Linda Doornbos is an assistant professor of elementary social studies at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. Professor Doornbos formally spent 28 years teaching in multiple contexts and at different grade levels. She is deeply committed to educating teacher candidates to be responsive and responsible teachers and leaders in a culturally diverse and complex world. Her research work is grounded in supporting teachers as learners and builders of inclusive learning communities, and in investigating pedagogy that enhances the teaching and learning of powerful social studies.

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