



*Increase Student Engagement
Through
Absent Narratives*

Participant Guide

From
The Minnesota Humanities Center

www.mnhum.org

Thank you for participating in *Increase Student Engagement through Absent Narratives*. The need for this training and understanding is as critical as it is foundational. You will be challenged to think about teaching in a new way, through new paradigms. Having knowledge and understanding of the concepts within this offering gives hope and permission for all to seek innovative ways of being and doing in the classroom.



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Opening

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The Minnesota Humanities Center



Welcome to the self study offering, Increase Student Engagement through Absent Narratives.

The Minnesota Humanities Center is pleased to bring you this online offering as a pre-requisite that builds foundational incentive for incorporating absent narratives into curriculum.

A Participant Guidebook accompanies this course and should be downloaded now for you to follow as you learn. If you do not already have this important companion piece, please return to the registration page to print a copy.

- *It is recommended that you **keep a journal**, as well. If working by yourself, take 5-10 minutes to reflect upon and write your thoughts and feelings to each question.*

The majority of content is presented in video format so please

- **Click the play arrow to play the videos and the audio. The files will automatically load**
- **Allow 2-3 minutes for the video to fully load on each page**

Thank you and enjoy the course.

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Technical Support



If you have any problems during this offering, support is an email away!

Technical Assistance
Thien Nguyen August
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Purpose

This professional development offering prepares educators to know Absent Narratives as *human experiences* that change our minds and hearts and lead us to empowerment that builds toward a brighter educational and economic future.

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Increase Student Engagement through Absent Narratives

*When I listen to you, I hear your message.
When I look at you, I acknowledge your presence.
When you tell me your story, I know you.*



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The Humanities Approach



The Absent Narrative approach is a humanities-based approach. In this sense it privileges experiences and looks at human beings in their totality. It recognizes that humans and human communities are the sum of their experiences. It recognizes that each individual and community has a unique narrative to hear and a unique contribution to make. We rely on humanities content as expressed in literature, history, and the arts to understand Absent Narratives as human experiences.

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Absent Narrative Example



Your first example, *Losing Absalom*, emphasizes humanities-based human experiences as expressed through literature.



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Alexs Pate reading *Losing Absalom*



Losing Absalom is an award winning book by Minnesota author Alexs Pate. Listen to this selection from *Losing Absalom* where Alexs introduces Sonny, the main character of this novel, and then listen to Alexs reflect on why he wrote this selection.

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Alexs Pate talking about *Losing Absalom*



In this excerpt from Losing Absalom, the novel, I wanted to capture in a moment the complexity of life certainly for African American men, some African American men, and some people of color in general, as they move out of the world that they were brought up in—the culture that they are steeped in—and try to operate in what is called (generally) the “dominate main stream” and how bifurcated what Du Bois called “double-consciousness” how deeply that affects their thoughts and feelings; and it’s true, he knows that he thinks differently about the world around him and so that’s what this excerpt tries to capture.*

* William Edward Burghardt Du Bois; sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, Pan-Africanist, author, and editor

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As Alexs explains, he wanted to lay out Sonny’s complete experiences as an African American executive. For Sonny being Black is not a matter of perspective or a matter of having different culture, music, art, food, or family traditions. It’s about fundamentally different experiences – some unique to Sonny and some unique to the community and family in which he was raised. Sonny helps us see that we each bring a variety of experiences, emotions, fears, and hopes to our human interactions. It is these experiences, these emotions, these fears and these hopes that make up Absent Narratives – these things that we don’t talk about are those things that undo us.



UNIT ONE

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Unit One: Introduction to Absent Narratives



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Unit One Goal and Objectives



Goal: To deepen knowledge and understanding of the Minnesota Humanity Center's approach through the humanities, Absent Narratives, and community partnerships.

Objectives:

- Identify clear and compelling need to include Absent Narratives as a method of engaging students
- Explain how this approach ties to communities
- Define Absent Narratives

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Unit One: Introduction to Absent Narratives



The Minnesota Humanities Center's approach helps to make connections between teachers and their students and all people in our communities. In this first unit, you will hear authentic, unmediated voices emphasizing their lived and cultural experiences. This approach through Absent Narratives asks people to speak only for themselves and not to represent a community. Therefore, differing opinions, ideas, and thoughts show up as uniquely as the individuals who bring them. And yet, we hear the common desire for these narratives to be included in the process of closing the relationship gap between us.

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The Humanities Approach Video



Meaningful Stories



Transcript

Commissioner Toni Carter:

We all have really the same goals; to be able to raise our families, to be able to look into the eyes of our children and know that we can meet their needs from day to day; to be able to educate them, and in environment that certainly creates a learning for them in a way that prepares them for a future in which they are at the center, and that future preparation really has to engage them at the center today and to be about them and to feel very comfortable for them; to create opportunities for our children to succeed and not fail; and a community that welcomes them and lifts them up based on their strengths and talents. I think that that's what we all want.

Alexs Pate:

My friend, David Mura*, talks about how some stories are valued over others and we need to eliminate that. I think about the writer John Edgar Wideman* who says, "All stories are true, all stories equal, all stories true, all stories need to be told." And so in order to validate what I just said... I don't know how people would respond to that – maybe you could tell me what you think when I say that... **but when we get to that place you're constantly questioning, "Why is this story more important to you than this story?"**

Monica Briggs:

All my life it's been my home... and... this place, Minneapolis and St. Paul, have been my home and not even being fully aware of the area or anything sacred about who I am as a person, who I am as a Native American living here in the Twin Cities... and having been born here and raised here and I'm planning on actually staying here, I don't really want to plan to move out of the Cities because I really want to be more familiar with, just the aware of which I come from.

Four selected voices of the Asian Pacific Youth Council:

1. Being Hmong, we don't have a Country so people don't really know about us and so I feel like we need to tell people who we are and what we are.
2. You don't learn that much about Asians except maybe a couple of wars.
3. They say it was really good for the European society, but it was really good for the Indian society; they're not really including that so... I wish they would.
4. ...and in that book it's talking about the Vietnamese War and in that book they use derogatory terms toward Asians and that was really offensive towards me because my grandparents fought in the Vietnam War.

Toni Carter:

I think the discomfort with communication because we perceive ourselves to be so different is the challenge. We really need to cut through that discomfort and be able to stand in this space together.



Dr. Omowale Akintunde:

...and that part of the process is being uncomfortable. But it is that discomfort that brings us to a newer, brighter, freer, more equitable place. And that until we realize that, we're going to become stale and stay stale and remain stale and that we need to really, truly need to move on.

Alexs Pate:

...recalibrate and reconceptualize the whole and include these absented stories in the whole... it may add up to be more work, but it is the whole and not a supplement to. So I think it's really important that when we get to the place where all these stories are told they express the fullness of the American experience.

When I think about Dr. Professor Omowale who has talked about epistemology a lot and has written about it, I asked him, "What do you do when you start asking questions about why you think this way or that way?" And he said you've already done most of the work when you get there. Thinking about it – wondering why you thought this and putting it up to the test of the light – taking it [your thought/belief/assumption] out of the closet and saying, "Ok, I really do like to read Hemmingway more than I like to read Earnest Gaines, I do. Why do I?"

Elder Dave Larsen:

Working out of college I hear people saying, "Use your head."
I say, "Please, not just your head, if you don't use your heart it's not going to be complete." Because your head... I'm learning this from my Hunka, my adopted brother. He said, "When you use only your head, your head is good, your brain is good except it always says, 'How can I get out of some of this; how can I cut this short; how can I do this easy?'" And that is what that mind does and the heart is what keeps you in balance and says, "No, there is not a quick way of doing things right."

*Notes

David Mura is a poet, creative nonfiction writer, critic, playwright and ... about their lives as men of color and Asian American-African American relations ...

John Edgar Wideman; author of *all stories are true*. Winner of the Pen/Faulkner Award. "John Edgar Wideman is now our leading black male writer and one of our finest writers, period." ~ New Republic.

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Absent Narratives are Human Experiences



Absent Narratives are at the heart of a truly equitable education for all students.

Absent Narratives are stories, art, music and histories that are left out of the standard curriculum; they are the *human experiences* of a people and place.



Through Absent Narratives educators restore relationships and act to make available and amplify community voices in order to engage, heal, connect, create, explore, and strengthen the educational experience of ALL students.

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Community Voices



Throughout this offering you will see pages titled “Community Voices.” These pages introduce Absent Narrative videos.

The Absent Narrative (story) you are about to hear is an example of a living history of a place and a people that is missing from standard curriculum.

Write any insights and questions in your journal. You will be coming back to this later.

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A New Beginning



Waziyatawin

Transcript

Our story of our creation, the origin of our people, is a story that I heard many times growing up. Wakantanka, the Great Mystery, created many children and into each of his children he placed a part of himself. He gave the quality of swiftness to the deer, majesty to the eagle. This story is geographically specific. It's connected to a specific land base and it's this land base that it's connected to.

I was taught that this story takes place at a place we call maka cokaya kin which means the center of the earth. Another word we have for this place is bdote. In our language bdote literally means the joining or juncture of two bodies of water. The primary bdote is right where the Minnesota River joins the Mississippi and in English that place is known as Mendota today and it's right where Fort Snelling sits at that juncture of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers.

And we know that the story takes place at this site in particular because this story is marked on the landscape. Down river on the Mississippi there is a bluff and in English it is known as Barn's Bluff, but in Dakota we call that place Caske' tanka. Caske', in our language meaning first born child and male, and tanka meaning large or big. Caske' tanka existed for thousands of years and you could see the profile of a Dakota face on that bluff at least until 1954 when it was dynamited to make way for a bridge that crossed the Mississippi river into Wisconsin. And now that site has been desecrated. And even down river from Caske' tanka, is Caske' cistinna. And again Caske' meaning first born child and male, and cistinna meaning little or small, is downriver.



Those two bluffs mark the first beings that were created. This story is geographically specific. That is it takes place here in this land and it ties our people, the Dakota Oyate, specifically to this land.

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Questions to Consider



1. What makes this an Absent Narrative?
2. Dave Larsen spoke about using our head and heart in making decisions. What strikes you about that in this narrative?
3. We will be coming back to this video later. What else do you notice? Make note of it.

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Joining the Resistance



As Carol Gilligan in *Joining the Resistance* (2011 p. 128) observed,
What is unvoiced or unspoken, because it is out of relationship, tends to get out of perspective and to dominate psychic life.

One aspect of Absent Narratives, the humanities, **are these unvoiced or unspoken things—those things that make up our human experiences.** Going forward, we ask you to embrace and understand more deeply your own unspoken reality.

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The Relationship Gap



*Why must we embrace these Absent Narratives? What is the educational or public need for introducing Absent Narratives into schools, museums, or personal lives? Absent Narratives accepts that there is an achievement gap and it honors the need to create sophisticated global citizens. However, the Absent Narratives approach insists that the reason we have an achievement gap and the barrier to creating true global citizens is based on a relationship gap – a gap of human understanding and meaning. The Gilligan quote tells us about this relationship gap, “What is unvoiced or unspoken, **because it is out of relationship**, tends to get out of perspective and to dominate psychic life.”*



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Restoring Relationships



Absent Narratives is about restoring our relationship to ourselves, to each other, to our communities, and to the places we live and work. It is about embracing those untold experiences that make up each of us and those unvoiced stories (positive and negative) that dominate the lives of too many students and communities. Absent Narratives is not about adding a few multicultural stories here and there across a curriculum. Absent Narratives is about helping us to relate to each other as human beings who operate within human communities.

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Community Voices



Kao Kalia Yang, the author of *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, is featured in TPT's MN Original series. During the following segment, she reflects on her lived experiences, family and writing the book *The Latehomecomer*.

Take notice of the relationship gaps within her stories.

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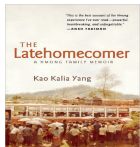
The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir



Kao Kalia Yang

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The Latehomecomer Excerpt



Please listen to and read an excerpt from the *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, by Kao Kalia Yang. This is another example of a relationship gap that happens in schools.

Transcript:

Yang, Kao Kalia. *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*. Minneapolis, Coffee House Press. Pages 140-141.



We had only been in Battle Creek Elementary for a few days. It was recess time, which we had practiced for in Phanat Nikhom at the child care center, so I knew what to do. I was playing with a ball, a red rubber ball that bounced up and down against the hard concrete. A boy approached me; he had dark hair and was taller than me by at least two heads. He said something, but I didn't know what he wanted. When he pushed me, I knew what he wanted but I was not sure I wanted to give it to him. It was too late. I fell against the cement. I started to cry from the surprise and then because my elbow started to hurt. He picked up the ball and bounced it at my feet.

I didn't see Dawb run up. All I saw was the boy on the ground, flat on his back, and Dawb on top of him, pulling his hair, saying again and again, "Why are you mean to my sister?"

She was speaking in Hmong. My back hurt and my elbows were bleeding. The boy began pulling at Dawb's hair and yelling in English. I didn't know which part of him to hurt first. Dawb had his head. I looked at his feet. He had on white hightop sneakers and was wearing jeans over scrawny legs. I was about to step on his leg when the teachers came and blocked me. They grabbed Dawb and then they turned and grabbed me and took us to the office. Battle Creek Elementary did not want us anymore.

Our sponsor, my father's best friend, had a daughter who was my age. We became kind-of-friends. Because she was born in America and spoke English, we could not become very close friends-I thought the Hmong children who had lived in America for a long time were not as Hmong as us newer kids from the camps-except this didn't matter when we were playing. She went to a school close by, and the adults believed that it was a good school. My cousin took Dawb and me to register there, but they didn't want us because we couldn't speak English well enough, and they didn't have the special teachers we would need. This is my first memory of feeling embarrassed.

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Questions to Consider



1. Define Absent Narratives.
2. Why is it important to include Absent Narratives in your classroom?
3. How does this approach to learning engage students?
4. Where do you see relationship gaps in your school?
5. What is it about Absent Narratives that restores relationships?



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Unit One Summary



This first unit has examined the impact of Absent Narratives as human experiences of people and places. These stories are not missing from the current lives and histories of students, but they are unknown by many educators and are absent from the classroom curriculum. You heard honest and unmediated community voices encouraging you to understand more deeply the human experiences that surround us all; you have considered how the achievement gap in education is based on a relationship gap of human understanding and empathy. Restoring these relationships happens when we embrace untold experiences that help us relate to one another as human beings. This work goes beyond traditional cultural diversity or proficiency programs because the humanities approach encourages us to relate to students through understanding the variety of stories and experiences that constitute all of our experiences.

In the following units please continue to listen to these community voices as they explore more deeply their relationship to themselves, to each other, and to their communities and places in the world.

UNIT TWO

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Unit Two: The Construction of Race



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Unit Two Goal and Objectives



Goal: To examine the historical overview and resulting costs of the construction of race, ethnicity and identity while becoming more conscious of one's own race and identity.



Objectives:

- Summarize how race, ethnicity and culture are socially constructed
- Discover the complexities and narratives that make up one's own identity
- Challenge the notion of mainstream knowledge as neutral knowledge
- Discuss how the white experience has become the "normative" experience in America and that this experience dominates current curricula and educational standards
- Discuss one's own culture and ethnicity in order to appreciate the process and costs of assimilation

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Unit Two: The Construction of Race

In Unit Two, you will be provided the framework for understanding how individual racial identity is created. It will expose how what we often see as neutral knowledge privileges one experience over another. This privileging actually supports and contributes to the achievement and relationship gaps between white students and minority students and between teachers and their students.

The story of how American culture came to be is not a history that is told or studied in teacher training and education, but it is a history which has incredible meaning in our educational system. Historically, specific public policies have privileged the Anglo experience. It is a study of how those who are white do not understand how white was created or the public policy implications of this creation. The challenge in this next unit is to acknowledge the discomfort that comes from seeing oneself through a new perspective and going deeper in that discomfort to learn more.

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Community Voices



Omwale Akintunde and Alexis Pate prepare you for the challenge involved in the uncomfortable process of personal examination of one's beliefs and values.

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The Challenge of this Work





Omwale Akintunde and Alexs Pate

Transcript:

I would simply like to say that we need to not be afraid to challenge people at their core and that part of the process is being uncomfortable. But it is that discomfort that brings us to a newer, brighter, freer, more equitable place. And that until we realize that, we're going to become stale and stay stale and remain stale and that we really, truly need to move on.

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The Construction of Race



Dr. Keith Mayes and Alexs Pate are featured in a series of interviews examining the construction of race through a historical lens. Other concepts addressed include the concept of White as a race and the costs of assimilation.

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The Construction of Race



Keith Mayes and Alexs Pate

Transcript:

What's fascinating within the last 10 years of scholarship is the focus not only on how African Americans are "raced," but how white people are "raced." White people also have a race. We never think about that... race had always been synonymous with black people.

So white is not a race, or white is a race?

White is a race. Actually, white historically, in the United States has been a race but whites have been able to divest themselves from the concept of whites being a race when they became whites, when they became Caucasians, which is really a 20th Century phenomenon. But when we look back into the history we'll see that the various ethnic groups that we understand that came over from Europe, they didn't call themselves necessarily the Irish ethnic group. They called themselves the Irish race, or the Italian race, or the Polish race or the German race, or the English race. So they used those terms to describe themselves. It is only very recently that they've become ethnic groups that if we think of them as ethnic groups at all, really we just understand them to be whites. I would even argue that even more fascinating than black identity at the level of understanding the concept of race is not with blacks and other minorities, it's with whites.



But all of that has gotten lost over the years...

Absolutely; it's been completely and thoroughly lost, obliterated I would say because of the way in which race relations have evolved. Let's just take in one context we have the 1790 Naturalization Law that was passed. It said "All free white persons can be citizens of the United States." This was three years after the ratification of the United States Constitution. Now when it said all free white persons it meant those emigrating from Europe. But the Anglo Saxons who were the dominate white group did not really mean all free white persons can be citizens, it just used that word "free white" to denote who was coming over from Europe which meant that non-whites in the world, Africans, Asians and others could not be citizens in 1790. They could not be citizens even as late as 1924 when the act was re-institutionalized and reconfigured, but although that law said that all free white persons coming over are free, whites still or mainly the English, still discriminated viciously against other European groups for a long time, over a century.

So how did those groups who were discriminated against, the Eastern Europeans, or the Irish, how did they overcome that? Would you classify that as a racial oppression?

That is indeed a racial oppression. First of all they were locked out of certain sectors of American Society. Number one, the labor market; they couldn't get certain jobs they were relegated to certain employment. They were locked out of the political process for a long time. I'm talking about dominant groups like the Germans initially, Irish, in the 19th century, Italians and other southern and eastern Europeans later in the 19th and early 20th century. And one of the most illustrative things about white racism is how it plays out in certain events.

So you're calling this White Racism. This is white on white racism.

This is white on white racism and oppression that was as vicious as detrimental to the lives, to the lived experiences of different immigrant groups as they came over. They had to create umbrella communities to protect themselves from this until they were able to convince the dominate white society, dominate being Anglo Saxons, the English, that they were worthy as citizens, as human beings and that they should partake in the larger polity in the United States.

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White Race and Racism on the Iron Range



A clip from the Minnesota Humanities Center's Emmy Award winning documentary. (This is available to view on our website www.mnhum.org or you may order your own copy.)



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Questions to Consider



1. What ethnicities are part of your background?
2. Reflect on your family traditions and/or history and if they have meaning today.
3. Does your family have or have you heard stories about white on white oppression?

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Family Ethnicities



Group Discussion

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Family Stories



Group Discussion

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The Cost of Racism



Keith Mayes and Alexs Pate

Transcript:

We talked specifically about those racial identities. What was the cost to them? Because if you think about it, think about African Americans, we understand the cost of slavery and all of that, but we don't really talk about the costs of whites who were discriminated against by other whites.

Exactly; we'd have to go back and look at individual costs on people, on families and on communities. In many ways what they brought over in terms of values, culture, mores, all were obliterated after the second or third generation and so the cost was a loss of something. So it cost the Irish, it cost the Italians, it cost the Poles, it cost the Germans a lot.



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Community Voices



JoAnne Stately shares her family story of the costs imposed through the boarding schools experience.

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The Costs of Boarding Schools



JoAnne Stately

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Questions to Consider



1. How does it change your concept of race to know that not everyone categorized as white was always part of that group?
2. What did white ethnics have to give up in order to become white? Offer some examples.
3. What has your family given up from its country of origin?
4. How can an understanding of these costs help you understand the development of "American culture" more completely?

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What were the Costs to the Family?



Group Discussion

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The Cost of Assimilation



Group Discussion



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The Significance of Moving Forward



Keith Mayes and Alexs Pate

Transcript:

Why is this discussion about whiteness and white privilege and the basic idea about white-on-white racism significant?

It's significant because nearly everyone in the United States has undergone this process. At one point they were questioned. Their origin was questioned, their humanity was questioned and it was questioned on racial lines. We want people to understand that race was a factor not only for blacks and other people of color, but it was a factor also for whites and they overcame it, but they overcame it in a way that suggests that there were those in power who were willing to hear their cases. The case was, "listen, I am just like you. I'm no different than you are even if I have to prove it."

Blacks never had a problem proving their worth and their humanity, but after they demonstrated it – it was skin color.

What is significant about it today... really in many ways, if blacks can make it over than certainly that means that Latins can make it over, Asian Americans, Native Americans— I think in many ways the assimilation process that has taken place in this country among whites has not taken place among people of color—and if we can have people understand that whites were also victims of mob violence, of racism, of oppression and of discrimination, then we can show them, we can demonstrate to them that they were not only victims but perpetrators... perhaps they can understand the plight of people of color and of African Americans in the 21st Century.

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Questions to Consider



1. How does understanding the history of white racism and white assimilation help you understand current racial issues?
2. Would you agree that nearly everyone has had their origin and humanity questioned along racial lines?
3. Why were some ethnic groups able to "make it over" while others were not?



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The Construction of Race



Group Discussion

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Unit Two Summary



Learning about race as a construction is a process that continues throughout one's life. For teachers, being able to apply this learning in the classroom is as critical as it is foundational. Teachers are encouraged to continue to talk with one another about the questions and information in this unit. The more discussion you engage in, the more comfort there will be with communication that leads to relationship building with parents, community members and students from other cultures than your own.

UNIT THREE

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Unit Three – The Epistemology of Race



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Unit Three Goal and Objectives



Goal: To begin to organize a sophisticated understanding of one's own epistemology that inspires a revision of prior understanding and formerly held beliefs and/or practices.

Objectives:

- Gain an appreciation and understanding of epistemology as a set of unconscious beliefs that effect the classroom
- After a process of self-reflection, discuss the influence of epistemology as it impacts everyday life including the classroom and school environment



- Propose one revision of a formerly held (or current) practice that contributed to how privileging “ways of knowing and doing” harms relationships and opportunities

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Unit Three – The Epistemology of Race



Once you know the meaning of the word Epistemology, you will likely find yourself using it in the context of various ways in which you understand the world. In this unit, you will begin to look at the impact your own (subconscious) beliefs and understandings bring into the classroom. While they are invisible to you, they show up loud and clear, like the pattern on your shirt, to your students you are teaching.

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The Epistemology of Race



Dr. Keith Mayes and Alexis Pate are featured in a series of interviews examining the epistemology of race.

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What is Epistemology



Keith Mayes and Alexis Pate

Transcript:

Can you help us with the definition of Epistemology and what that means?

Absolutely, the best response I've gotten is from a student. It's what you know when you don't know that that's what you know. It's that subconscious set of knowledges and realities that exist so deeply within you that form the basis of how you see the world and the lens through which you view it that you don't even know that you are viewing through a lens or a set of ideas over a period of time.

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More Equitable Epistemologies



Keith Mayes and Alexis Pate



Transcript:

I'm also curious about where the derivation of this comes from? How long has it taken for people to come to acknowledge and understand the impact and significance of epistemology?

I think we've always known. This comes up in class all the time. [A student says] "If I wasn't in power, you would be." What's interesting about that dynamic is, I always point out "So, you've just acknowledged that you're in power."

"No, no, that's not what I meant."

"But you just said that if I'm not in power you'd be in power." Your whole argument to this point is, 'My whiteness doesn't have power.' So, if the notion that we could exchange power exists then there has to be the presumption that someone is in power. With that said, we're always working within a context. We're all a product of our civilizational evolution and I think that whether we have ever been consciously aware of it or at what point we became consciously aware of it, the true issue is – how can we create an epistemological framework that is more equitable to a more diverse group of people? The goal is not to get rid of epistemologies, but to develop epistemologies that are more inclusive.

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Questions to Consider



1. Define epistemology in your own words.
2. How does your epistemology impact the everyday life of the students in your classroom?
3. Think about the normative experience in your classroom. What are you currently doing that you didn't know that you are doing?

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Epistemology in the Classroom



Group Discussion

Transcript

Alexs:

When we introduce this idea of epistemology and dealing with what teachers know when they don't really think about what they actually are saying; the values they're communicating; the ideals they are imparting; the whole way in which a teacher



approaches their classroom sort of falls all the way back, culturally, along the lines we've been talking about.

So it is really interesting because even when we're being really creative in the classroom the question really is; what is the nature of that creativity? What is the source of it?

Eden:

It's really pretty much who we are. I know that I taught in a suburban district and most of my students were white. Coming from my own upbringing and bringing that piece in, I just assumed that things move in a very linear way; that kids—not that I expect them to be perfectly behaved, but kids stay in their desks, they raise their hands when they need to speak. There's those certain norms that we believe should be norms for everybody because that's what we experienced and that's maybe what we learned in our training. Then when you do get a little bit of diversity of kids you realize that not everybody grew up with the same norms, values—that culture of what it means to be a student in the classroom. It's something I really was not very conscious of when I was teaching and I was confronted with it very often. But now it's interesting to look back and to see what that experience was and where I am today. I can kind of look back and do some analyzing.

Alexs:

Think about classroom and think about what you walk in “being.”

Kate:

There are so many things that you bring to the classroom and how you have all these subconscious beliefs that you haven't even examined. It's frightening when you start to look at the culture that you do come in with and what you can expect of kids because of that culture. Everything from parent involvement to classroom management, to homework, to the way they physically present themselves. I mean there's so much to it. If you're a practitioner you have to keep looking at yourself and changing your craft so that you're inclusive because otherwise it's not going to be an equitable education for all those students that you have all day in your classroom. I think that basically teachers go into it because they love kids and they want to do what's best. I really believe that with all my heart.

And I just think that it takes being introspective and to keep trying your best to examine your own beliefs and to try and serve those kids the best you can by looking at them more closely and seeing what their needs are and what they bring with them.

Keith:

I think there is also a sense that classrooms are these neutral spaces where some learning takes place and the learning could be at a very affect level. What gets missed is that when the students come into the classroom they bring in a whole lot. They bring



in histories, cultures, of course... underneath that is language and values and how they may look, smell.

The teachers are bringing those things in the classroom as well. And so in many ways a classroom can be a space where you have a clash of cultures. And that's in learning as well, but I think that people don't understand learning in that way. It's just that I'm standing up here as a teacher and I'm teaching the child multiplication or teaching a child how to read and that's it. But there is so much subconscious text involved in the classroom space and I'm wondering if you've had occasions to even thing about that as educators and as students, ever. Or was that something that was completely off the radar?

Jim:

I think that most of us received training to become teachers. I know when I walked into the classroom—I'll take that word you used, "neutral"—I just thought it was a neutral learning space and I just happen to be a facilitator in that process. I didn't think about what I'm bringing into the classroom in terms of expectations or values. It took me awhile to realize that before I even opened my mouth... when students came into the classroom they already knew what I was about. And they knew how things were going to line up. I didn't have that same awareness of how their coming in could change that or play with that because I was trained and I was trained in a linear fashion. I taught history progression... normal. I taught English as a second language, and although English is a messed up language being it's borrowed from all those... Still there are usually rules involved, although exceptions always mess with that. But still, there are rules and you follow this linear pathway, but I still didn't see that as a teacher until (I think Mallory used the term "blow-up") I'd have a few lesson plans—which on paper; a neutral learning site; and me just being a neutral presenter of information or facilitator; in theory they work perfectly, but in practice when you have students from different backgrounds, different ethnic groups, different values, it's not going to work. And it didn't work and it took me quite some time to figure out that it wasn't necessarily me or them, or the lesson plan. It was the whole system was out of sync and until I could learn how to tweak each aspect of that, I was never going to be successful as a teacher.

Slide 55

The Impact on Students of Color



Keith Mayes and Alexs Pate

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Questions to Consider





1. What role does a mandated curriculum and/or state standards play in reinforcing one experience or way of being over another?
2. Recognizing our unconscious choices allows us to make new choices that are more inclusive. What are some choices in a unit of study that you would reconsider now? Do you question “why is this story more important than that story?”

Slide 57

Evaluating the Curriculum



Group Discussion

Slide 58

Michener's Novel



Omowale Akintunde

Transcript:

... so he sees the professor and Carol exit the plane and they get on the tarmac and they suddenly hear this loud voice bellowing, “Carol, Carol, over here.” And then Michener said they turned and they see a tall black man. A tall black man.

And at that point I put the book down – not because of the story narrative – it was the fact that they were seeing a “tall black man.” So then I started to think... if they are seeing a tall black man, then what is the professor? And what is Carol? And what was the President at the university and what were the people at Us Magazine? No one else in the novel had been described in racial context to this point and I hadn't realized that no one had been described in racial context at this point... and then I realized that when he introduced this new character as a tall black man it started me to think then, what were all the other characters? And I had been thinking about them subconsciously all this time!

Then I sat down and I slowly realized that although I didn't think that I was thinking it, I had automatically absorbed that all of those people were white.

Now that's deep if you think about it. Because it meant that even I, a black man, sitting here reading this book and coming across all these characters had never thought about them in terms of their race. There was just Carol, the professor, the people at Us Magazine. Then the tall black man appears and then I had to think about what I'd been thinking about and how I had been thinking about it.



That is when I realized that whiteness had become so normal, so natural, so deeply subconsciously entrenched in my knowing that I didn't even know that I didn't know it. And this blew my mind!

Because I realized that not just Michener was writing this way but my entire cultural experience was this way. Now I want you to stop and think about it because this is deep. This is really, really deep.

Because it's not what you know. It's what you know when you don't know that's what you know.

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Questions to Consider



1. What is one thing that you have learned about your epistemology as it transfers into your classroom practices?
2. What makes it difficult to identify your own assumptions and notions? How do you confront and change these hidden knowledges?

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Identify the Assumptions



Group Discussion

Slide 61

Unit Three Summary



Cultural ways of being and learning differ greatly between people. Understanding one's own epistemology inspires a revision of prior thinking and formerly held beliefs and practices in order to be more inclusive of that which we simply don't know.



UNIT FOUR

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Unit Four – Changing Hearts and Minds



Slide 63

Unit Four Goal and Objectives



Goal: To prepare to provide support and advocacy for the inclusion of Absent Narratives for the benefit of all students.

Objectives:

- Identify what happens when untold stories are missing from mainstream curriculum
- Hear community voices as assets to building cultural understanding and connections
- Compare and contrast an Absent Narrative in light of new knowledge
- Explore links and connection to Minnesota Humanities Center resources, tools and additional learning opportunities for long-term sustainable change in the classroom

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Unit Four – Changing Hearts and Minds



Preparing to be inclusive of Absent Narratives takes a change in not only the educational materials used, but in one's attitude and will. In this unit, community voices continue to speak to the need for an educational approach that includes the lived experiences of those students learning through it.

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Community Voices



Dave Larsen amplifies the human experience of American Indian students in schools today.



Slide 66

Equity in Education



Elder, Dave Larsen

Slide 67

Community Voices



Dr. Tony Treuer talks about the benefits of learning and understanding the history and current effects of United States/Indian treaties.

Slide 68

A Deeper Understanding



Dr. Anton Treuer

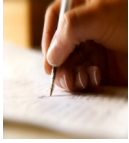
Transcript:

There is a lot to be gained from learning about treaties for all people. I think Native Americans, like other Americans don't get to learn a lot about their own history, treaties, culture in school. It's something that is learned a little bit more on the side and we should change that. The treaties that govern the sale of land are the stories of how Minnesota came into being or how this country came into being; the good, the bad and the ugly. I think they offer incredible insights into the minds of tribal leaders of America and some of the treaties are hard to look at. Some of them offer down right swindles. At the same time, we have to take a look at even our ugliest chapters to make sure that the future is better and brighter. In Germany they had to mandate teaching about the Holocaust K-12, across the spectrum in their educational system as a way of preventing something like that from happening again. We need to look good and hard at the treatment of Native Americans around land, genocidal policies and treaties, just like we need to look hard at the practices of slavery in this country as a way to arrive at a deeper understanding of how we came to be and how we really should be; what directions we should be heading in the future.



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Review the Absent Narrative, *A New Beginning*



Recognizing and embracing Absent Narratives as human experiences does change one's heart and mind and leads to empowerment that builds toward a brighter educational and economic future.

*In the beginning of this professional development offering you viewed the video narrative titled *A New Beginning*. Please turn back to the notes you took about what you noticed and heard. At this point, after learning about the history of race as a construction built from a dominant perspective, and about your own epistemology (your subconscious beliefs and attitudes) you will view the video *A New Beginning* through the lens of your new learning. Afterward, you will be asked questions to help you see what you may not have noticed earlier.*

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New Beginnings



Waziyatawin

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Questions to Consider



Now that you've reviewed *A New Beginning* video answer the following questions.

1. Compare and contrast this Absent Narrative in light of your new knowledge and understanding. Look back at your notes from viewing it earlier. What do you notice now?
2. What epistemologies are revealed as you consider the dominant narrative?
3. How can this narrative or one like it be incorporated into what is taught?



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Epistemological Modesty



Before you proceed, there is good news ahead. As teachers, you are often expected to have all the answers, but in reality, you know that is not possible. In the next few slides you'll be introduced to a way in which you can reconcile the weight of having to know it all and do it all correctly.

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Epistemological Modesty



As educators, bumping up against the knowledge of how little we know (or even can know) is a major cause of discomfort in this work of engaging students through Absent Narratives. However, there is a very helpful attitude one can choose that is called Epistemological Modesty.*

This is an attitude toward life that comes out of the awareness that we simply don't know ourselves fully. Therefore, we also have trouble fully understanding others. Those who choose this humble attitude believe that *wisdom* begins with an awareness of their own lack of knowledge and with the *recognition* that there is no one way of solving problems.

* Epistemological Modesty as described in *The Social Animal*, by David Brooks

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No one way of solving problems



Imagine a person being asked what day in the spring they should plant corn. This person could consult a scientist, weather patterns, historical records, and more... or they could ask a farmer. Folk wisdom in North America decrees that corn should be planted when oak leaves are the size of a squirrel's ear. Whatever the weather in any particular year, this rule will guide the farmer to the right date.

This is a different sort of knowledge than we are used to relying upon. However, the person choosing the modest attitude learns not to trust just one way of thinking.* They open their heart and mind to learn from others.

* Example from *The Social Animal*, by David Brooks



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Questions to Consider



1. How will you apply this modest attitude in your teaching?
2. Knowing what you do now, choose one former practice you will change in your classroom.

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Unit Four Summary



This offering is designed to help you see that which may at first be invisible. This kind of transformational learning takes place over time as individuals see the need and have a desire to bring about change because of new knowledge they have come to understand.

At this point, while you are about to complete this pre-requisite offering, you have just begun learning about Absent Narratives and the impact they deliver. You are now ready to begin deeper exploration and understanding.

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Next Steps



The next two slides bring you into our resource center and our website. There, you will find videos and further learning opportunities. Please look at these pages now and plan to come back to them often. We look forward to working with you again in this new and important change of minds and hearts. Thank you for all you do as an educator of our children, our future.

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Minnesota Humanities Center Resources





The Humanities Center has created a video page that addresses how Minnesota is home to many rich narratives. These accounts attempt to make meaning of this place, its residents, and its histories. The narratives are intended to expand your knowledge, understanding, and empathy for the people who live here.

Visit the Minnesota Humanities Center video page at www.mnhum.org/videos

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Further Opportunities



The Humanities Center is dedicated to providing educators with high-quality Absent Narrative content. Absent Narratives online and in-person professional development offerings are led by scholars and experts in their field.

Visit the Humanities Center website to review our professional development opportunities. www.mnhum.org/pd

Visit another Absent Narrative resource, the Bdote Memory Map. This is a resource for understanding more about the Dakota people's relationship to Minnesota.

www.bdotememorymap.org

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Evaluation



You have reached the end of this professional development offering. Congratulations! Your certificate will be activated upon completion of the evaluation. Thank you!