

Course Name:

The Power of Memory



The Janjaweed

The Janjaweed militias consist of "Arab" men recruited from local nomadic tribes and armed by the Sudanese government.

Interests in the Darfur Region: The Janjaweed's political goals - if any - are unclear. Most of the Janjaweed appear to be mercenaries; men who join for a gun, a small amount of money, and the opportunity to rape and pillage non-Arab towns.

Role in the Conflict in Darfur: The Janjaweed steal or destroy the basic food and water resources vital for civilians' survival. Janjaweed attacks have caused the displacement of millions of people in Darfur and the deaths of hundreds of thousands.

(An extraction from <http://worldnews.about.com/od/sudan/ig/Darfur/Janjaweed-.htm>)

Rationale:

“It is a challenge to survive in this world as a whole human being with principles and integrity, especially when immersed in an environment rife with unprincipled, intolerant behaviour.” (Teaching for a Tolerant World)

Through exposure to art, film, media and literature (both fiction and non-fiction), students will have the opportunity to develop an understanding of the history, causes, and especially the impact of genocide the world over. Through collaboration with their peers, interviews with survivors of genocide, activists, and research, students will be able to develop an appreciation of the impact of genocide on a personal level, contribute to avoiding such future disasters and help those who are victims.

The course and its materials:

This is an integrated social studies and English course for college level students of seven weeks' duration that utilizes both memoir and non-fiction in order to put a human face on genocide. It has been designed to be conducted mainly through face-to-face interactions and also partly with online activities. The course materials include:

The Diary of Anne Frank (Anne Frank)

Zlata's Diary (Zlata Filipovic)

Shake Hands With the Devil (Romeo Dallaire) – memoir and film

The Hiding Place (Corrie Ten Boom) – memoir and film

Night (Elie Wiesel)

MAUS I and II (Art Spiegelman)

Media (newspapers, news magazines, television news etc.)

Museum of Tolerance website (<http://museumoftolerance.com>)

Yad Vashem (Holocaust memorial and museum in Jerusalem) website

(<http://yadvashem.org/>)

Canadians Against and Torture in the Sudan (CASTS) website

(<http://www.geocities.com/castsudan/CanadiansagainstSlaveryandtortureinsudan.html>)

The following website contains information on other genocides of the twentieth century

(http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/genocide_massacre.htm)

Methodology

For the most part, students will work in groups known as literature circles. Each group or circle will select a book from the above list, depending on their interest and reading level. Over a period of two weeks, students will read the book, independently, and note their questions and reactions to the reading in a Response Journal. They are invited to exchange ideas, questions and responses through the “conference board” feature on the Blackboard online portal. If necessary, the teacher will assign roles to group members to ensure a productive discussion and exchange. At the conclusion of the discussion, students will return to their Response Journals and note any new questions, reactions and insights that accrued as a result of the group discussion. Each entry must be dated. The journal will constitute part of the final evaluation.

The teacher will provide supplementary readings, participate in group discussions, and lecturettes as necessary to provide factual background to the following genocides: the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide and the current situation unfolding in Darfur.

Films have been made of several of the above books (The Diary of Anne Frank, Shake Hands with the Devil and The Hiding Place) and short clips of these films will be used to supplement the reading.

Two guest speakers namely Romeo Dallaire and Dr. Norman Epstein (an activist on behalf of the victims of the slaughter in Darfur) and three survivors of the above-named genocides will be invited into the classroom for one hour lectures and discussions. In very extreme conditions where it is not possible to bring these speakers to class in time, recorded speeches of them would be delivered. With assistance from the teacher,

students are also encouraged to contact university students, survivors of the Rwandan genocide, currently living and studying in Belgium. A facility in French is useful for this.

Students are expected to monitor the media daily and to analyze reportage, commentary and the use of graphic images (photographs cartoons in the print media; video clips in the electronic media) in order to understand how media contributes or conversely distorts our ability to fully comprehend these events. Their findings and reactions may be posted online and discussed in their Response Journals.

Students are encouraged as well to investigate the role of propaganda (both graphic and verbal text) as precursors to genocide and the role of art, memoir and literature as bearing witness to the impact. All of the websites listed above contain ample data that students may access. They may also investigate additional sources.

Assignment: Creation of a Memory Book

Each group is to identify 5-8 people to interview who can provide insight and perspective to the genocide under study. These may include survivors, soldiers who served in these areas, activists, United Nations and government officials, journalists who have visited these areas to report on events etc. As a group, they are to determine what questions to ask their subjects and will share and discuss the data assembled. In addition, through research, they will assemble a collection of relevant quotations, passages, graphics (art, photographs, cartoons, maps etc.; this may include original work), and media pieces from the internet and other sources.

Each group will create a Memory Book which documents the impact of genocide and its implications for humanity. The Memory Book should focus on key passages gleaned from their interviews, quotations from the interviews, readings and other sources, original artwork or artwork from other sources, newspaper clippings and photographs. The layout of the book will be determined by the group.

In addition to the Memory Book, each student will submit his/her Response Journal, and an accompanying reflection paper, documenting what the coursework and creation of the Memory Book has meant to him/her on a personal level.

The allotment of marks	
Work component	Percentage of marks allotted
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-class contributions• Contributions to online forums	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Response journal	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Memory book	20%
	40%

The allotment of marks	
Work component	Percentage of marks allotted
• Reflection paper	20%
Total	100%

Introduction

One of the best explanations of a curriculum constructed on the principles of constructivism is summarized by Tracy Chao and Bruce Stovel in their chapter, “Nothing But the Blues: A Case Study in the Use of technology to Enrich a University Course”. “...learning is viewed as a social function and the focus is on knowledge construction. An individual must be an active agent in the learning process and learning should occur in an authentic context.” Uzma Ansari in note 604 offers these ideas which we include in our discussion.

“A constructivist curriculum is a philosophy; a study of how people learn. Students are given raw data, amorphous information, ill-defined problems etc. which they are asked to put into form and analyze, with the teacher’s guidance (Jacqueline Brooks). Students work essentially collaboratively in groups.

Students would ask open-ended, probing questions and use active learning techniques such as experiments and real-world problem situations to learn about a phenomenon and then to analyze and reflect upon it. The teacher’s role is to facilitate a collaborate approach, to allow for group work to take place. The students should respect each other and allow everyone’s opinion to be considered and respected. Assessment could be done through student work, observations, points of view as well as tests. Process is just as important as product (Jacqueline Brooks). Curriculum is supported by materials in primary forms, e.g. media, videos, written forms.

We will add two more comments from two educators to the above discussion. They are “In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience (Dewey, 1938). “Individuals are active agents, they engage in their own knowledge construction by integrating new information into their schema, and by associating and representing it into a meaningful way (Hoover,W.A., 1996 & Hsiao, D.). Having all of the above ideas together, we chatted with each other to start a constructive discussion on making our constructive curriculum.

What came up in the discussion?

We found that we were able to launch into the task very quickly. Warden presented an idea which Joan liked and from there our hypothetical constructivist curriculum project began to take shape. We paid careful attention to the role of authentic learning, to giving students a foundation upon which to enhance their understandings and a social context (literature circles and small group collaborative tasks) in which to test and share insights and ideas. Mindful of the caveats posited by Carol Scarff Seatter in “Constructivist

Science Teaching: Intellectual and Strategic Acts”, we were careful to temper the individual and small group learning tasks with opportunities for strategic teacher intervention to ensure that any challenges that arose could be successfully met. We inserted the requirement of the Response Journal to allow students a personal space for documenting and exploring their learnings and reactions.

Questions and answers

1. What are the advantages and the draw backs of implementing constructivist principles in a course?

Constructivism supports progressive education theories and a good advantage of it is that it can cater to a variety of learners having a vast and wide range of abilities. As learners construct their own knowledge based on their previous knowledge, their abilities and their interpretations of the world, constructivism readily adapts to the learner’s needs. This creates a democratic learning situation which respects individual learning styles. Another advantage is that learners are exposed to a variety of learning methods through this approach, and the whole process is more resemble to holistic education. Constructivism also allows the student to explore the knowledge and assumptions that s/he brings to the task and to either add to this or test it against newly acquired insights. The constructivist tenet of placing the learning task in an *authentic* framework is also important.

However, as noted by Carol Scarff Seatter, constructivism should not necessarily be applied equally to all subjects. Scientific principles for example are not negotiable and care must be taken that students do not make erroneous assumptions based on inadequate prior knowledge. The role of the teacher in a constructivist environment must remain fluid.

Another drawback is that it is sometimes difficult to achieve the expected goals of a curriculum, as learners learn at their own pace. The learning process takes time and there might be situations where it might lead to unexpected directions. Controlling and sustaining the learners within a pre-determined framework could be harmful to the learners when achieving their individual goals.

2. What are some foreseeable problems if you were to follow the same principles in your course?

In adult education, we see constructivism as easier to implement as adults are more natural learners and prefer to investigate on their own since they are more experienced persons about the world. Again, the problem of implementing a particular curriculum with pre-planned objectives exists here too. On the other hand, some adults are used to absorb knowledge from teachers, books and other materials without engaging much in conversation. Some even like to hear lectures than working in a group or doing individual work. It is problematic to implement the constructivist approach if the majority of

learners in the class fell into this category. Much depends on the expectations that learners bring to the course.

In the course we have constructed above, the emotional impact of the material may be overwhelming, depending on the individual student's own background. Because they are adults, some may be themselves touched by genocide. Access to technology and expertise in utilizing it effectively may be an issue depending on their experience and comfort level.

In Joan's own course, it is easier to apply constructivist principles as students are encouraged to explore their experiences and their assumptions about the teaching/learning process and to test those or add to them through hands-on tasks and collaborative situations which explore aspects of the teaching/learning dynamic. All assignments are practical in nature with almost immediate application to the classroom.

3. What are the benefits and challenges in integrating technology into a conventional course in higher education? How can you ensure that students have a valuable learning experience?

The challenges of incorporating technology into an adult course are vast. There could be a variation of technology experiences among adults. Another factor in the range of experience is age. The adult learning situation often encompasses a wider range of ages. Older learners may have less experience with technology, less confidence and less expertise. Hence, which level of technology is suitable, is difficult to decide without having a real understanding of learners. In contrast, the participants have the benefit of learning from their peers and this is an advantage for them.

Integrating technology into the course is a valuable experience to participants as they have to explore methods of coping with new technology that were sometimes not known to them in the past. This is essential as they have to do assignments in the course within a limited time. In our view, a holistic approach with a transformation orientation is especially very near and dear to adult learners in any online or face-to-face learning situation.