

**Increasing Diversity in English and History Curriculum for Teachers at Western High
School through Collaborative Professional Development**

Holly G. English

Department of Education Administration, Michigan State University

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Dr. Emiko Blalock

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Executive Summary

At Western High School, there is a need to diversify the English and history curriculums. This move towards diversity is supported by Michigan's Common Core State Standards; however, teachers in the district are fatigued from district provided professional development and lack resources such as time and money to search for programs on their own. To address this, a program running concurrently with district provided professional development focusing on East Asian literature and history in the secondary classroom is proposed. This program will be facilitated by an in-district teacher, and will make use of the resources provided by the National Consortium for Teaching About East Asia.

This program has two goals: first, to provide teachers with content and resources centered around East Asian history and literature and second, to provide teachers time to create lessons related to East Asian history and literature. As these teachers are practicing professionals, with years of experience, the program will focus on content rather than pedagogy. This gives the participants freedom to choose what to include in their curriculums as well as how the information will be used. By using a staff member as a facilitator, this will mitigate negative perceptions of professional development. This also allows the facilitator and participants to draw upon their prior knowledge, utilize the leadership of colleagues within the department, and create timelines and goals that make sense for the participants.

As a facilitator, I believe strongly in Humanistic theories that value a learner's identity. This is essential in creating programs and environments that allow for individual and collective learning to thrive. Honoring a learner's experience by using cognitivist and situated learning theories is especially important when making a program for individuals who bring experience in the area of the program.

This program is informed by Hansman's (2001) theory of adult learning in context. This theory is ideal for these participants are teachers who bring experience to the program which is conducted on school grounds during scheduled professional development. Curtis' (2021) strategies for postsecondary education is likewise ideal, as it can be used for transformational learning and bringing dialectical strategies to the program.

Humanistic and collaborative facilitation strategies are proposed for the use of this program. The humanistic facilitation method allows for the participants to work concurrently with the facilitator to create program goals and objectives while the collaboration method fosters group work between participants.

This program serves the Bay City School District's purpose of having highly educated teaching staff who seek ways to foster engagement in the classroom. Adding East Asian literature and history to the curriculum, as encouraged by the Michigan State Standards, is one way to better prepare students for the world and create learning opportunities. By building a program with humanistic, cognitivist, and situated learning theories in mind, the program will foster staff engagement and provide an effective use of district provided professional development time.

Situated Professional Development

Need for Authentic Professional Development

There is a need for more diverse and inclusive education in the secondary English and history curriculums at Bay City Public Schools. Although the inclusion of multicultural literature and history is encouraged by Michigan's Common Core State Standards, the textbooks provided by the district do not feature very many people of color. Teachers recognize the inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives in curriculum leads to a well-rounded education, fosters empathy, and helps students deconstruct harmful stereotypes.

Despite this knowledge, many teachers are unsure where to start. This is due to a number of reasons: fatigue from perceived ineffective district provided professional development and lacking time or money required for a professional or traditional continuing education course. A place to start addressing ways to include more diverse literature and history into the Bay City Public Schools Curriculum is integrating East Asian literature and history into high school English and history classes. This program aims to address this need for intentional diversity. By using resources from the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA), the facilitator will provide participants with information, materials, and time to work on creating lessons for implementation in the participants' English and history classrooms.

Program Objectives

This program has two overarching goals: provide teachers with resources centered around East Asian history and literature and secondly, give teachers time to create and cultivate lessons for their classrooms. By the end of this program: teachers will be able to analyze the significance of East Asian history and literature by articulating how integration of literature and history can create a more inclusive classroom. With this, teachers will be able to challenge the notion of East

Asian cultures being foreign or perceived as strange by a student population that is geographically isolated, rural, and predominately white. This should help teachers create opportunities to foster empathy among students.

Learners and Context

This program is intended for practicing teachers at Bay City Western High School in the English and history departments. Many teachers are considered veteran teachers with 10-25+ years of experience. All of these teachers are white. Many are married with children or coach for the school and thus have commitments outside of the organization. Some of these teachers have continued their education through masters programs or other courses, but some might need to deconstruct previous assumptions regarding East Asian literature, history, and culture.

These teachers want to include new and diverse material in the classroom but are worn down by irrelevant and non-content specific professional development. Some are resistant to professional development due to this. Others do not know where to start when faced with the task of diversifying the curriculum, do not want to speak on what they do not know, or lack time for a more formal or traditional learning opportunity.

Bay City Western High School is a relatively rural school in northern Michigan; the majority of students are white; most are working and middle class. About half of the students move to college directly after high school, while the other half enters the workforce, goes to a vocational school, or enters the armed forces. However, under the Michigan Merit Curriculum, all students are required to take four years of English and three years of history. This makes the English and history classroom an ideal place to diversify the curriculum to ensure students are better prepared for the world.

Personal Philosophy Towards Learning

My personal learning philosophy brings critical perspectives together with what I believe to be an innate human curiosity to learn more about the world. This way of thinking aligns me with Humanist, Cognitivist, Social, and Critical learning theories. When the learner feels valued as an individual, they are motivated to learn and explore in uninhibited ways. This innate desire and motivation for learning aligns with andragogy (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

Along with andragogy, I believe in feminist, social, and critical race theories. While I think learning can be accomplished individually as andragogy claims, I think much effective learning is done through social processes. Vygotsky's theory of Sociocultural Learning claimed learning is a social process and is dependent in part on the learner's culture and surroundings (Cherry, 2024). Later theories like Friere's (2009) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Curtis' (2021) *Spiritual Strategies* built off of sociocultural theory by exploring the importance of the learner's culture and background to learning, as well as how culture can impact learning. I keep these ideas in mind when designing learning experiences, as learners are humans who bring unique knowledge and experiences to all they do.

Frameworks for Learning: Sociocultural and Situative

Abbreviated Background of Frameworks

Hansman (2001) drew from Vygotsky's (as cited by Cherry 2024) and Lave and Wenger's (1991), sociocultural and situated learning theories to emphasize the importance of adult learning in context. This idea positions learning as a collective process that relies on people, tools, and the context itself for learning to occur. Importantly, Hansman pointed out adult learning in context should incorporate "the learners' developmental needs, ideas, and cultural context into the learning experience" (p. 44). Therefore, learning for adults should occur in context, emphasize

the interactions between people in that context, and utilize cognitive apprenticeships and communities of practice.

Curtis (2001) developed the “Spiritual Strategies for Postsecondary Pedagogies (SSM)” as a way to “translate” the values of Liberation Theology and critical pedagogy into the classroom (p. 31). While these strategies are intended for use by teachers to students, effective facilitation strategies can be used for multiple groups of learners. SSM contrasts with the banking method which, according to Freire (2009), positions the teacher as a storehouse of knowledge who dispenses information onto passive students. The banking method denies students’ individuality and puts the teacher in the position of true learner. Attempting to use the banking method for this program would be a disservice to the teachers who bring years of experience to this program. Since this program is intended for practicing teachers at Bay City Western High School, the dialogic strategies of SSM are useful for the exchange of information and development of new ideas. SSM encourages a range of collaborative, (such as Socratic discussions) and individual (reflective writing) practices to help learners “find meaning” (Curtis, 2021, p. 35). Finding meaning in the program is important for two key reasons.

Using Frameworks to Create Meaning Among Participants

The first, in line with SSM and other theories oriented towards social justice such as Liberation Theology and critical pedagogy, is in order to help students learn about East Asian literature and history in ways designed for students to engage critically and reflectively with the material, the teachers themselves must have a decent understanding of the content. Some of these teachers will have continued their education through master's programs or continuing education courses; however, no one at Bay City Western High School has a specialization in East Asia. It is

likely some of the teachers will need to spend some time deconstructing previously held assumptions about East Asia. SSM can aid in this critical thinking and reflection.

The second reason for finding meaning is the need for relevance. The participants in this program are working professionals with outside commitments such as families, coaching positions, and daily life. Whereas district provided professional development tends to focus broadly on teaching strategies and not content, and more formal programs are often out of reach due to monetary or time constraints, this program can bridge the relevancy and content gaps through Hansman's (2001) theory of adult learning in context. The district sets aside days for professional development; using one of these days to focus on content-specific knowledge would be a welcome reprieve for many of these teachers.

By situating participants of the program as members of a learning community, it not only honors the experience the teachers bring, but it also positions the facilitator as one of the members, preemptively dismantling the power imbalance that usually exists during district provided professional development (MacKeracher, 2004). Using contextual learning strategies such as discussion and distributed cognition and bringing along tools teachers are familiar with such as handouts, lessons, and other educational technology, the participants can draw upon their previous knowledge to work with new material in authentic ways. Focusing on content within the context of the teachers' classrooms will also aid in relevance of the proposed program. By positioning this as a problem for teachers to solve, they can focus on bringing East Asian literature and history into their classrooms, using each other's experience and knowledge to build products that make sense for their classroom and curriculum (Freire, 2009).

Facilitation Approaches: Humanistic and Collaborative

Engaging Educators Through a Humanistic Approach

This program will utilize a humanistic facilitation model as it “works best” with a small group of individuals with a flexible learning outcome (MacKeracher 2004, p. 217). The facilitator will hold off on planning activities and content beforehand with this method and instead wait until the participants meet to discuss what they need and want from the program. Then, the facilitator and participants will develop a more specific plan for integrating curriculum on East Asia into their classrooms. However, this does not preclude the facilitator from gathering resources such as articles, textbooks, novels, and digital media on the topic of East Asia ahead of time.

Gathering resources for participants to page through at the initial meeting can help participants decide areas of further inquiry. This initial information gathering session fits with the humanistic model’s allowance for structured activities at the beginning of programs to further develop and clarify “objectives and directions” (MacKeracher 2004, p. 217). This type of activity also allows for various methods of exploration: individual and group, to exist at the same time. Similarly, teachers who like a little more structure and guidance can receive that from the facilitator at this time, as the facilitator is familiar with the general curriculum of both departments, and those who like to work independently can do so.

This program will start with an initial meeting of teachers from the history and English departments at Bay City Western High School. After an initial welcome where teachers can share any thoughts they have -- apprehension or excitement for example -- regarding the program, the facilitator will explain the flexibility of the program, and the intentional design for freedom of choice. Once the participants are made aware of the goals of the program, they will have time to

peruse materials. With this, they can work independently or in groups to develop areas for further inquiry. The session will end with a general discussion of topics for further study and a solidification of smaller goals and objectives within the central objectives of the program with the facilitator guiding discussion as needed.

Rationale for the Humanistic Approach

The initial discussion of goals of the program will help to ameliorate negative feelings veteran educators might have towards professional development by making it clear their voices are heard and valued by the facilitator. By including the participants in the decision making for the program, it values their experiences as educators and as people (Hansman, 2001; Curtis, 2021). If teachers express negativity towards the program and outcomes, the facilitator will emphasize the participants' ability to "choose their own directions" for learning, in keeping with the humanistic facilitation model (MacKeracher 2004, p. 217). The elements of respect and choice are crucial to creating buy-in and curating success for the rest of the program.

Bringing materials to help spark initial inquiry helps the program in several ways. Teachers who have experience in teaching East Asia will have previous schemas on the subject (Cherry, 2024). By bringing in materials from the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTAsia), these materials could align with what teachers already know, allowing for those experienced with the subject matter to pursue other avenues. For those that aren't as familiar, the materials could challenge previously held assumptions and spark areas for new inquiry (NCTAsia, 2024).

Using a humanistic facilitation method will allow the facilitator to meet the needs of various participants. Some teachers crave more independence from professional development, while others prefer support and guidance. Viewing the participants as educators and as people

who have preferences in facilitation style and learning is a more holistic approach to professional development that district provided opportunities often lack. Furthermore, by shifting away from extrinsic models, teachers will have an opportunity to develop questions, goals, and content that makes sense for them.

Connecting the Humanistic Model to Theoretical Frameworks

The humanistic model links strongly to Curtis' (2021) work "Acting Out the Shared Heritage: Towards a Pedagogical for Liberatory Education." Curtis' (2021) work presented a framework for transformation of the learner and social justice. Using ideas from Oldenski's (2002) Integrative Model of Liberation Theology and Critical Pedagogy and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, Curtis (2021) advocated for the use of dialogic strategies. Dialogic strategies are ideal for practicing teachers as it encourages not only the development of new ideas, but the free exchange of information and finding new meanings (Curtis, 2021). Humanistic models focus on "affective and social dimensions of learning" that can shift attitude, personal intellectual, and emotional schemas (MacKeracher 2004, p.218-219).

Hansman's (2001) "Context-Based Adult Learning" built off Lave and Wenger's (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* by proposing adult learning in context should incorporate "the learners' developmental needs, ideas, and cultural context into the learning experience" (p. 44). By hosting this program onsite, facilitated by a teacher, with teacher participants with the express goal of incorporating material into the classroom, this program exists in a situated context. Additionally, the collective and collaborative nature of a humanistic facilitation approach lends itself well to context-based learning which relies on these elements for learning to occur.

Collaborative Facilitation for Cross-Department Learning

In addition to humanistic facilitation strategies, a strategy of collaboration will be used by the facilitator. As participants move through the program, they will build on their pre-existing professional learning communities. Typically, the district splits teachers up by departments; this program provides an opportunity to do cross-curricular work. Participants might choose to work across grade level, pulling from the same grade standards in the Michigan Department of Education's (2010; 2019) standards for English and Social Studies. Other teachers might want to work within their department to create cohesion among the grade levels. This flexibility to form groups works well as it allows for building a learning community, division of tasks, and leadership opportunities within the program (MacKeracher 2004, p. 210).

Once participants have decided how they will form groups, the facilitator will ask the groups to take on the following roles: discussion director, reporter, and timekeeper. These roles will help keep groups accountable and on task. The discussion director will take on more of a leadership role, helping to guide the group through deciding on a specific focus. The timekeeper will check the clock to make sure the group stays on task, and the reporter will give the initial findings of the group to the rest of the participants when the time comes. Once these roles are decided, participants will choose an area of inquiry related to the program topic, spend time researching or examining material, create a lesson plan for the material, and then prepare to share what they have done with the rest of the group.

Rational for the Collaborative Approach

As the facilitator and participants are colleagues, they all share the responsibility of teaching accurate information in thoughtful and engaging ways to prepare students for the next grade level, college, career, or other life path. As such, trust already exists between the facilitator

and participants (MacKeracher 2004, p. 210). This allows for all parties to act as co-learners, sharing the responsibilities of the program equally.

The division and sharing of tasks that a collaborative facilitation style requires are processes the participants are used to as teachers. (MacKeracher 2004, p. 210). With the program having two goals: developing more of an understanding of East Asian history and literature and developing materials for classes, it makes sense to have the participants work collaboratively to meet the objectives while still allowing choice.

Ultimately, participants will leave the program with a stronger understanding of East Asian literature and history and lesson plans for integrating said knowledge into their classrooms. Some teachers will likely want to focus on building content, while others will be more focused on pedagogy. This natural division will allow for teachers to pursue areas of interest, work with other like-minded colleagues, and then come together at the end to share their discoveries with all participants. This division will allow the facilitator to share equally with the participants in “the vulnerability” of the knowledge-making process (MacKeracher 2004, p. 210).

Linking Collaborative Facilitation to Theory

By building this program with the intent of facilitating for teachers who all have experience in their field, it makes sense to choose a collaborative facilitation style as it uses this collective and distributed knowledge to the advantage of the facilitator and entire group. This aligns with Hansman’s (2001) theory of contextual situated learning. As these learners are already part of a professional learning community, they are “self-organized” group “who share a common sense of purpose” (Hansman, 2001, p. 48). Within this group, there is “mutual

engagement” a sense of collaboration and a shared knowledge aligning with the goals of a collaborative facilitation style (Hansman, 2001, p. 48)

Using a collaborative facilitation style also works well with Curtis’ (2021) “Spiritual Strategies for Postsecondary Pedagogies” (SSM) in that placing the facilitator as a co-learner, it decreases the perceived and real power imbalance between facilitator and participant. This creates a sense of trust which allows for a freer exchange of ideas, information, and meaning among participants and the facilitator. The dialogic strategies proposed by SSM are ideal for a collaborative environment. Dialogue is an important SSM and collaborative strategy. Another important aspect of SSM is social perspective-taking. Ideally, through inquiry, discussion, and reflection, participants will be able to better empathize with their students from East Asia, or of East Asian descent. Participants can then create lessons that increase knowledge and foster empathy in their students.

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