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Lies My Teacher Told Me

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Lies My Teacher Told Me

Abstract
This *works-hop will present the quantitative findings of a study aimed at assessing what impact* (1) *traditional historical misinformation, and* (2) *the substitution of that information with revisionist history has on the perspectives of college pre-service and in-service education majors. In particular,* we *will investigate the impact James Lowen's "Lies My Teacher Told Me" has on that learning.* The *session will benefit educators and trainers who teach history and human and race relations courses.*

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This workshop presents quantitative findings of a study aimed at assessing what impact (1) traditional historical misinformation, and (2) the substitution of that information with revisionist history has on the perspectives of college education majors. In particular, we will investigate the impact James Lowen's *"Lies My Teacher Told Me* (1996)" has on learning. In his book, Lowen asserts that traditional high school textbooks perpetuate a history full of half-truths and omissions that end up promoting:
.Heroes and heroines who are unrealistically near perfect;
An uncritical acceptance of historical events evaluated mostly by people who stand to gain the most;
A calculated cover up of viable alternative philosophical perspectives; .
Various blatant and institutional forms of racism, elitism, and sexism;
.The downplaying of White anti-racist that fought for principles of justice and equality from the very beginning; and
.A general passivity among teachers and learners to accept truth that is handed to them, as opposed to defIning it through multiple historical lenses.

II. Methodology:
164 students from 4 undergraduate sections of Human Relations and 1 graduate level Multicultural Counseling class were given a pre-test assessing their views and perspectives on the following historical people and events:
1. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and human rights;
2. Betsy Ross and the flag;
3. Helen Keller and her political views;
4. America's flI'St feature film entitled *Birth of a Nation;*
5. The role of the two major American political parties in the development of Civil Rights for Blacks;
6. The role of the American government in the communist revolution in Russia; and
7. The connection between American colonialism and the rise of dictators in Latin America.

Students were asked to read the first two chapters of the Lowen book and evaluate how the information differed from traditional accounts. I believed that because the book was well documented .with facts previously left out of most high school history books respondents would experience the following outcomes:
1. A majority of respondents would find the new information to be unsettling, yet nonetheless accurate;

2. A noticeable amount of disappointment regarding the prior education of students would be evident;
3. Respondents would conclude that learning which included a wider and more inclusive perspective was better in comparison to traditional historical accounts; and American citizens.

After reading the material, respondents took a post-assessment that measured learner surprise and change in thought, as well as an evaluation of revisionist perspectives educators might consider adopting.

III.Findings:

Utilizing descriptive data gathered from assessment instruments that registered responses on a 0-8 Likert Scale, I was able to conclude that students:
1. Were only moderately shocked by revisionist fmdings (M = 4.45)
2. Generally agreed that the alternative material found in the Lowen book was portrayed accurately (M = 5.20);
3. Clearly in agreement that there were missing gaps in their prior learning (M = 6.50);
4. Generally believed the study of history via a revisionist paradigm was important for today's students (M =5.71);
5. Students were only moderately willing, however, to blame their miseducation on former teachers (M = 4.00);
6. Were willing to strongly endorse the fact that history cannot be told through the eyes of the dominate group or a ruling class only (M = 7.11).

Respondents ranked the following events included in the first two chapters of the Lowen book to be most surprising (1) to least surprising:

1. Although Woodrow Wilson gained a worldwide reputation as being a man of democratic principles, his domestic policies against Blacks made him a racist;
2. President Wilson was intolerant of new White immigrant groups;
3. Helen Keller became an outspoken socialist in her adult years;
4. There is a high probability that Betsy Ross did not make first American flag;
5. Our country's first major motion film, The *Birth of a Nation,* was purposely made to hold Blacks down;
6. Reconstruction era Southern Democrats encouraged and supported the KKK;
7. A high probability exists that U.S. involvement in Nicaragua and Cuba helped encourage totalitarian dictators to come to rise in those countries;
8. Reconstruction era Republicans were the original champions of Civil Rights and equality for Black people;
9. Reconstruction era Republicans freed the slaves; and
10. The U.S. sent troops to help squash the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

Although respondents reported not being as comparatively surprised by the contribution of Reconstruction era Republicans, a clear majority said they were nonetheless baffled as to what happened over the years that caused Republicans to drop the multicultural ball and allow Democrats to become champions of minority rights. Sixty-nine percent identified the question as a missing gap in their learning. The study also looked at how responses varied according to selected demographic factors.

Presenter

Franklin Thompson is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His academic areas of expertise are in race relations, multicultural education, at-risk youth, and counseling. He is a former social studies high school teacher and counselor. He earned a bachelor's degree in social studies from UNL, a master's degree in counseling from UNO, and a specialist degree in educational administration from the University of southern Mississippi. His doctoral degree in Educational Administration was earned in December of 1996. In addition, Thompson is a local politician serving as the district 6 representative for the Omaha City County.