My CCT Journey to Become a History Teacher and Creativity and Art in a Facing History Classroom - The Holocaust and Human Behavior Curriculum

Amy McLaughlin-Hatch
Abstract: I did not always know I wanted to be a history teacher. I arrived at this place by taking a circuitous route and coming full circle three times in my journey of self-discovery. Obtaining my master’s degree after choosing to be a stay at home mother and discovering my professional identity was challenging. My family had been one of the pioneers in the charter school movement in the mid-1990’s and my children enrolled in the Ben Franklin Classical Charter Public School (BFCCPS). The experience sparked my desire to have a career in education. I became a parent leader and participated in all aspects of the charter school. My first circle occurred as I was researching possible careers in education and returned to BFCCPS as part of the process to finish my CCT coursework. I had a meeting with the Head of School and learned I could become a certified high school teacher in Massachusetts with my bachelor’s degree in political science. I loved history and current events and knew I was on the right career path. During my research for a career in education I reached out to an old friend, the head of the history department at our high school alma mater. He suggested I begin substitute teaching there in hopes a long term substitute position would open and it did. I got the job. My second circle happened when I became a high school history teacher at North Attleboro High School.
My third and final circle began with my first CCT course when I met Jennifer Jones-Clark of Facing History and Ourselves during Larry Blum’s course. I was so inspired by Jennifer and their pedagogy, I knew from that moment on, I wanted Facing History to be a part of my future work. Facing History is a nonprofit educational institute that provides students with the ability to make personal connections to history by learning about themselves. I obtained a full time teaching position at Southeastern Regional Vocational Technical High School (SERVTHS) and in my fifth year of teaching I met Jennifer again. The next school year, I began teaching Facing History, the Holocaust and Human Behavior course to my students. I designed my own curriculum using the Facing History pedagogy. Their motto is “People make choices and choices make history.” Students critically analyze the Holocaust and learn about the social injustices that allowed it to happen. The Holocaust is one of the darkest chapters in the history of humankind and I have designed lessons to incorporate art and creativity into my course. It is through student created art they express themselves and hopefully find joy and beauty in this heavy topic.

In my desire to understand the Holocaust fully and share this knowledge with my students, I have devoted all of my professional development for the past five years to this endeavor. I enrolled in seminars at Facing History, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Georgetown University and a variety of others courses and trainings. I have traveled with teachers to Holocaust sites in Germany and Poland. My recent professional development culminated with study and travel at the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel. My learning continues as a student at Seton Hill University in their Genocide and Holocaust Studies graduate certificate program. It is my hope that others may find inspiration and guidance to their own fulfilling career though my journey of self-discovery. It is my wish to provide teachers with ideas and tools to incorporate art and creativity in their own history lessons. Finally, by sharing my love of learning, teaching and passion to become a Holocaust scholar it is my desire to motivate others to follow their dreams. My CCT motto, “Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it.” Goethe.

\*The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.\*