

This is the authors accepted manuscript (AAM) of:

Allen, A. (in press). Historical narratives and place-based education as a catalyst for social change. In Allen, A., Kavanagh, A.M., & Ni Cassaithe, C. *Beyond single stories: Changing narratives for a changing world*. Information Age Publishing.

Multiple perspectives and place-based education as a catalyst for social change

A single story is dangerous and limits critical understandings of people and their lives (Adichie, 2016). Unfortunately, a single story, a dominant narrative, typically takes the front seat in social studies standards and textbooks. This single story is especially present in the narrative surrounding slavery, civil rights, and mass incarceration in the United States. Although slavery was officially abolished in the United States more than 150 years ago, its history remains unresolved and shapes our current times (Sharpe, 2016). Educators are faced with the challenge of engaging in work that disrupts and challenges Whiteness (a social identity that superiorizes those racialized as white) and hate (Love, 2019). In this study, I share details of how place-based education (PBE) offers an opportunity for teachers to respond to this challenge by constructing experiences that enable students to interpret racism present in their world.

While it is possible to teach beyond a single story through the use of perspective recognition and engaging lessons about past events that generate student interest in a topic as a part of normal classroom instruction, this goal becomes much easier when students are able to participate in an experience that diminishes the effects of time or distance (Alberts & Niendorf, 2017). For example, it is significantly easier for students to visualize the harmful impact of slavery, the Civil War, and reconstruction when standing with present-day self-proclaimed reparatationists in an upstairs room in the Green-Meldrim House in Savannah. According to locals, this room is where Gen. William T. Sherman met with local black leaders to create Field Order 15, the plan commonly known as "40 acres and a mule," enacted after the Civil War but later repealed.

During a two-week J-Term (often referred to as Winter term) experience examining the impact of the Civil Rights Movement in the US on racial inequality, high school seniors (ages 17-18) participated in a course that combined location and academic coursework. As the primary instructor, I used program structure and robust pedagogy to intentionally create a focused learning environment where students engaged with historical events while centered in the places those events occurred with the aim of disrupting the single story often told. This single story is the dominant narrative presented throughout the south and in many textbooks (Duncan et al., 2020).

Based on data collected on this trip, this qualitative study highlights the experiences of a group of high school seniors who engaged in PBE to answer the question, "How does knowing and thinking about the narratives of history we have available impact our ability to make sense of and act in the present?" Believing, as Pipitone (2018) does, that PBE experiences "can be put to work in the current political movement when social change beckons" (p. 56), this course was intended to help students use perspective recognition to make connections between the history of racial tensions in the United States with current events and provide space for students to consider their role as local community members and citizens. To describe the connections made by students during this PBE experience, I utilize the five dimensions of place identified by Gruenewald (2003) as a framework. Analyzing the data collected will help determine whether the goal of the course was achieved. This study has implications for other educators attempting to construct place-based history education experiences that reimagine the field of social studies.

The dangers of teaching history as a single story

Telling history through a single perspective is dangerous and limits critical understandings about events and people groups of the past (Adichie, 2016). Consideration of multiple perspectives is not always a part of history education, and complex events are simplified to an extent that students are asked to digest a false ideal of history. For example, studies show that less than half of social studies teachers in the United States assign reading materials outside the class textbook (Russell, 2012; Wade, 2002). This is problematic because textbooks often oversimplify heroes (Loewen, 2008) and present history as a singular story, resulting in a mythic version of history that marginalizes, excludes, and silences the voices and perspectives of many (Loewen, 2008). Beyond this, research demonstrates American History textbooks focus exclusively on Eurocentric narratives (Aldrige, 2006; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Foner, 2010; Litner, 2007; Shear et al., 2015; Thornton, 1991).

There are consequences for teaching history in a traditional, Eurocentric manner. Not only do standards outlined by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) (1994) argue for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, but not including multiple perspectives is harmful to students. An absence of multiple perspectives leaves out significant contributions made by BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) individuals and groups, leading to oppressive experiences for BIPOC students (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Ferreras-Stone, 2022). Students who do not see themselves reflected in school curriculum may internalize the message that they are unwelcome in their schools and communities (Ferreras-Stone, 2020). Further, one goal of social studies education is the development of participatory and justice-oriented citizens that have agency and can act in their communities (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). If part of developing agency in students is recognition of alternate positions and actions that could be taken (Levstik & Barton, 1997), without presenting history from multiple perspectives, this goal cannot be realized. As a result, acknowledgment of multiple perspectives through the inclusion of marginalized voices should be a critical component of PBE education efforts (Lim, 2010).

Perspective recognition

Treating actors in events of the past as though they were the same as us in the present day makes understanding impossible, and making sense of events in the past can only be achieved by recognizing how the perspectives of people in the past may be different from our own. However, providing reasons for others' behavior is not enough if the goal is to understand their actions (Endacott, 2010). Consideration of how others felt is also important since feelings profoundly impact human behavior. While this understanding is often referred to as *historical empathy* (Brooks, 2011; Endacott, 2014; Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Foster & Yeager, 1998; Lee & Ashby, 2001) or *perspective-taking* (Seixas et al., 2015), another way to think about ideas that encompass both empathy and perspective but avoid the implication that students are able to take on another's perspective is *perspective recognition* (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

Perspective recognition is understanding the goals, intentions, beliefs, and attitudes of others and taking those into consideration when interpreting historical events and contextualizing individuals' actions (Barton & Levstik, 2004). It is comprised of five different components, including (1) a recognition of the otherness of people beyond oneself, (2) a recognition that others' perspectives are normal and make sense, (3) the ability to historically contextualize these perspectives, (4) an understanding that throughout history, people and groups have had a variety of values, attitudes, and beliefs and often come into conflict because of them, and, (5) a recognition of the connection between our own perspectives and historical context. Perspective recognition also requires that students care: *care about* people of the past, *care that* specific

events took place, *care for* people in history, and *care to* change our beliefs. The perspectives of others are integral in understanding history, but it is also essential that students are “concerned with what happened to [others] and how they experienced their lives” (p. 208). Theoretically, once students have obtained a better understanding of historical events, they should *care to* put that learning into practice.

In a study conducted by Brooks (2011), high school students participated in various instructional techniques, including lectures, secondary source work, primary source work, and discussion. Observation of these techniques indicated that the teacher sought to encourage perspective recognition and care through teaching methods and resources. Of the four students included in the study, all demonstrated both perspective recognition and care as encouraged by the teacher but, at times, failed to show empathy as well. Further, the study (Brooks, 2011) showed that student care extended beyond the classroom and began to inform students’ thinking on current events.

Recognizing that the values, attitudes, beliefs, and intentions of others may be different from your own can be seen as the starting point for mutual understanding and meaningful communication (Barton & Levstik, 2004), and students can recognize that others have perspectives different from their own. Not only is perspective recognition a necessity for meaningful engagement with historical events, but it may also help prepare students to become active and engaged citizens. Recognition of multiple perspectives is indispensable in a pluralist democracy (Barton & Levstik, 2004). As students develop the skills of perspective recognition, they learn to critically examine their own worldview as historically and geographically situated. While many pedagogical approaches help students develop these skills, PBE provides unique opportunities for students to see historical and current events from different viewpoints.

Place-based history education

Many researchers have proposed frameworks for understanding people’s experiences with places. Relph (1976) suggests three components are required to conceptualize place: physical setting, human activities, and meaning. Others suggest alternative dimensions, including social, physiographic, and psychological (Gustafson, 2001; Matthews, 1992). Within education specifically, Sobel (1994) defines PBE as “the process of using the local community and environment as a starting place to teach concepts” (p. 7). Gruenewald (2003) builds on this idea by describing the concepts that places can teach: “places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy” (p. 621). Despite established agreement that PBE is valuable in school settings (Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald et al., 2007; Strait, 2012), it remains uncommon (Alberts & Niendorf, 2017). However, PBE, especially when applied to social studies, provides a powerful platform for exploring a range of historical and contemporary issues. Historicity is a significant part of place identity (Lim, 2010). Research also shows historical objects and sites can challenge students to make sense of the past (Barca & Pinto, 2006; Cooper, 2004; Levstik et al., 2008), demonstrating how place-based *history* education allows students the opportunity to examine issues that resonate in their world today by affording them the chance to interrogate, examine, and uncover the historical roots of these issues.

Grimshaw and Mates (2022) consider the effects of PBE on students between the ages of eight and ten. While visiting local mines to learn about the history of their community, researchers observed children’s sustained interest and engagement in the topic and even commented on the intellectual empowerment experienced by some students. They conclude that a benefit of PBE is that it helps “children gain a better sense of their own identities” (p. 34) as they grapple with class and regional stigma and a need to combat it.

Investigating the question, “How do history teachers and students interpret evidence of a historic site?” Pinto (2013) considers what kind of historical thinking seventh and tenth-grade students develop through direct contact with a place. This study shows some students are able to contextualize information, making inferences based on prior knowledge. In contrast, others demonstrated emerging and explicit historical consciousness, recognizing their contextualized interpretation as a key component of historical understanding. Pinto (2013) concludes that visiting heritage sites “might improve multiple competencies in youngsters, particularly in the context of historical understandings” (p. 133).

With undergraduate students, Alberts and Niendorf (2017) travel to Germany as part of an interdisciplinary study abroad program. During their course, they find evidence of how being in the place where historical events happened affects student learning and historical thinking about the Holocaust and the Berlin Wall. For example, experiencing a place firsthand allowed students to see multiple interpretations of past events and led to an understanding that different perspectives about a historical event must be integrated to understand it fully. As a result of the PBE experience, students learned that “material taught is often selective and that we interpret it through the filters we have obtained from previous education” (Alberts & Niendorf, 2017, p. 148).

Ultimately, studies have shown that PBE generally results in empathy for and greater awareness of others (e.g. Soria et al., 2014; Ramirez, 2013). Chapman and Facey (2004) contend that history teachers are responsible for instilling a sense of historical consciousness, the ability to critically analyze historical events, their causes, and consequences (Rusen, 2004), in their students. When woven together with the inclusion of multiple narratives and perspective recognition, place-based history education has the potential to achieve this goal by demonstrating how student conceptions of the present are affected by the way they interpret the past.

Theoretical framework: Gruenewald’s five dimensions of place

In his assertion that humans should examine how places impact culture and identity and embrace our role as place-makers, Gruenewald (2003) suggests five dimensions of place that can be used to critically analyze PBE. These dimensions include perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological. To describe the ways student learning was influenced by visiting the places where events occurred in this J-Term experience, I utilize the five dimensions of place identified by Gruenewald (2003) as a framework.

The first dimension, *perceptual*, suggests that people are able to perceive places and learn directly from these interactions. However, our ability to do this can be either helped or hindered by educational experiences. The second dimension, *sociological*, ties place with the lived experiences of humans and enables us to consider place as a cultural product that can be unpacked for cultural meaning. The third dimension, *ideological*, centers on relationships of power and the way place facilitates and legitimizes ideologies. The fourth dimension, *political*, considers place within a global context of power, struggle, and resistance and is attentive to what life looks like for those on the margin. The fifth dimension, *ecological*, explores how modern economies function in ways that damage and destroy the ecosystems supporting human and non-human activities. Using these five dimensions of place as a guide, I will discuss specific places encountered during the course and the related experiences of students present during the PBE experience.

This study builds on previous work in the field by considering students’ ability to engage in perspective recognition through the introduction of multiple narratives as part of a PBE

experience. Beyond that, it provides researchers and educators with an example of PBE to improve understanding of what the theory of the five dimensions of PBE looks like in practice (Gruenewald, 2003).

Methodology

This study examines, through qualitative analysis of student reflections, the experiences of students engaged in PBE. These experiences, which integrated the presentation of multiple narratives and ideas underlying perspective recognition, are overlaid with the five dimensions of PBE outlined by Gruenewald (2003) and potentially help educators and researchers unpack this theory through real-life examples.

Context and participants

This study took place at a small private Christian school in the southern United States. Within the United States, southern states are generally referred to as the “Bible Belt” due to the abundance of churches and the impact of Christianity in this region (Brunn et al., 2011). The participants included five high school seniors who were involved in the launch of a J-Term program. In this case, the initial offering consisted of a course titled “Civil Rights and the Gospel: Why We Still Have Work To Do.” It included three full days on campus as well as nine days of travel to Savannah, Georgia; Montgomery, Alabama; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

As an administrator at the private school at the time of the study, I designed the course and served as the primary instructor. Additionally, it seems important to note I am a white female and was working part-time as an adjunct social studies methods instructor at a large university in the south. Other faculty participants on the trip included the headmaster of the school and the chair of the theology department. In Georgia, an art historian from a local university also accompanied the group. Her expertise informed many of the planned outings.

During the course, students were asked to engage in the experiences while keeping the reflection prompt below in mind. At the end of the two-week course, students are asked to write a reflection on course experiences.

How does knowing and thinking about the narratives of history we have available impact our ability to make sense of and act in the present? Throughout this course, we will attempt to answer this question, especially as it relates to the history of the Civil Rights Movement and our responsibility to love our neighbors... so, while the above question has greater implications, for this course we might ask: How do the narratives of the civil rights movement we have available impact our ability to make sense of and act in the present? The question students are asked to reflect on helps answer the research question, “What are the experiences of students engaged in PBE?” by identifying the ways the course materials and places visited impacted students’ perspective recognition and their development of historical consciousness (Rusen, 2004).

Data sources and analysis

Data sources for the study include course materials and written reflections from student participants about the question posed above. After an initial read-through, I engaged in line-by-line coding (Morse, 1994) of the data sources. Initially, I looked for sentences, phrases, or vignettes that aligned with Gruenewald’s (2003) five dimensions of place (each assigned a specific color). Using highlighters, I physically coded the data using the assigned color codes. I then examined this highlighted data looking for instances where the themes, the five dimensions of place, become visible in student reflections through connections with physical places encountered during the course.

Connections to the Five Dimensions of Place

In examining the roots of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement through PBE, students observed that different voices, perspectives, and experiences were absent from how they originally interpreted these events, moving students away from the idea that history is a single story. Through data analysis, connections between Gruenewald's (2003) five dimensions of place, the places encountered during the course, and the experiences of students emerged. Below, I have included selected vignettes that illustrate these connections.

Perceptual

In describing the perceptual dimension of place, Gruenewald (2003) says "a theory of place that is concerned with the quality of human-world relationships must first acknowledge that places themselves have something to say. Human beings, in other words, must learn to listen" (p. 624).

To tell the story of the Civil Rights Movement in the US, you must start at the beginning: slavery. That is why, on our first day in Savannah, I scheduled a tour of the sacred places where enslaved Africans dwelled between 1751 and 1864. On this tour with a well-known and respected African-American storyteller, participants were asked to listen to what these places had to say. We visited a port where enslaved Africans were forced to first unload the ballast stones used to weigh slave trade ships down during the journey across the Atlantic, then use these stones to build the roads they would travel on during their journey to the slave market. The roads built with ballast stones still exist. If you listen, they are telling the beginning of the story of race relations in the United States, and students on this trip were listening. In her reflection, one student said,

It is one thing to read about the history from a textbook while sitting in a classroom, but it is an entirely different and better experience to go where the history was and see that it is still here today. The physical experience of walking through Savannah emphasizes the stories of slavery, pain, and hatred were real and are still in effect today.

Providing the opportunity to listen to these places proved to be deeply impactful to students on the trip. This was evident when students discussed their senior research projects. One student's project drew on this experience and was titled "It's not my voice that needs to be heard: How community, suffering, and listening can flourish into racial reconciliation." In her course reflection, she said,

The biggest takeaway for me is that there is still work to be done. There are still stories that need to be recognized and told... I kind of want to work with [local organizations]... so that we can bring even more attention to the history and injustices that have been done in our city.

This PBE experience helped develop this student's ability to listen to a place and perceive what it had to say. Gruenewald suggests, "A fundamental paradox of place, then, is that although we can experience it everywhere, everywhere it recedes from consciousness as we become engrossed in our routines in space and time" (p. 622). In this case, traveling somewhere new enabled her to make connections and reveal new insights about a place, her hometown, with which she was deeply familiar.

Sociological

The sociological dimension ties place with the lived experiences of humans. "Becoming aware of social places as cultural products requires that we bring them into our awareness for conscious reflection and unpack their particular cultural meanings" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 626).

Traveling into the deep south requires an understanding of unique cultural and social practices. In preparation for the trip, students and teachers spent the first two days in the classroom reading and discussing materials that would help us gain an understanding of relevant issues. One of these readings included a blog post titled “How Dixie’s History Got Whitewashed” (Levin, 2017) that highlights the role of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in the south. The UDC saw themselves as the overseers of how history was taught to future generations in high school and college. Often this was done by authorizing textbooks that portrayed the Confederacy favorably and rejecting textbooks they felt were a threat to the memory of the Confederate soldier. The UDC also organized monument dedications and raised money to support aging Confederate veterans.

One way this role manifested in our experiences of physical spaces was evident when we visited Laurel Grove Cemetery: both Laurel Grove North and Laurel Grove South. In Laurel Grove North, we see the result of the “lost cause” and “states’ rights” narratives artfully woven after the Civil War to justify the exoneration and glorification of Confederate soldiers and the Confederate cause, myths still taught throughout schools in the south thanks to efforts by the UDC. In Laurel Grove North, we found a marble sculpture dedicated to the Confederate dead, while at our feet are dozens of pristine and well-preserved graves marked with the dates of the battle of Gettysburg: July 1-3, 1863. On the other side of this segregated cemetery, Laurel Grove South, we saw a wooden sign mostly obscured by overgrown plants designating “Slave Burials.” In this space, we found only a handful of primarily unmarked graves of the enslaved, those who died in obscurity and have remained silenced for over a century. A larger field with no markers was dedicated to “strangers.” Referencing this experience, a student says,

Laurel Grove cemetery remains segregated as much as the surrounding communities, not in law but in reality. The white side well funded and well kept, while the black community remains poor [sic].... We cannot always trust the history that is told to us by those in power because oftentimes the history told by the powerful helps maintain their power and change the narrative of truth. We understand the African-American community is a historically oppressed community... that comes from a neglect of their side of history and an unwillingness to admit the truth. You cannot have healing without truth.

As students unpacked the cultural meanings of this segregated cemetery, one side well-kept while the other, even in the spaces that are cared for and maintained, visibly showed a wealth disparity, they brought into their consciousness the ramifications of slavery and the Civil War that continue to affect those living the present.

Ideological

The third dimension, *ideological*, centers on relationships of power and the way place facilitates and legitimizes ideologies. “One function of space,” Gruenwald (2003) says, “is hegemonic: Domination is maintained not through material force but through material forms” (p. 628). Historically, history is told from a single Eurocentric perspective (Aldrige, 2006; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Foner, 2010; Litner, 2007; Shear et al., 2015). Other voices are silenced. When we engage with places with problematic undertones without questioning the presented narrative, we become complicit in a process that legitimizes the ideology embedded in these material places.

In all three cities visited on this trip, students experienced places that told history in both ways. After reading an article from the New York Times, “Enslaved People Lived Here. These Museums Want You to Know” (Mzezewa, 2019), we visited the Owens Thomas House, a

historic home in Savannah that has actively worked to change the narrative of their tour experiences by giving voice to those who were enslaved (Mzezewa, 2019). Others, like the Confederate monument in Forsyth Park, highlighted white stories and ignored all other perspectives despite calls from the community to do so (Curl, 2019).

This experience was also profoundly impactful to students. As future place makers, it is essential to teach students to question the places they engage in: Whose voice is heard? Who is silenced? Students heard and internalized this message. In his course reflection, one student commented,

History has been suppressed in order to maintain a false sense of security and act as a shield against difficult issues... but hearing different perspectives on racial issues builds relationships and humanizes people... The only way to have racial reconciliation is to hear from those affected by it.

While this trip took students to places outside their local communities, throughout the course, students referred back to things they could do to “make places” that gave voice to those silenced in their hometown.

Political

The fourth dimension, *political*, considers place within a global context of power, struggle, and resistance and is attentive to what life looks like for those on the margin. During our time in Montgomery, Alabama, we had the opportunity to not only retrace the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, which directly led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but also to visit the Equal Justice Initiative, which traces black history from enslavement to mass incarceration. These two places highlight the political dimension of place by shining a spotlight on the struggle experienced by people of color as well as highlighting the resistance they engaged in. On their website, EJI acknowledges that this is indeed their goal: creating a physical space that represents the struggle and resistance experienced by people of color. They say,

For more than a decade, EJI has been conducting extensive research into the history of racial injustice and the narratives that have sustained injustice across generations. Our new museum is the physical manifestation of that research.

These two experiences were extremely compelling for the students on the trip. In response to our visit to Selma, one student said:

One of the people who shared their story was John Wheeler¹ who drove us around Montgomery and along the route of the march from Selma that was led by Martin Luther King Jr. He actually walked one of the five days of the march! Mr. Wheeler brought the history to life through his personal experience. He also talked about how he still feels the effects of segregation and racism today. Personally, I had never drawn the connection that the Civil Rights Movement happened so recently, so it makes more sense to me now why so many people are still hurting. It has been truly powerful to hear the first hand accounts of people who lived through this history. Through learning the past, we can work to reconcile the future.

In response to visiting The Legacy Museum at EJI, another student said:

[We need to] bring more attention to the history and injustices done in our city. Now that I've been to cities that have monuments, museums, and historical markers (that aren't perfect but at least they are there), I have an idea of what [our city] could potentially be and I want to be a part of making that a reality.

¹ All names included are pseudonyms.

In both cases, seeing the spaces where political struggles took place or where they were memorialized affected students in meaningful ways: in one case, gently but visibly shifting her belief system, and in the other, deepening her resolve to not only know more but to educate others and bring change to her own city.

Ecological

The fifth dimension, *ecological*, explores how modern economies function in ways that damage and destroy the ecosystems supporting human and non-human activities. Closer to home, students made a day trip to the Greenwood District, the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre site. In this neighborhood, students witnessed the aftermath and lasting impact of not only the Massacre but also the result of environmental racism (Bullard, 1996) in the form of interstate highway routes designed by state and local governments (with federal acquiescence) to destroy urban African-American communities (Rothstein, 2017). Beyond government involvement, highway planners did not hide their racial motivations. Rothstein explains, "In 1949, the American Road Builders Association wrote to President Truman that if interstates were properly routed through metropolitan areas, they could 'contribute in a substantial manner to the elimination of slum and deteriorated areas'" (p. 128). The Greenwood District is an example of an ecosystem steeped in an ecological dimension of place - not only the physical place occupied by the interstate highway routes but the role of a modern economy that deliberately and openly supported white human activities while destroying African-American neighborhoods in the name of economics. In protest, civil rights groups often used the slogan "urban renewal means [African-American] removal" (Rothstein, 2017, p. 127).

In his reflection, one student said: "Institutions of government have failed to remember and tell the story of the African-American community." I would argue they have not failed to remember - spaces such as Tulsa clearly reveal an intentional desire to suppress - but in this statement, there is a clear recognition that some stories are not being told. He continues, as we see in interstate highway systems, "Systemic racism is still prevalent... across the country." In response to this existence of systemic racism, he says,

This trip has challenged me not just to listen but to act. The people we have met [on this trip] have shown us what action looks like. It involves educating others, having genuine conversations with people, doing so in a loving manner and understanding your own personal biases in order to combat them properly.

Indeed, he has already moved forward with moving to educate others. In his senior research project, this student tackled political and economic issues surrounding the current immigration crisis in a presentation given to our community at large. In staying true to his definition of action, he took time to engage in genuine conversations around the topic after his presentation.

Discussion

Gruenwald and colleagues (2007) suggest that "places become windows to understanding social and cultural practices, as well as contexts for the practice of democracy" (p. 235). If we want students to be citizens capable of action, then it is crucial that we examine the historical roots of current systems of oppression and inequality and ensure that the perspectives of those too often marginalized or misrepresented are included. As seen in the examples shared above, PBE, and more specifically, place-based history education, is one approach that allows for the inclusion of these voices.

Questioning a single story

We must avoid teaching history in a traditional, Eurocentric manner. There are consequences for teaching history in this way, and it affects students' ideas about the past and their understanding of why the present is as it is. As indicated when discussing the ideological dimension above, since a single story is also frequently presented at historical sites, it is vital to equip students with the skills needed to question the presented narrative. Students in this study were able to recognize the censorship of multiple narratives and even suggest reasons why this censorship happens, saying things like "History has been suppressed in order to maintain a false sense of security and act as a shield against difficult issues," and "We cannot always trust the history that is told to us by those in power because oftentimes the history told by the powerful helps maintain their power and change the narrative of truth." In thinking through what they knew and did not know, students often considered what stories might be missing from their own communities and considered how they might make change when they returned home, saying things like "I kind of want to work with [local organizations]... so that we can bring even more attention to the history and injustices that have been done in our city."

One thing that may have helped students engage in this sort of thinking was the reflection question that guided the PBE experience. Students were asked to consider, "How do the narratives of the civil rights movement we have available impact our ability to make sense of and act in the present?" Without asking questions about the places they interact with, visitors become complicit in a process that legitimizes the ideology embedded in these material places. Some questions to consider when visiting a physical site, with or without students, include:

- Who is represented in this narrative?
- Who is excluded?
- Who held the power here?
- Who did not?
- How did the power manifest itself?
- How is this place connected to me?
- How is this place connected to my community?

Related, educators should not avoid overt discussions on issues of race, inequality, and oppression. The students in this study were open to these conversations and made that clear in their reflections. One student implied talking about race was helpful, not harmful, saying, "hearing different perspectives on racial issues builds relationships and humanizes people." In contrast to research that indicates teachers are unsure how to talk about race and instead choose to avoid it (Farrago, 2017; Ohito, 2016; Sapon-Shevin, 2017), this study shows that students are not looking for teachers to shy away from the truth. As one student put it, "You cannot have healing without truth." These comments suggest teachers should fully embrace the social utility of teaching history, make a deliberate effort to link the past to the present, and seize opportunities to tackle controversial and emotive issues (Kitson & McCully, 2005).

Engaging in perspective recognition

Students in this study demonstrated multiple ways they engaged in aspects of perspective recognition (Barton & Levstik, 2004). By the end of the two weeks, students seemed more aware of and acknowledged the multiplicity of historical perspectives. Of particular note, a majority of students recognized the otherness of people beyond themselves and gained an understanding that individuals have a variety of experiences that lead to a variety of values, attitudes, and beliefs. While there may have been multiple reasons students could engage in these aspects of perspective recognition, the introduction of multiple narratives through listening to stories present in the places students visited seemed particularly helpful in achieving this goal. Student

reflections mentioned the importance of hearing individual accounts of historical events, saying things like, “There are still stories that need to be recognized and told,” “The only way to have racial reconciliation is to hear from those affected by it,” and “It has been truly powerful to hear the first hand accounts of people who lived through this history.” All of these examples indicate a need to listen to individual perspectives but also emphasize a plurality: *stories*, to hear from *those*, first hand *accounts*.

Students were also aware that contemporary views held by people are shaped by historical context. In reflecting on the legacy of segregation present in Laurel Grove North and Laurel Grove South, one student said, “We understand the African-American community is a historically oppressed community... that comes from a neglect of their side of history and an unwillingness to admit the truth.” In this instance, the student shows an understanding that the present state of a still segregated cemetery, “not in law but in reality,” is the result of past events, and he was able to make connections between the past and the present. Another student said, “I had never drawn the connection that the Civil Rights Movement happened so recently, so it makes more sense to me now why so many people are still hurting.” This comment further demonstrates how students interpreted contemporary views based on an increasing understanding of historical context and made connections between events in the past and events happening in the present.

Barton and Levstik (2004) also identify that students should “care about” the people and events of the past. Students should be encouraged to use this newly gained historical knowledge to take action in the present. In other words, having gained a better understanding of the past, students should “care to” put their learning into practice. Again a majority of students in this study showed this care following the PBE experience, as seen in the quotes below:

“This trip has challenged me not just to listen but to act.”

“I kind of want to work with [local organizations]... so that we can bring even more attention to the history and injustices that have been done in our city.”

“Now that I’ve been to cities that have monuments, museums, and historical markers (that aren’t perfect but at least they are there), I have an idea of what [our city] could potentially be and I want to be a part of making that a reality.”

These examples demonstrate how PBE which includes visiting historical sites outside students’ own communities has the potential to help students develop historical knowledge and “care” for people and events of the past and bring those notions of care home with them.

Promise of place-based history education

This study builds on the foundation of PBE (Sobel, 1994; Gruenewald, 2003) and sets place-based history education as a possible foundation on which to include multiple perspectives by highlighting stories that historically have not been told, building an avenue of disruption and creating social change. In doing so, teachers can utilize PBE as an opportunity to decenter dominant, traditional narratives.

From the beginning of the two-week experience, one student was skeptical about why this course was relevant and even combative and resistant to engaging in some of the readings, frequently referring to her parents’ belief system as evidence that the readings were biased or patently untrue. By the end of the course, outwardly, I witnessed a change not only in her actions but in her words when she reflected, “it is an entirely different and better experience to go where the history was... walking through Savannah emphasizes the stories of slavery, pain, and hatred were real.” Her emphasis on the “real” stands in direct contrast to an attitude that tended toward disbelief at the beginning of the experience.

Beyond this, throughout her reflection, she mentioned the deep impact of speaking with people in those places, like our guide in Selma, who openly shared their present-day experiences with racism. She said, “It has been truly powerful to hear the first hand accounts of people who lived through this history. Through learning the past, we can work to reconcile the future.” Another student suggested that participating in this trip has not only changed her thinking but given her specific ideas on how to take action in her own community, like working to educate others, listening to the voices of the marginalized, and working to understand personal bias. These potential actions exemplify the disruption and change that can be achieved through place-based history education that explicitly addresses present injustice.

Conclusion

A single story, a dominant narrative, is often displayed throughout the story of slavery, civil rights, and mass incarceration in the United States. As a result, educators must be called upon to engage in work that disrupts and challenges Whiteness and hate, reimagining social studies as a space that reckons with difficult history and provides students with the tools they need to disrupt the status quo and create social change. Place-based education has the potential to assist teachers in responding to this challenge by developing academic course experiences that help students interpret the racism present in the world around them.

While this study builds on existing research about PBE (Alberts & Niendorf, 2017; Grimshaw & Mates, 2022; Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald et al., 2007; Pinto, 2013; Sobel, 1994; Strait, 2012), by considering one example of how PBE can use multiple narratives and perspective recognition to disrupt dominant narratives, there is a need for further studies that consider the ways in which PBE offers an avenue for teachers to move beyond a single story and reimagine the way social studies should be taught. Studies that consider the way all five dimensions of PBE outlined by Gruenewald (2003) are present within a single site or students’ hometowns would be especially helpful. Additionally, there is a need for longitudinal studies that consider the long-term impact of PBE on student ideology. While the examples provided here demonstrate the potential for PBE in disrupting dominant narratives, it is unclear whether these disruptions have a lasting impact on students or whether these experiences motivate students to take action.

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