

ComUNIDADES: The power of our stories

Comunidad=Community Unidades=Units



My students at art exhibit at Assumption college



My students shopping for ingredients at Compare on Main Street



My students interviewing elders at Centro in Main South



Dr. Cuberes speaking to my students about Catalan independence



José Castillo teaching music to my students



My students learning about El Salvador and dining at Fuente de



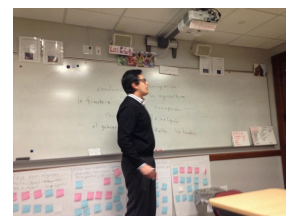
Vida



My students in dance class



Cooking class meals



Dr. Loustanau digging deep into the history of his native México

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Professional/Curriculum Development Proposal

INTRODUCCIÓN

For more than 10 years there has been an idea itching at me, slowly coalescing beneath the surface of my work at Worcester Academy. As I look back at my job application materials to the school, I see I was already asking what could be possible at the intersection of academics and the life of the city with its diverse communities and enormous human capital. Over the years I have wondered how we could create something native to our school, our history, our students, and our community, something that would be unique and authentic to us. Little by little, I have been working the city into the curriculum by engaging in activities such as: using the local latino newspaper the Vocero Hispano, visiting with classes at elder centers, collaborating with the Latino History Project, bringing in Latin musicians and dance teachers, participating in community events such as health fairs and outreach days with students, visiting the collections of WAM, inviting in many guest speakers, bringing students out to local restaurants and markets to name but a few community-based initiatives. The richness of the resources became even more evident to me last year in the discovery of the rich legacy of students hailing from the Spanish-speaking world in our Latinos of WA project. It was a powerful experience to catalog the more than 350 alums from Latin America and to speak with four of them about their time on the hilltop.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn4b9zqm5R4&list=PLhd56czLoeGryl1_BltHwZznrdyFeQlfv)

These connections have enlivened the curriculum and brought the language into a real context for students and many times provided the authentic audience which is so essential to their engagement. With the new strategic plan also leaning in this direction, I think it is time to bring all of these components together and create a brand new “text” that puts these efforts into a more cohesive and purposeful package, which, perhaps, can serve as a model for others.

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS:

1. **Community-** The most pervasive and important element is using the local community as a text to understand ourselves, WA, the city, and the world at large. There will be a special emphasis on “Open Gates” concepts of bringing people in and getting students out of the classroom for “encuentros”. The goal would be to have an event of this nature at least once a month. Also, the stories of people from the Latino History Project of Worcester and our own oral interviews with alumni will be woven around the topics of the class, in essence becoming the foundation of the text.

2. **Proficiency-** The emphasis will be on what students can ultimately accomplish with their language skills in accordance to ACTFL standards and benchmarks. No longer will the vocabulary and grammar be the center of the work, which is often the case in a traditional text; instead they will become tools of discovery and utility. Students will be evaluated mainly through performance-based assessments many times with the end product oriented towards an external audience (WA and Worcester) The course would integrate the ACTFL five C's (communication, culture, connections, comparisons, communities) as an organizing principle.
3. **Cultural Competencies-** The course will integrate activities that specifically target the cultural competencies that we aspire to inculcate in the students. As a long-time member of the E + I committee these are important topics to our community that I would like to see better integrated in our curriculum.
4. **Service Learning-** Although it is too early to know the exact nature of what the service-learning component will look like in fine detail, I know from past experience that there are many ways that our students can be of use in the community and that the experienced gained in these context are profoundly meaningful.
5. **Mindfulness-** A meditator for almost 25 years myself, I have been including more and more of these centering practices into instruction in the last several years. The effects have been significant and I think that a course that begins with this as an essential building block will have even more profound outcomes for the students.
6. **Portfolio-** An important component of this class would be the careful and purposeful development of a digital portfolio, which will serve to demonstrate student progress (highlighting metacognition), be a resource for the following year's teacher, and be a possible model/playground for what can be done throughout the language department. This is certainly something we have been exploring as a school over the years.
7. **Inquiry-** The purpose of this proposal is seeking support to build out a strong structure to fulfill the goals of instruction, but it will be important to leave space for students genuine inquiry around the topics. They will be asked to engage in real questions about the foundations of community and be expected to pursue their own questions and interests within the framework provided.
8. **Food-** This is language that we all understand and appreciate and invites like nothing else! It is a window into culture and pairs well with conversation and community. Although there are some challenges around kitchen facilities etc, the many times that I have shared my passion for cooking with students have all

yielded outstanding results. Also, this is an important life skill; I have often been surprised about how little experience many students have preparing food. One of the tenets of the class would be planning, shopping for, and preparing meals on a regular basis.

9. **Music-** This is another of the universal languages that will help students enter more fully into the cultures and communities we are investigating. I find that student generally come with almost no concept of the diversity of music in the Spanish-speaking world. The idea would be that students will not only gain some familiarity with the differences at a passive level, but engage with the actual making of music (my friend José Castillo is a wizard at drawing out student who do not think of themselves as musicians).
10. **A New financial model-** Instead of having students purchase any books, the idea would be to assess them with a moderate “class activities” fee. The current \$165 that each student must spend on books that are required for the current 3 Honors class could be brought down to half that amount. Another side benefit is that we will be contributing to the local economy. The fee would provide a budget that could fund such things as:
 - Subscription to Vocero Hispano
 - Multiple class research activities in the field including meals
 - Culturally appropriate snacks or ingredients for food made in class
 - Support for guest speakers/classes (such as dance and music)
 - Support (donation) to WLHP for use of their materials

THE TEXT AND THE CONTEXT:

Audience:

After having considered the correct placement of a course of this nature for many years, I believe that a third year honors level makes the most sense, at least as a starting point. These students have sufficient demonstrated language abilities, that with the help of skillful scaffolding, should allow them to engage in an urban studies/language program.

Organization:

Using the authentic voices of the Latino History project of Worcester (a number of which have been transcribed by my students) as a backdrop, text, and guide, the stories will be a springboard for moving into thematic units (Unidades) that dive deep. In some cases we have reached out to the subjects who have already signaled an interest in continuing the conversation. Stories we have collected from Latino Alumni of WA (which is an ongoing project of mine) also will also be utilized to investigate the many expressions of

the rich hispanic cultures that thrive on our doorstep. Although there will be a great focus on the local, we will also use those stories to reflect on global perspectives and issues to interrogate the home countries and cultures from which they originate. The course framework would be a combination of creation and curation of resources already available.

Although the support I am seeking here is to put flesh on the bones of the concepts enumerated above, let me give just one possible. The course would be designed in concentric circles around the concept of Yo (individual), Nosotros (our communities), Ellos

Example:

After listening to an oral history of a Salvadoran immigrant from archive of LHPW in which food was a recurring theme tied to nostalgia and childhood, we read a story from 'Cuento las pupusas' from the Salvadoran author Roberto Maximilian (perhaps we could even skype with him). We discuss the relationship we have to food, look at its role in our family and community and then contrast and compare it to what we have seen in the story and oral history. We learn vocabulary around food and cooking and take time to review commands. We look at the ingredients that we now use that were only possible after the Columbian exchange and the history of immigration from El Salvador. We invite the subject of the oral history to accompany us to Fuente de vida where we have a Salvadoran meal, speak with the owners and guest while explore the connections we have found already and to the history of their country. We learn to make pupusas there and subsequently make batches during class to sell at lunch one day for the benefit of the Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center of Worcester (<http://www.riacboston.org/location/>). There could be a connections with the Breisacher family, WA alums from the late 70's and native Salvadorans. One of the assessments of student work is information they create around the food, the history, and the work of RIAC in a bilingual video.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS:

1. Professional development. In addition to what the student could potentially gain out of the experience, this will be an amazing opportunity for me to break free of the tyranny of the text and re-design from the ground up, putting into full practice all of those things that I have seen to be most helpful and effective over my 20 years of teaching. This will also be a chance for collaboration across the disciplines.
2. Possible model/playground for other community-based courses

3. If all goes well, the course and its development could make an interesting conference subject at MaFLA and/or ACTFL
4. The course should get the WA name in positive ways into the community as a reciprocal relationship with many stakeholders
5. Service to the community at large
6. Authentic learning in a meaningful context for students
7. Lower the cost of texts by half

STRATEGIC PARTNERS:

This is just a preliminary and partial list of people who have already signaled an interest in helping to develop the course.

Organization	Contact:
Latino History Project of Worcester- Worcester Historical Museum	David Connor- Director of community outreach (former Bancroft teacher)
QCC	José Castillo professor of music
Worcester State University Latino Education Initiative	Hilda Ramirez
Assumption College	Esteban Loustaneau. Spanish professor and practitioner of community-based education
Rosa Carasquillo	Holy Cross

CONCLUSIÓN

The time is now to create a program that is unique to our school and to our community. It would be a course that embodies the spirit of the new strategic plan with rigor, creativity, and community connection at its core, providing an outstanding opportunity for both professional growth and innovative curricular development all in the same package.

Carlos Delhumeau class of 1982 in oral history interview with students

