

How has TAHSC influenced my teaching?

Teaching is a challenging task at times. It should be ever evolving. There should always be an effort to find ways to improve the delivery of information. Student learning and achievement will improve if the delivery system is continuously evaluated. It is essential that teachers engage in professional development that concentrates on content instruction and methods instruction. One without the other is not effective.

As a teacher of 14 years, I have attended many workshops and classes that promoted various strategies and teaching techniques. Most of these things have seemed novel and eventually their effectiveness diminished. I have found that the most effective means of teaching are the ones that focus on relevance. Relevance was the key concept that I got out of the TAHSC class. How does this class relate to what I teach? How will my students relate to what I am teaching? TAHSC showed me that I can find and use primary sources that are more relevant to my students than the standard, garden-variety we have used for so long in our classrooms. For instance, during my lesson about Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts, I was able to share personal letters of Shaw in which he shares his most personal thoughts and feelings about the events in life. By themselves, these letters could have been a great source, but I found an even more interesting primary source that I was able to share. I was able to show the payroll records of my maternal great- great-grandfather (Private Michael Powell Bassett) who served in the 3rd SC Cavalry of the Confederate army. Through some great research on the part of Ashley Stevens, a graduate assistant for TAHSC, it was found that Private Bassett may have fought against the 54th Massachusetts at the Battle of Honey Hill near Hilton Head. Before TAHSC, I probably would not have used such a source in my lesson. This, I feel is a result of the content instruction I received during the summer.

Including primary sources is important to accurately conveying the true impact of events and people. The methods portion of the institute was beneficial because of the strategies we learned. I found it very interesting and it contributed greatly to my enjoyment of the class. I particularly enjoyed the new approaches to analyzing documents to determine their significance. One that particularly stands out was the account of Jehru Jones, a former slave. It was an unusual story as he was a free man and purchased his own son. The theories behind this action were thought provoking and proved to be very interesting. The choice of primary sources showed diversity and showed that there are many different types of ways to use primary sources as an instructional tool.

The most influential impact on my teaching was my partnership with the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Through the genealogy project, my students and I got actively engaged in a quest to relate our curriculum and its many standards to our own lives through our ancestors. While at the Archives on one of the “research” Saturday’s, I did some research of my wife’s family. I made some remarkable discoveries. First, I found her maternal great-great grandfather’s death certificate. John Peter Sanguinetti, was an Italian immigrant who settled in Charleston and died there in 1905. I used this information very prominently in my lesson as we were studying immigration. My students were astounded by the discovery. I was quite happy for such a discovery, but I found something else that was truly amazing. My wife’s maternal grandmother, Vivian Jones MacDonald, lost her mother at an early age—around eight. Several years ago, she told us that upon her mother’s death, she was taken from Charleston and placed in an orphanage in Columbia. Because Vivian now has Alzheimer’s Disease, she has difficulty recalling the events of her life. Using the 1920 and 1930 census records, I located Vivian’s family and discovered what happened to her. In the 1920 census, I found Vivian’s

family two years prior to her birth. In the 1930 census, Vivian's mother was deceased and Vivian was not living in the home. When I searched for Vivian Jones in Richland County, I found her listed as an "inmate." As it turns out, she was a patient at the South Carolina Sanatorium at State Park. Vivian's mother, Katherine Jones, had died of tuberculosis and apparently, they suspected that Vivian had tuberculosis also. I am still investigating the details of Vivian's stay at the Sanatorium. I shared this incredible story with my students as we discussed life in the city. I could actually put a real face on someone who dealt with tuberculosis. From this point, my students were hooked and they all wanted to do their own genealogy. This was one of my biggest successes with a lesson. They completed their generation charts with zeal and are planning on working with me to do their own genealogical research at the Archives.

In the future, I am going to use more relevant primary sources such as genealogy and integrate it with the interviews I know use. In my experiences, the most significant issue I see is the lack of schema in my students. Many have no experiences to draw on and have great difficulty making connections. Making connections is the most essential task a student must complete. If there is no relevance, there can be no connection. It is my desire to find more realistic types of primary sources so that the students can see how they and their relatives are involved in history. With one of my students on a Saturday, we found her maternal great-great grandfather and possibly the man that owned him when he was a slave. I am going to make it a conscious effort to require my students conduct research and discover a primary source of their own. The art and thrill of discovery is something that can inspire students to discover their own family's history. In using primary sources, I am going to make it my goal to use at least one in each unit. I would like to find sources that raise interest and offer students the opportunity to do analysis without becoming overwhelmed or frustrated.