



The TEACHER CENTER of Broome County
Teacher Study Group Grant Award
2002-2003

FINAL REPORT
DOCUMENT PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

STUDY GROUP TOPIC: Fever, 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson

GROUP MEMBERS: Julie Orband, Barbara Welsh, and Stephanie Hodkinson

Describe the initial goal of the group noting any adjustments that had to be made as time passed.

The goal of our group was to create an interdisciplinary unit around the novel Fever, 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson, which would use cross-curricular ideas and skills to assist students in gaining knowledge about Post-Revolutionary America. We planned to present this unit to students over a period of one month, with topics introduced and studied in both English and Social Studies classes. The final culminating project was to be a group research project about a particular aspect of Post-Revolutionary life.

As our group progressed, we made some adjustment to our goal. While we remained committed to creating a cross-curricular unit, we altered the culminating activity to provide a greater element of student input and self-direction. Rather than a group project, we created a Project Grid, allowing students a choice in the topic and type of assignment they completed. Each of 16 tasks in the grid was assigned a point value. Students selected the tasks they preferred in any combination adding up to 100 points.

Describe the ACTION PLAN that the group followed.

Our group began by identifying what we wanted students to learn during the course of this unit. We decided on an introduction to the culture, values, practices, and traditions that existed in the United States following the American Revolution, with special attention paid to the roles of women and African Americans during this period. We also wanted students to make the connection between historical events and the real day-to-day lives of individuals living in this time period. The novel provided relevance that helped students to better understand the events of the time; through the characters' eyes, students were able to imagine themselves living in 1793. From this novel, we also extracted specific topics to be studied in greater detail during Social Studies classes, including the establishment of the Free African Society, the lives of specific individuals who lived during the novel, such as Benjamin Rush, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, etc.; and the relocation of the nation's capital.

Next, we worked to create a culminating activity that would address a variety of learning styles and preferences, and would also allow for student input. We developed a Project Grid, along with detailed descriptions of 16 assignments (see attached). The grid describes 16 assignment choices with corresponding point values. Students would select any combination of assignments totaling at least 100 points. Among the assignments were varied activities, including research, mapping, creative writing, illustration, reader's theater, and timelines, in

order to allow students to become stakeholders in their own education by choosing their own preferred method of learning. While some projects offered the opportunity for group work, most were independent assignments. All of the assignments aligned with the New York State Learning Standards, particularly the English Language Arts and Social Studies standards. The completed assignments would later be graded according to rubrics correlating these standards and benchmarks.

As the unit progressed, our group met to ensure that students were making progress on their culminating projects. While the assignments were designed to challenge students, we needed to make sure that success was achievable in all of the assignments. We adjusted the directions as necessary. We also met ensure that enough work time was scheduled for the students.

Describe how the action plan was implemented.

The Project Grid was given to the students during English class. Students were informed of the due dates and the class time that was to be given in order to work on the projects. They were also provided with detailed project descriptions. Students were then given one school week to decide which projects they would like to complete. When the week ended, students were asked to commit to their desired projects, and their choices were recorded. Since a significant amount of the work and research would take place outside of both English and Social Studies classes, each parent/guardian received a letter explaining the entire unit, complete with a timeline of when projects were to be handed in. This letter was signed by the parent and returned to school. Over the course of two weeks, students had time in both English and Social Studies classes to work on their projects. Students also had the option of working in the library, where materials and resources were provided. Laptop computers were made available to students during these classes as well. In addition, Social Studies and English teachers were available after school for two weeks for students who requested assistance.

How has participating in this study group changed you as a teacher? Have any of your teaching practices changed?

Networking with other teachers has been invigorating for all of us. Having the chance to bounce ideas off of one another has encouraged us to use other teachers as resources in the future. Instructing the students about connections between classes has made them more aware of how their education fits together as a whole, which has been meaningful for the students, as well as us.

What evidence is there that student achievement is improving as a result of participating in this study group? What kind of differences are you observing in your students?

A tremendous number of projects were submitted by the students (about 300+). They have stated that they enjoyed this experience and appreciated having a choice, and have learned “extra” information in the process. In Social Studies class in particular, students have brought up many interesting facts during class discussions, leading to many more meaningful conversations.

What evidence is there that the goals of the study group have/have not been met?

Our group's goal was to create an interdisciplinary unit based on the novel Fever, 1793 which reached across subjects and challenged our students, and we believe that there is evidence to prove that our goal was attained. In observing the students during the unit, all of us were able to see the enthusiasm they had for the projects they were completing. We feel that in allowing students to experience the enjoyment of learning we have accomplished a great thing. The amount of projects submitted as well as degree of effort shown for each project exceeded the level we had initially expected. Lastly, by using both Social Studies and English ideas and skills, students were able to make meaningful connections, which in turn made the material much easier for students to comprehend as well as apply.

Comment on the value of the study group process? Did it work for you?

This study group was very valuable in helping us, as a group of teachers from different backgrounds, in creating a meaningful interdisciplinary unit. By brainstorming together, we were able to come up with many ideas that none of us would have on our own. The process of conveying the material was much more simplified when divided among core subjects, and it also gave us the chance to display the connections that can be made across subjects to our students. In having more than one mind always working to supplement each part of the unit, we progressed more smoothly and at a constant pace. Our group felt that each one of us was a valuable team player, no one more important than the next, which made it very easy to express our ideas as well as our concerns. This experience was a great way to involve teachers, who may not have had the opportunity otherwise to work together, in a small group setting.

How can we make the study group program better?

Our group thought that this program does a good job at pulling everything together. The deadlines were attainable, and the hours flexible enough to provide for every one of our hectic schedules. This study group program is right on target, and easy to complete successfully.