



**The TEACHER CENTER of Broome County**  
**Teacher Study Group Grant Award**  
**2003-2004**

**FINAL REPORT**  
**DOCUMENT PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES**

**STUDY GROUP TOPIC:** Making American History Come Alive

**GROUP MEMBERS:** Thomas Walls, Greg Smith, Suzanne Johnson, and Margaret Hoover

**The final report must be word-processed and submitted both in print and on disk using this form. Include information under each of the following headings.**

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

The group's goal was to revise the present Vestal US history curriculum to emphasize the following teaching techniques:

- Essential Questions
- Differentiated Instruction
- Differentiated Evaluations
- Dimensions of Learning

**Describe the ACTION PLAN that the group followed.**

Our group met for a total of ten hours in which we:

- Created an essential question for the course
- Created essential questions for each unit
- Created differentiated instruction and evaluations for the first two units
- Devised a plan to continue the work during the school year.

**Describe how the action plan was implemented.**

The group worked collaboratively to create the essential questions for the course and the units. The required content for each unit was discussed and the team divided the unit (lessons and evaluation). Each member created a lesson or evaluation that covered the content requirement, but instructed or evaluated based on a specific style of learning. This created two units that addressed different learning styles in both their presentation and their evaluation.

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

My participation in the study group has been useful on a number of levels. Interacting with my colleagues, researching teaching techniques and challenging myself to devise alternative evaluation techniques have all been worthwhile. However, the aspect of this project that I have found to be the most useful would be the creation of essential questions. This technique, which I field-tested this summer in a class at BCC, provides for a tremendous amount of focus by the student and the instructor. It lends itself to both preview and review exercises and allows the student a target to focus their reading on. A significant reflection on this technique is in its usefulness in grading essays. An essay that is based on an essential question such as “To what extent did the civil rights movement solve the problems left by Reconstruction” allows the student to think critically and provide an opinion. This makes reading the essay more interesting. The essay is graded on a basis of how many facts they can use in support of their opinion, rather than whether they agree with the instructor or not. In short the essential questions provide a vehicle in which the students take more ownership of the material. This makes our job as educators easier and more enjoyable.

**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?**

Not applicable until school year begins, but see above paragraph for information regarding the field-testing of these techniques.

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

We were surprised at how much time was dedicated to the essential questions. The course question alone took forty minutes of debate to complete. Although this took time away from the creating of differentiated instruction and evaluations, the fact that there was so much reflection and debate over issues which seem so fundamental and basic, illustrates that the process is useful in focusing all of the team on the same topic for each unit of content.

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

The process was valuable and worked because during the school year it is too difficult to dedicate time to review the curriculum as a whole. Without the pressure of grades, parent phone calls, or administrative evaluations we were able to get back to what brought us in to this profession; a love of history and a passion for teaching. I am looking forward to implementing these ideas in September.

**How can we make the study group program better?**

Give us more time. Ten hours was not enough to overhaul an entire course.