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Scholars Week

May 18th, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Teaching Historic Trauma: Centering the generational trauma of Khmer youth

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Qualitative Findings

Disaggregating education data on Asian ethnic groups

Historical trauma being a community issue, and not

Community disconnect

Reflection

Intellectuals, artists, craftsmen were murdered

Focus on the stigma Khmer

Continued Imagination and

The Khmer Rouge was a political party led by

U.S. American imperialism in Southeast Asia

The lack of literacy of the Khmer language by Khmer

Mental health stigmas in Khmer community

Shifting power to youth of this ethnically

Asia

“erasure of history”

Civilians were forced to do extreme

The past/current forms of resilience of Khmer people

Erasure from conversations around social justice and in

and partnerships

Qualitative research

Emphasize the importance of knowing one’s

Forms of resistance from groups experiencing historical

Normalizing pain but not healing

Attended events relevant to topic

Imagination

Interviews with Khmer

The need to validate and follow the voice of Khmer

other parts of Southeast

the monarchy

Vietnamese government, and

came to power, the

of how the Khmer Rouge

genocide. (Reading: Morelli, P. T. T., (1996). Trauma and Healing: The

Khmer Rouge era and
genocide. (Reading: Morelli, P. T. T., (1996))

Discussions where the Khmer narratives and experiences are not present in education, specifically history and social studies.

Discussion on general timeline of how the Khmer Rouge came to power, the involvement of the Vietnamese government, and the monarchy

The effect of American imperialism on Cambodia and other parts of Southeast Asia during this period

Methods

• Qualitative research
• Interviews with Khmer-American community members and teenagers
• Thematic analysis of interview notes, event notes, and reading notes
• Attended events relevant to topic
• Weekly reflections

“Students having a discussion about the importance of remembering history of the Khmer genocide.”

TRAUMA V. REMEMBERING

Transmission of Trauma v. Resistance Through Storytelling

Communities that have experienced violent trauma can pass this trauma through biology as well as oral storytelling, viewing documentaries, and general interactions, especially within the family household. The way parents and elders who are experiencing PTSD or other mental illnesses due to trauma related to the genocide and diaspora interact with young people (born in the U.S., post-genocide) can also contribute to this transmission of historical trauma. But storytelling and the process of remembering is also used as a form of resistance from erasure and a form of validation of Khmer existence.

Curriculum Outline Draft:

Introduction

Historical Background of the

Khmer Rouge era and

genocide. (Reading: Morelli, P. T. T., (1996))

Discussion on what historical trauma looks like shown by other groups? (This may give students a more tangible experience that will allow them to see their own experiences more concretely).

Writing sessions: Group reflections and personal reflections: (how can we allow pain and healing to be present?) What has healing looked like in the Khmer community? What has resilience looked like in the Khmer community?

The effect of American imperialism on Cambodia and other parts of Southeast Asia during this period

Reflection

What is Historic Trauma? (Reading: Evan-Campbell, T., (2008))

Have students research lecture/reading introducing historic trauma and groups dealing with historical trauma.

Imagination

Give students time to reflect on what the Khmer community, or lack there of, feels like currently.

What kind of representation of Khmer people does our community need? What representation do we already see?

Continued Imagination and Action

Brainstorm organizations and institutions we would like to connect with (team from, teach, engage).

Who are we going to ask for resources from? (Donations/raising for projects and transportation—possible partnerships)

Doing further research and gathering material to create an archive on Khmer-American diaspora and the continuum of Khmer culture outside of Cambodia

The importance of the continuum of Khmer literature and the information it would allow one to access.

Celebrate resilience, progress, and the choice to push back and be resistant to systems and institutions that force populations experiencing historical trauma to be silent and erased

Cultural teachings/Continuous historical teachings & research

Connecting and communicating with elders

Purpose

• Communicate the experience of historical trauma/community trauma in the Khmer community
• Emphasize the importance of knowing one’s history, ethnic narrative, and power in resilience
• Shifting power to youth of this ethnically marginalized community in order to create transformative space for learning
• Focus on the stigma Khmer-Americans have on mental illness and treatment
• Continuum of ethnic cultural narrative and practices

Common Interview Themes:

• Storytelling and diaspora
• The past/current forms of resilience of Khmer people
• Mental health stigma in Khmer community
• Defense mechanisms: silence, humor, alcoholism
• Normalizing pain but not healing
• The lack of literacy of the Khmer language by Khmer Americans
• Community disconnect
• Erasure from conversations around social justice and in school curriculum
• The need to validate and follow the voice of Khmer youth
• Disaggregating education data on Asian ethnic groups

Common Themes Found in Research:

• Mental health
• Western view of mental health being very individualized
• U.S. American imperialism in Southeast Asia
• Historical trauma being a community issue, and not individual
• Sharing of narrative passes down identity and possible trauma
• Forms of resistance from groups experiencing historical trauma

References:


Um, K., (2012). Erased Memory: History, Identity, and Remembering in Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Diaspora. DOI: 10.1215/10679847-1593564

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