

Nobel Laureate Peace Park Project Award --- Jose Alonso



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Jose Luis Alonso was Born in Guadalajara, Mexico and Brought to the United States when he was 5 years old. Raised in East Oakland, California Spanish was his first language. He learned English through a negative system of “sink or swim” as his own language and culture were not a part of the U.S. culture or history.

Due to being of Mexican origin and language, he faced many painful incidents of racism, prejudice, and discrimination in society and within the educational systems. He disliked school and did not do well.

He Entered the military to get off the streets, served in Vietnam, and returned home. He had the opportunity to go to community college found that he had the skills to be successful in academia

He Started working with at-risk youth and eventually ended up working with an diverse groups of young people as an advocate, mentor, and educator: and as a teacher in a variety of programs schools over the past 17 years (i.e. the University of Oregon High School Equivalency Program --- a program designed to serve the children of migrant workers; Churchill High School; Springfield High School; Bethel School District; and Sheldon High School). The core of his work was based on incorporating a multicultural paradigm, a cultural competency paradigm, a social justice paradigm, an anti-bullying/anti-harassment paradigm, He incorporated all of his own life experiences which provided him with an awareness of acts of injustice and in turn the motivation to fight for social justice.

Jose's journey into the world of education was greatly influenced by his own challenging experiences within the world of education and the idea that education did not have to be a painful experience or a one way method of teaching where the student is placed in the role of being a passive learner.

The end result of all of these life experiences was the creation and implementation of a very unique Multicultural Studies social studies curriculum which flourished into a popular and educationally influential class at Sheldon High School. The Multicultural studies class is designed to introduce students to the concept of diversity (including their own diversity) and to have the students use critical thinking skills to reflect on real life and relevant elements within their lives and their own education and how these elements relate to their role as responsible citizens within our U.S. society and as global citizens.

The core of the class is designed around developing the knowledge and skills within the following: respect, empathy (including historical empathy), critical

thinking, reflection skills, listening skills, and understanding the role of positionality and epistemology in determining how and why they think what they think.

The students are asked to think about the concepts of social justice, equity, anti-bullying, anti-harassment, anti-racism, etc., and how these concepts might be related to the discourse.

In addition, the class is student centered and provides an opportunity for students to de-construct current events in our U.S. society and globally by using the above mentioned skills in understanding the history and the present of these events. The goal is for each student to determine from their own perspective, after deep reflection and critical thinking, their position and their role as they relate to determining/influencing the outcomes of the event or events.

The subject matter covered involves issues related to long standing issues facing our society and other societies: racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, etc. The class is designed to create a learning environment where students feel safe to explore their own perspectives and discuss their perspectives with classmates in a respectful manner.

The students of Sheldon value the class so much that they recommended it be included as a core class and that all Sheldon High School students be required to take the class prior to graduation.

The class has contributed greatly in reducing the amount of harassment and bullying taking place in the school. It serves 45 to 55 students per class, grades 9 to 12, from students with low grades to students in the honors program, to IEP students, to TAG students, to IHS students, to Life Skills students, to students who are at-risk of dropping school due to attendance or grade issues.

The class is very diverse within the context of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and political persuasion.

Along the way Jose has been fortunate to meet other social justice educators who have influenced my pedagogy and epistemology. These wonderful colleagues have nurtured and validated the work I have been doing over the years.

However, the greatest teachers he has had and continues to have --- are the students. They have trusted him enough to tell him about the good, the bad, and the ugly of the work they are doing within the classroom. They continue to make him aware of how much more is needed to learn and how important it is to listen to them with respect while at the same to be honest with them--- leading to an exchange of ideas. Teacher to student and student to teacher --- teacher teaching student and student teaching teacher leads to a very rewarding and educational sharing and learning experience.