

Professors work to change credential students' thinking about mission project

Some parents, even though they may not have a personal connection to the Mission experience, are nonetheless astute and find ways to ensure that their children learn the truth about what transpired at these sites.

That was the case for Dr. Stephanie Biagetti, Chair of Teacher Credentials at California State University, Sacramento. When her son was in the fourth grade, she looked at the reference books to analyze how the California Indians were portrayed.

She brought her analysis to her son, asking him to consider whether California Indians were willing participants in life at the missions, and what life might really have been like for them. Together, she and her son considered such questions as: Why were the California Indians at the mission sites? Why were they getting sick? How were they treated? Why were they killed?

While Dr. Biagetti personally extended herself to ensure that her son learned a full rendering of what transpired at the missions, she had to dig for this information – a task she was fully qualified to do as Chair of the university's teacher credentials department. However, most parents in the field do not have the access or the ability to compile such information.

Meanwhile, fellow Sac State professor Dr. Rose Borunda reached out to Dr. Biagetti to discuss the effort to “repeal, replace and reframe” the 4th grade mission project. They agreed that children should not be dependent on a parent who may not even be aware of the full and accurate story. Instead, children should learn the information, correctly, from their teacher.

“It was then that we began discussing ‘replacement units’ that teachers had used in the past when textbooks did not align with updated standards,” said Dr. Biagetti. “My thought was that if teachers are not aware of alternative projects or assignments that target the same standards, then they will most likely fall back on what they have done in the past – namely, the traditional mission project.”

This conversation led Dr. Biagetti to look more closely at her university's teacher preparation program. She got the Multiple Subject History/Social Science methods instructors involved in the conversation.

“They are responsible for teaching future teachers about the standards and best practices for the History/Social Science curriculum,” she said. “Since the traditional mission project resides in the 4th grade curriculum, we needed to critically discuss in our methods courses the impact the traditional mission project has on 4th grade students and offer ideas for – or create together – alternative projects that our candidates could assign to replace the traditional mission project.”

Dr. Biagetti asked the instructors if they would be interested in revising their methods coursework to include this content and these conversations.

Their response?

“They unanimously agreed,” said Dr. Biagetti.

The Multiple Subject Social Science methods instructors have invited Dr. Borunda to come talk to the classes in the spring when the class is offered. They are in the process of discussing changes to the methods curriculum to provide an alternative to the Mission Project.