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AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

“TRUE TO ME”: CASE STUDIES OF FIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS’  
EXPERIENCES WITH OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL VERSIONS OF HISTORY IN  
A SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM (211 pp.)

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This qualitative study addressed the problem of students’ lack of trust of and interest in U.S. history and focused on students’ experiences with official and unofficial versions of history in the middle school social studies classroom. A collective case study of five African American students was conducted in an eighth grade classroom at Carroll Academy, a public, urban charter school in Ohio. Interviews, questionnaires, observations, artifacts, and logs were collected and analyzed with a critical, interpretivist lens.

The findings included: (a) the students were suspicious of the official historical story in the form of their textbook and teacher; (b) they shared similar rationales for the perceived motivations behind the dishonest accounts in their textbooks, and the rationales changed in similar ways throughout the course of the project; (c) although they had limited experience with unofficial history before the project, they preferred to use unofficial historical sources with the condition that one eventually corroborates accounts with official sources; (d) the experience of studying family histories created race-related instances of contradiction between unofficial and official accounts in the classroom, and (e) students developed productive forms of resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history by the end of the study.

The findings of the study offer implications for teachers of social studies. By using family history projects, teachers can engage students while helping them learn critical and historical thinking skills. They can provide a more inclusive social studies curriculum and can better understand their students' backgrounds and historical knowledge.