

The Cultural Fieldwork Initiative: Collaboration for Better Education

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In recent years many advances have strengthened history teacher preparation. Due in large part to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, preservice teachers increasingly major in their content areas to be designated “highly qualified.” Although it is not a new approach, teaching with primary sources has also become an exceedingly valued dimension of social studies teacher preparation; future teachers are taught to use documents so that they can model for students the analytical skills of historical thinking and illustrate particular episodes or chronological periods.¹ In addition, preservice teachers are often assigned field experiences prior to their student teaching placements, as opportunities to apply what they are learning in their programs. In some cases, these field experiences take place in historical museums, giving novice teachers the chance to learn how to teach using objects and how to work with groups of students in alternative educational settings.

While the literature on museum education is vast, little of it explores history museums and their relationship with social studies teachers. Much of the scholarship on preservice teachers and museums discusses teaching with objects and artifacts and preparing beginning teachers to design field trip experiences for future classes. Science education is a central focus in the literature, and the few discussions of social studies teaching and learning typically address the preparation of elementary classroom teachers. One recent study of secondary history teacher preparation found that the relationship between teachers and museum staff is underdeveloped. As Alan S. Marcus, Thomas H. Levine, and Robin S. Grenier argue, “both school teachers and museum staff are important stakeholders who can learn from each other and support each other’s work.”²

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¹ The No Child Left Behind Act is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. sec. 6301 (1965). No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. sec. 3102 (2001). Teaching with primary sources is not a recent innovation. For a historical exploration, see Chara Bohan, *Go to the Sources: Lucy Maynard Salmon and the Teaching of History* (New York, 2004). For current research on teaching with primary sources, see Samuel S. Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, 2001); and Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton, *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools* (New York, 2011).

² Alan S. Marcus, Thomas H. Levine, and Robin S. Grenier, “How Secondary History Teachers Use and Think about Museums: Current Practices and Untapped Promise for Promoting Historical Understanding,”

In addition to incorporating these major influences on social studies teacher preparation—NCLB, the emphasis on working with primary sources, and basic field experience programs—we wanted to design a field experience for our students that would also take advantage of the abundant cultural institutions in the greater Philadelphia region. Two of us (Christine Woysner and Marc Brasof) are teacher educators, and the third (Andrea Reidell) is an education specialist at the National Archives with many years of experience in museum education and public history. We set out to develop an internship program for undergraduate secondary preservice teachers in Temple University's certification program—double majors in history and education—who had already gained experience in schools tutoring small groups of students. We envisioned an internship, which we called the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative (CFI), that would help them draw on their content backgrounds in history, teach them to apply historical skills, and show them how to use what they had learned in curriculum design.

Although the students are double majors, their fieldwork experience is exclusively through the College of Education. (Temple's Department of History traditionally has not played a significant role in the preparation of social studies teachers.) With this project, however, we see opportunities for change and view the potential for collaboration with the history department as an intriguing way to better integrate the students' majors. They participate in the CFI during their junior year, after they have taken a significant number of history courses and are beginning to think more broadly about history and its application.

To connect these future teachers to area cultural institutions—museums, libraries, archives, and historic sites—we built upon existing partnerships developed by the National History Day (NHD) program in Philadelphia. These networks were vital to institutional support for the initiative, since one of the goals for participating cultural partners was to make their resources more available to NHD students and teachers. The resulting field experience had many additional benefits, including the development of new education products for participating partners, the creation of mentors within cultural institutions for the preservice teachers, and the expansion and strengthening of the regional education community.

Context

The National Archives at Philadelphia is a regional branch of the National Archives of the United States, which offers an array of support and programs for K–12 educators through its regional archives and Presidential Libraries as well as from its Washington, D.C.–based operation. The Philadelphia division leads National History Day Philadelphia (NHDP) and is responsible for bringing the NHD program back to the city in 2005 after a twenty-year absence.

Foundational to the NHDP approach is the concept of the “city as a campus,” made possible by the rich array of institutions and sites throughout the region. The NHDP works as a

Theory and Research in Social Education, 40 (no. 1, 2012), 73. See also Susan Wunder, “Learning to Teach for Historical Understanding: Preservice Teachers at a Hands-On Museum,” *Social Studies*, 93 (no. 4, 2002), 159–63; Debra Zinicola and Roberta Devlin-Scherer, “A University-Museum Partnership for Teacher Education Field Experiences in Science,” *Clearing House*, 74 (May–June 2001), 248–50; and Linda H. Cox and Jill H. Barrow, “On Display: Preservice Teachers in the Museum,” *Social Education*, 64 (Oct. 2000), 364–67.

collaborative of more than forty cultural and community institutions and provides a year-long program, serving public, parochial, charter, and private schools throughout Philadelphia's diverse neighborhoods. Begun with just 175 students in 2005, it now serves more than one thousand students annually. A flagship regional program within the larger NHD network, the NHDP received the History Channel's 2008 Outstanding Educator Award. Year-long NHDP activities include workshops for teachers and students; curatorial mentoring of students at cultural institutions; hosting of individual students and student groups at cultural institutions; in-school support for teachers and students; and an array of Web resources and tools. These activities culminate with the NHD Philadelphia regional competition held over two days on a campus of organizations located around Independence National Historic Park, with the National Constitution Center as the central host site. The cultural and community institutions provide more than 150 judges and support people for this event, and the partnership raises scholarship funds to cover all expenses to the NHD Pennsylvania state finals for first- and second-place qualifying students. Andrea Reidell, at the Philadelphia branch of the National Archives, designed the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative to leverage the capacities of the NHDP program for the benefit of Temple's social studies certification majors.³

Temple University, a comprehensive public research university in northern Philadelphia, is the twenty-eighth largest university in the United States. Founded in 1884 by Russell Conwell as an informal adult-education initiative of his Grace Baptist Church ministry, Temple College was chartered in 1888 and incorporated as Temple University in 1907. Temple's College of Education, founded in 1919, is the fifth largest college within the university. At present, the college enrolls several thousand undergraduate and graduate students. Social studies is the largest secondary education major, with nearly three hundred declared majors at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Temple also has the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching designation of a Community Engaged Institution, which shaped our thinking about this fieldwork experience.⁴ In a city with so many cultural institutions, the partnership between the university's social studies teacher preparation program and those institutions seemed a natural fit. An internship program would not only help our students (future teachers) apply what they had learned in course work but also show them the many resources and cultural institutions the greater Philadelphia region has to offer. Exposing students to cultural institutions in this way, we believed,

³ *Preserving the Past to Protect the Future: National Archives and Records Administration Performance Accountability Report to Congress, FY 2011* (n.p., 2011), 10, <http://www.archives.gov/about/plans-reports/performance-accountability/2011/par-summary.pdf>; Joseph A. Slobodzian, "Making History, 7 Schools Advance to Pa. Meet, Local Students Going to the State History Day Take Their First Crack at National Competition in 20 Years," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 22, 2005, <http://articles.philly.com/keyword/national-history-day>; "Philadelphia Educator Earns Nation's Top History Educator Award," *City Suburban News*, July 2–8, 2008, p. 8; "Philadelphia Makes History," *Declarations: Published for the Staff of the National Archives and Records Administration*, 602 (April–May 2011), 1; Kelly E. Weber, "National History Day: A Worthwhile Partnership between Students, Teachers, and Public Historians," 2008, unpublished Villanova University graduate student paper (in Andrea Reidell's possession); *NHD Philly Newsletter*, 1 (Fall 2007) (in Reidell's possession); *Phila.gov: National History Day—Philly*, <http://www.phila.gov/phils/NationalHistoryDayPhilly/default.htm>; *National History Day Philadelphia*, www.nhdphilly.org; *National History Day*, <http://www.nhd.org/>.

⁴ On the Temple University data and history, see "Mission, Vision, and Strategic Planning for the College of Education: Who We Are, Where We Want to Go, and How to Get There," Spring 2011, Temple University internal report (in Christine Woyshner's possession). On the designation by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, see http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php/.

would strengthen their abilities and approaches as future history teachers; they would learn that teaching and learning can and should happen beyond the school walls.

The Field Experience

The Cultural Fieldwork Initiative was designed to place forty-four social studies certification majors at twenty-two Philadelphia-area cultural institutions for the fall 2011 semester.⁵ The participating institutions represented a cross-disciplinary range of history, science, and art-based institutions, from the Pennsylvania Hospital Archives to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The internships were intended to support National History Day. NHD, the 2011 winner of the National Humanities Medal from the National Endowment for the Humanities, is project-based learning at its best. An annual competition similar to a science fair, National History Day engages more than half a million middle and high school students each year in the study of history. Students choose and investigate a historical topic based on an annual theme and are required to use an array of primary and secondary sources to develop and support their theses. From that research, they create projects in the categories of exhibit, documentary, Web site, performance, or paper. Professionals in the field judge the students' projects for historical accuracy, understanding of historical context, use of sources to support their analyses, and clarity of presentation; these criteria require the development of sophisticated research and higher-order thinking skills. Independent research shows that students who participate in NHD outperform their peers on state standardized tests not only in social studies but also in reading, science, and math. The program also has a positive impact on students' attitudes toward academic subjects.⁶ Because NHD facilitates critical thinking, educators in social studies and in other subject areas are now being challenged to develop sophisticated lessons that focus on historiography and students' interests. In some schools, NHD has fostered interdisciplinary cooperation.

National History Day became the focal point for field experiences for both the Temple interns and cultural institutions, in a citywide effort to support students who compete in this highly rigorous educational experience. Temple's social studies students worked at cultural institutions, correlated their resources with the current National History Day theme, and assisted middle and high school students looking for relevant primary and secondary sources. Temple interns also worked with National History Day students to review their work and hone their historical arguments.

⁵ The following were the 2011 participating partners: American Swedish Historical Museum; Athenaeum of Philadelphia; Bryn Mawr Special Collections Department, Mariam Coffin Canaday Library, Bryn Mawr College; Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries; Cliveden of the National Trust; Dorrance H. Hamilton Public Media Commons at WHYY; Drexel University Archives and Special Collections; Fairmount Waterworks Interpretive Center; Free Library of Philadelphia; Historic St. George's United Methodist Church; Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Independence Seaport Museum, J. Welles Henderson Archives and Library; Legacy Center for Archives and Special Collections at Drexel University College of Medicine; National Archives at Philadelphia; National Constitution Center; Pennsbury Manor; Pennsylvania Hospital; Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries; Philadelphia City Archives; Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent; Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Special Collections Research Center at Temple University Libraries.

⁶ Kay Sloan and Saul Rockman, *National History Day Works: Findings from the National Program Evaluation* (College Park, 2010), http://www.nhd.org/images/uploads/NHDSReport_Final3.pdf.



A preservice teacher in the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative program mentors student researchers. *Courtesy Historical Society of Pennsylvania.*

Course Design

The field experience was the centerpiece of the first of a series of advanced methods courses addressing issues, themes, methods, and materials for the secondary social studies classroom. At the beginning of the semester, cultural institutions submitted short narratives of expectations for student interns and how these expectations connected to the skills and content necessary for K–12 students to complete NHD projects. Then we held a “match night” during which the Temple students met representatives from the partner institutions. They learned about each other, and students circulated their resumes. The three of us worked to match students with cultural institutions, and for the rest of the semester the students spent four hours a week working at an institution under the supervision of a mentor. Students wrote and shared weekly reflections via Google Docs. We developed a midsemester evaluation to improve project goals and experiences, and used course evaluations to gain greater insight into students’ experiences. We also asked the institutions to complete a survey about their thoughts on the pilot project.

Within the methods course that included the internship, we designed assignments to introduce students to significant themes in the development of social studies as a curricular field and current pedagogical approaches. In one essay assignment students articulated their philosophy of social studies education; in another they scrutinized state and national social studies content standards. The major project was the development of a primary- and secondary-resource collection for presentation and future use in their classrooms. Throughout the course, students learned to facilitate the research process and to integrate inquiry methods in teaching history. Students wrote a final reflection on their experiences facilitating classroom learning in partnership with the cultural institution. At the end of

the semester the instructors, project coordinators, students, and mentors from the cultural institutions assembled to present their work at a celebratory event.

Under the direction of their mentors and instructors, Temple students created a variety of products that reinforced skills they needed to be effective teachers. They also advanced the missions of the cultural institutions by becoming advocates for more community outreach. Thanks to their work, several institutions can now offer to the general public and to educators—sometimes for the first time—a variety of new resources and materials that highlight important historical collections. These include redesigned sections of Web sites, annotated lists of resource collections relevant to common and less-studied subjects in the social studies classrooms, revamped visitor tours, primary source-driven lesson plans, and teacher and student workshops.

The students pursued a variety of projects in diverse media. One student was assigned to the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University, and he developed lesson plans on the experiences of the Tuskegee Airmen, the all-black pilot corps in World War II. Blockson curator Diane Turner put the student in touch with one of the airmen, and he interviewed the veteran about his experiences. Two students placed at Bryn Mawr College worked on developing women's educational history materials for the library's new Albert M. Greenfield Digital Center for the History of Women's Education. These students conducted original historical research on the entrance exams for women's colleges and compared them to the exams for admission to men's colleges at the turn of the twentieth century. Six Temple students were placed at the local public news radio and television station, *WHYY*, where they taught high school students how to write and produce documentaries. One of the issues they documented was the Occupy Philadelphia movement. Another Temple student interned at Cliveden, a historic site in Germantown owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, where she organized primary sources and other materials for classroom use. She was so excited about the experience that she volunteered extra hours on a Saturday to assist with the reenactment of the Battle of Germantown (1777). Her reflections in her online log affirmed our decision to create this Cultural Fieldwork Initiative:

I'm not going to lie. I was not excited to spend six hours at Cliveden on a Saturday. But once I got there, I had so much fun for so many reasons. I was surrounded by people who had the same interests as I did. I saw so many kids that were so excited to watch a piece of history that took place in their own backyard. I saw parents who cared to take their kids to this event so that hopefully they could learn something. It just made me feel so good to know that so many people still cared about history the way that I do. I think it's so great that Cliveden does this every year, because it's such an important part of history. Today's event made me even more excited to teach history. I only hope I can get kids as interested as I saw them today!⁷

Results of the Collaboration

Our initial pilot of the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative brought several insights. The field experience strengthened partnerships between and among teachers, university teacher preparation programs, and cultural institutions. The experience also enhanced preservice teachers'

⁷ Sierra S., log for Social Studies 3278, fall 2011 (in Woyshner's possession).



A preservice teacher in the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative program explores archival sources. *Courtesy J. Welles Henderson Archives and Library, Independent Seaport Museum.*

content knowledge and skills by requiring them to apply what they were learning in their academic program to a real-world context. Further, the field experience helped build the capacity of the cultural institutions to serve the education community. Finally, the internship strengthened the preservice teachers' workplace skills and professionalism.

In their final reflections and during the presentation night, the Temple students expressed how much this experience affected the development of their knowledge, skills, and dispositions as future social studies teachers. Students posited that interning at cultural institutions improved their ability to teach history because they had been exposed to many historic resources in Philadelphia previously unknown to them. Knowing the range of free resources available to schools to support learning is not intuitive to emerging teachers; it must be taught. Yet few if any formal opportunities exist for preservice educators to network with many of Philadelphia's cultural institutions, creating hurdles to communicating needs and resources on both sides. In the survey conducted at the end of

the first semester, 72 percent of the twenty-two participating cultural institutions reported not having worked previously with preservice teachers. (Significantly, 100 percent wanted to participate in future phases of the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative.)⁸ Besides the NHD regional competition for which institutions send staff members to judge projects, the CFI match night at the beginning of the semester and presentations at the end are among the few times when Philadelphia's cultural institutions come together for a single educational purpose.

Throughout the internship, students were also exposed to content usually unexplored such as the histories of women, maritime, medical innovations, lesser-known immigrant groups, religions, and local colleges and universities. This invaluable experience opened up new perspectives for framing studies these teachers will one day design. Most students sifted through primary-source collections and used online databases for either their own projects or those of National History Day students and teachers. Many students wrote about how that experience will have tremendous implications for facilitating research when leading their own classrooms because it provided opportunities to practice the analysis of primary sources. Such outcomes support the notion that well-organized and structured internships, in which students are provided opportunities to reinforce collegiate studies on pedagogy and content knowledge, help translate theory into classroom application.

There were other unexpected positive outcomes as well. Staff members at partner institutions became more receptive to increasing student access to the collections, a great boost for educational outreach at those institutions. Other partnering institutions stressed how the preservice teachers developed resources that helped build the organizations' capacity to serve the public in ways previously impossible due to a lack of time, staff resources, or pedagogical training necessary to create effective educational resources. (Only 39 percent of partner respondents had a staff member dedicated to education.) One institution reported that "lesson plans will greatly increase the ability to teach the subject [of the collections] and can serve as a template for other teachers." Another institution felt more confident that "leaders who bring their groups here now have discussion questions and online resources to continue their exploration with students."⁹

Preparing undergraduate students to negotiate their needs as they enter professional environments is an enduring challenge. Many of our students have held short-term minimum-wage jobs; this internship was for many the first opportunity to engage in highly sophisticated tasks and experience a new level of autonomy in a professional organization. Students had to learn how to negotiate job responsibilities with their site mentors and other employees and adapt to varied organizational cultures. Although most of the internships provided exceptional experiences, some were not without their challenges. Site mentors and student interns sometimes had difficulty communicating project expectations to each other. Schedules did not always coordinate well, creating tension at times in the mentor-student relationship. During our class discussions, students and instructors explored these issues and strategies for addressing them. Some students were uncomfortable with high levels of autonomy, but they learned to take initiative as the semester progressed. Such powerful lessons cannot be taught in the classroom.

The instructors and project coordinator also gained valuable lessons about facilitating educational community partnerships. We knew that immersing students into this type of

⁸ Cultural Community Fieldwork Initiative Survey for Participating Institutions, Dec. 2011 (in Reidell's possession).

⁹ *Ibid.*

internship—in which students and cultural institutions were asked how they might support the efforts of the education community to compete in NHD—would create challenges for all involved. Cultural institutions want to connect with educators and their schools, but some lack the necessary knowledge, skills, or time to work with interns, especially in an era of dwindling resources and budget cuts. Many staff members at archives or special collections libraries must balance preservation and maintenance with accessibility. Guiding preservice teachers challenged some participants, but all were willing to try, eventually gaining experience in developing ways for academic specialists and content managers to work with educators to make resources more widely available. At times, the instructors and project coordinators worked with individual institutions to ensure that their projects were connected to National History Day and had lesson plans that teachers and their students could easily use. At other times participating partners had to adjust their expectations based on the students' limited experience. We adjusted course instruction to cover topics such as the research process and to negotiate organizational norms, to empower students to face the challenges of project-based learning and translate their experiences into dispositions and skill sets necessary to thrive in the school environment. Finally, within the university, we realized that through this initiative a stronger relationship could be forged between the history department and the Social Studies Teacher Education Program.

Conclusion

Bringing together separate but overlapping worlds is never easy, but it can be extremely valuable. The Cultural Fieldwork Initiative exemplifies how innovative partnerships can enhance education regionally and nationally. Connecting future history teachers with the wealth of resources in our archives, libraries, and museums benefits us all; our teachers will be better trained to use the “raw materials” of history and will know where and how to access those materials before they enter the classroom. These future teachers will be better versed in the use and analysis of primary sources, knowledge that will help their students understand the process of doing history and become better critical thinkers. Our cultural institutions will understand more clearly the changing needs of classroom teachers, increase their connection to those educators, and develop new supporters who know about and can promote the use of their collections. All of these people and institutions will benefit from the creation of a more connected education community and from the understanding that education is not just something “other people” do. It is our shared responsibility and privilege.