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Heritage Education and Historic Preservation: Partners or Acquaintances?

Max A. van Balgooy

In 1951, as the National Trust for Historic Preservation was grappling with the acquisition of its first historic site—Woodlawn—it encountered a challenge that would continue through today:

“If an historic site or building is open to the public regularly, as much care should be given to its presentation to the visiting public as was given to the restoration. It is not enough to throw the doors open and wait for the crowd that oftentimes never materializes. It is not enough to assign to the job of reception and explanation just anybody who is available cheap. Most often it is in this final phase of preservation that reputations are made or broken.”

Like two sides of a coin, historic preservation involves both protecting and interpreting historic sites.

This issue of Forum Journal examines the status of heritage education today and follows up on an issue published more than a decade ago in January 1992. In the intervening decade, heritage education has become a key value in the National Trust’s new strategic plan and the responsibility for education is shared throughout the organization.

Education is a central element in most preservation organizations and historic sites throughout the country but, much like the variety of sites that have been preserved, there are a variety of approaches to education, much of it done under the umbrella of “heritage education.”

Heritage Education: Another Term for Teaching History?

In the January/February 1992 issue of Forum Journal, Kathleen Hunter proposed that heritage education is “an approach to teaching and learning about history and culture that uses information available from the material culture and the human and built environments as primary instructional resources.”

As you will discover in reading the following articles, “heritage education” can mean many things—there is no standard definition. It is typically based on the study of a building, site, or place (rather than documents or textbooks); is regional or local in focus (although often tied to national themes); incorporates multiple disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (such as archeology, history, and geography); is primarily for children (rather than adults); and often uses interactive and participatory approaches that encourage observation and discovery (not lectures, readings, or other didactic methods).

Heritage education programs vary tremendously and have been defined as activities that:

- encourage the preservation or restoration of the cultural heritage
- offer educational field trip programs coordinated with district curricula and state and national standards of learning
- explore the community—its place in national and world events, its relationship to the natural environment, and its cultural heritage as expressed in traditions and celebrations, literature and arts, economic practices, responses to crises, and everyday life and
- combat vandalism of cultural resources and teach stewardship. For these programs, history and heritage are often associated but distinctive—a perception that’s shared by most Americans. A recent study showed that most Americans like heritage but not history.3 For many,history is the boring, irrelevant study of names and dates in the classroom while heritage is a personal appreciation of one’s own family, culture, or region. Surprisingly, this study also showed that Americans believe that museums and historic sites are the most trustworthy sources of learning about the past—more reliable than movies, books, teachers, college professors,
Workshops and institutes are increasingly popular ways for teachers to gain historical understanding and learn new teaching methods to foster heritage education. This workshop on North American slavery offered by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History not only included lectures by historian Ira Berlin, but also visits to Mount Vernon and the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site. Photo: National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Schools: Challenges and Opportunities

Heritage education programs often target school groups as the most effective way to reach large numbers of children—but that is quickly changing. Not only are teachers spending less time teaching and eyewitnesses, and even grandparents. Historic sites have the “real stuff” and use a variety of perspectives and sources to develop their interpretation—resulting in a richer and more accurate educational experience. That’s great news for those of us working with historic sites—and also a great responsibility.

Meeting this need are the increasingly popular teacher institutes—one-to-six-day seminars that focus on both content and pedagogy. Because institutes teach teachers rather than students, these can more effectively reach a larger number of children. Typically provided at a state or local level by historical societies, they have moved to the national level thanks to recent efforts by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, the National Endowment for the Humanities’ We the People initiative, and the U.S. Department of Education’s Teaching American History grant program.

Unfortunately, most of these institutes rely on the familiar classroom-based instruction using textbooks and documentary sources and overlook the educational value of visiting and studying historic places. It’s up to us to help teachers cross this threshold. In a 2004 members’ newsletter of the National Council for Public History, Executive Director David Vanderstel reminds us that, “We need to help K-12 educators understand the rich resources of archives, museums, historic sites, and even their own neighborhoods and communities as historical teaching tools.”

The National Park Service’s Teaching with Historic Places program was developed to help teachers bring the study of historic places to their classes, enhancing learning in diverse disciplines. In her article, Carol D. Shull, keeper of the National Register, describes the development and the accomplishments of this award-winning program which has produced more than 115 lesson plans for use in the classroom or at the sites.

More hurdles to effective heritage education programs are erected each year. Funding for field trips has been curtailed drastically during the last decade in nearly every school district. When funding is available, competition among destinations is fierce and teachers have a long menu of attractive choices, including historic sites, museums, zoos, amusement parks, and shopping malls. In addition, many schoolchildren must get by without sufficient access to libraries, computers, or other learning resources.

It is clear that heritage education programs must be designed to accommodate the needs, interests, and limitations of today’s schools. The best way to do that is to have experienced teachers actively involved in program development. The Louisiana Teacher Training Program discussed by Sheila Richmond, Heritage Education Program manager for the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, presents a model approach for engaging classroom teachers in the planning process.

Heritage Education Beyond the Classroom

Although school programs have been the easiest way to reach large numbers of children, it may not be possible to offer them everywhere. Some heritage education programs are being designed or reconfigured to reach children in other ways, such as targeting youth groups (like scouts); offering activities outside of school hours (such as after school programs, weekend events, or summer camps); or providing materials for children in the form of publications or websites.

The Los Angeles Conservancy’s Kids’ Guide to Broadway interactive booklet with related web resources is one example. It is described here by the LA Conservancy’s former Director of Education Jane McNamara and Broadway Initiative Coordinator Trudi Sandmeier. This versatile tool—in two languages—shows young people how to “read” and explore architecture in their community, on their own or with help from family members, teachers, or group leaders.

Making Good Use of Historic Sites

In the United States, many museums are historic sites but
historic sites are not always museums. Despite that fact, ask most people what to do with a site worth preserving and they’ll tell you to turn it into a museum.

Yet we are slowly becoming aware that the standards and practices followed by most museums cannot (or should not) be followed by historic sites. Museums typically do not expose their most important artifacts to wear and damage every day. Yet historic sites are displayed outside every day in rain and sun, visitors are encouraged to walk in and on them, and people are permitted to use them as bed and breakfast inns or restaurants.

Furthermore, museums typically remove objects from their context, while historic sites work hard to preserve context, placing a higher value on objects and buildings original to the site. The issue of context is so important that historic sites are broadening their focus from individual buildings to the surrounding landscape, including neighborhoods and cities. A farmhouse is best understood with its fields, and a railroad depot by the adjacent tracks.

But most heritage education programs draw their inspiration from work done in museums, historical societies, schools, and colleges. And most teachers and historians are trained to study documents and give lectures—materials and methods that are least likely to make effective use of historic sites. You can always recognize the failures: The buildings are used as illustrations rather than evidence and the program can be presented in the parking lot just as well as in the parlor.

In their article “What Do Children Learn When They Go on a Field Trip to Henry Clay’s Estate,” educators A. Gwynn Henderson and Linda S. Levstik analyze what knowledge and insights a group of fifth-graders gained from a coordinated program of field trips to a museum and a historic site, including hands-on archeology experience. But they also caution against some limitations of this type of learning and the need to address some surprising misconceptions by the students who participated.

Figuring Out What Works

We need to know which heritage education programs are effective and why. “We cannot rely on observations and testimonials that describe the excellence in classrooms that we know are successfully leading students to high levels of achievement,” notes Denee Mattioli, president of the National Council for the Social Studies. “We need strong, solid, valid, and reliable research to support what is best in social studies teaching and learning. We need to know empirically not only what works but also how it works.”

This concern is shared by those of us who create heritage education programs, but who often have little time for evaluation and research. Based on my study of award-winning school programs, I offer some suggestions for fundamental elements that should be a part of any successful heritage education program.

Another measure of success is to evaluate a program based on one of the many benchmarks that are now available. In the last few years the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Tri-State Coalition for Historic Places, American Historical Association, American Association for State and Local History and the National Association for Interpretation, regularly offer workshops. Some of this training will be sustained by a recently created endowment at the National Trust, which will support national programs on the interpretation of historic sites. The next step for improvement is to conduct on-site program assessments and staff training, an effort that the National Park Service is pioneering in collaboration with the Organization of American Historians and that the American Association of Museums is expanding in its Museum Assessment Program.

We are fortunate that Interpreting Our Heritage, Interpretation of Historic Sites, and Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, and other classics from the past are now joined by many books produced in recent years. Interpreting His-
Historic sites differ from museums in several significant ways. For example, museums typically remove objects from their original locations whereas historic sites work to preserve them in context. These mementos of Woodrow Wilson’s political career—a gilt box given by the City of London, his inaugural medal, and his books—hold much greater meaning displayed in his Washington, D.C., home (now a National Trust Historic Site) than they would in a place not directly connected to him.

Photo by Ron Blunt.

Historic House Museums, Great Tours, The Power of Place, and Understanding Ordinary Landscapes are among the many new books that show a diversity of ways in which historic sites can be used as effective teaching tools.

Thankfully, the funding opportunities for heritage education programs continue to grow. For decades, individual donors have considered education as the most important reason for giving (after religious causes) and provided more than $31 billion for education in 2002. Private foundations have more than doubled their support of the humanities during the past decade and historical activities and humanities-related museum activities accounted for the largest shares of giving.10

In her article, Katherine Stevenson suggests 10 ways that citizens can help preservation organizations and historic sites to improve heritage education programming, and many of her ideas can form the basis for fundraising appeals. These recommendations are practical, even for organizations with limited means.

At the National Trust

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is working on several fronts to improve heritage education in the United States. The Board of Advisors, which consists of representatives from every state, has taken up heritage education as a crucial issue and drafted a series of recommendations to identify ways that the preservation movement can be more effective in advocating for delivering quality programs.

This year the National Trust sought heritage education nominations for its Honor Awards, with the intent of not only recognizing exemplary work but also bringing added attention to this area. The Trust is also working with the Council of Educational Facility Planners International to promote Historic Schools Day, an effort to have students study the history of their own school and link it to larger preservation issues.

The National Trust’s 25 historic sites are on the forefront of heritage education, reaching nearly one million people annually across the country. The strength of these sites is that they represent a wide range of resources and approaches, thus creating a deep pool of ideas. Thanks to a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and several generous donors, a new endowed fund provides small grants to improve or enhance interpretation and education at National Trust historic sites. In its first three years, 30 grants totaling more than $100,000 were distributed—but over $250,000 was requested, demonstrating that the needs still greatly exceed the funds available.

Heritage Education as a Fundamental Aspect of Historic Preservation

When it comes to historic preservation, we still have a cautious relationship with heritage education. We don’t quite recognize its potential power to advance the movement. We know that we need to demonstrate the value of historic sites, but when sites prove to be economically viable, education takes a minor, often peripheral role. Education seems to be the “purpose of last resort.”

This type of limited thinking compels preservation to the dustbin of irrelevancy. First of all, if we preserve sites to educate and educate to preserve sites, we’ve put ourselves in a cyclical pursuit that collapses upon itself. Instead, we need to think more broadly.

Education should be an integral part of every preservation project and historic preservation must be a part of every heritage education program, from beginning to end. We need to look outward as well as inward, and make connections to diverse audiences and places. So what would this look like? The Lower East Side Tenement Museum may provide an answer in a new walking tour of the neighborhood. The tour will visit sites chosen by community preservationists as being representative of the neighborhood’s various constituencies and offer a platform for a dialog on community building that will transcend ethnic and generational differences.11

It also means that many of our historic preservation
Finally, heritage education, with its broad meanings, reminds us that the historic preservation movement needs to strengthen its alliance with other humanities and arts organizations in order to be heard—especially when it comes to funding and priorities at the state and local level.

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Notes
2 These definitions are based upon the Heritage Education Commission of Minnesota State University Moorhead, Heritage Education Forum, Heritage Education magazine, and the Bureau of Land Management’s Heritage Education program.
4 For an in-depth examination of this issue in one state, see “History and Social Studies Education in Maryland: A Cause for Concern” by Margaret Burke, executive director of the Maryland Humanities Council (mburke@mdhc.org). For a broader discussion, see “Effective State Standards for U. S. History: A 2003 Report Card” by Sheldon Stern et al (www.fordhaminstitution.org).
5 Social Studies Professional, March/April 2004, p. 3.
10 Foundation Funding for the Humanities: An Overview of Current and Historical Trends (Foundation Center, 2004).
11 For more information about this program, contact Liz Sevcenko, vice president of Interpretation, Lower East Side Tenement Museum at beverkenko@tenement.org.
12 The National Council for Preservation Education maintains both the “Standards for Historic Preservation Degree Granting Graduate and Undergraduate Programs” and a list of historic preservation degree programs in the United States at www.ncpe.us.
Support from Rep. Jim McCrery (R-LA) resulted in the development of Heritage Education–Louisiana (HE-LA), the pilot program for the national initiative. The goals for the program are to enhance and enrich K-12 education, instill a sense of cultural stewardship for tomorrow’s leaders, and serve as a national model. The focus is place-based, encouraging the use of local resources such as archaeological sites, various types of historic structures, and cultural landscapes. One critical component was involving classroom teachers in program development to ensure a program for teachers by teachers.

Research

Aware that a quality education program must meet the needs of educators, early in 2000 NCPTT met with supervisors for pre-K, elementary, middle, and high school curriculum standards from the Louisiana Department of Education (DOE) and the Louisiana Center for Educational Technology. DOE staff encouraged the development of the program, but cautioned that accountability and high-stakes testing were the foremost concerns for teachers and administrators; therefore, only programs that directly affected accountability and the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) would gain the attention of those educators.

Also primary to the success of the development of the program were the consultations with preservation professionals. At a forum at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, discussions were held with staff from the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, which houses the Office of the Lt. Governor, the Division of...
and a five-day summer institute to create lesson plans and activities that they piloted in their classrooms. The first workshop outlined the tasks set before the teachers, described the timetable and events, and provided printed and online resources. Subsequent workshops addressed integrated curriculum, standards and benchmarks, creating appropriate assessments, and evaluation and recommendations.

The institute provided intense instruction, hands-on activities, resource review, and field trips. Presentations and information were provided by staff from NCPTT, NSU, the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Louisiana Creole Heritage Center, the Louisiana Center for Educational Technology, and Office of State Parks. In addition, the teachers took directed field trips to Los Adaes State Commemorative Area and Cane River Creole National Historical Park.

With the field trip experiences and information provided, the teachers began creating heritage education lessons and activities that they tested in their classrooms. These lessons included such activities as exploring the history of several towns and studying the architecture of historic sites in Louisiana. One teacher used primary documents such as images, journals, maps, and newspaper articles to help students research Camp Moore and its role in the Civil War.

The 16 schools provided excellent labs for field testing the lessons and activities in a variety of settings:

• urban and rural
• primary, elementary, middle, and high schools
• school populations ranging from 130 to 700
• varied socio-economic levels as evidenced by the 28 percent to 98 percent of students qualifying for free/reduced price lunches
• ethnic diversity ranging from 94 percent Caucasian to 90 percent African American with some representation of Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans.

Classroom testing helped the teachers to hone and revise the lessons before contributing them to Heritage Education–Louisiana.

The work accomplished during the first year of the program resulted in several recommendations from the participating teachers:
1. Create interdisciplinary lessons to involve teachers from science, math, social studies, and English language arts.

2. Use technology (computer software programs, online resources, digital cameras, etc.) as a component of each lesson, but also encourage the creation of lessons and activities that could be adapted should technology not be available.

3. Direct teachers to where information and resources can be found.

4. Develop focused workshops.

5. Provide funding for innovative activities.

Bearing in mind these suggestions, Heritage Education–Louisiana teamed with education methods instructors in math, science, English language arts, and social studies from NSU’s College of Education to ensure a cohesive, interdisciplinary effort. Subsequently, HE and HE-LA staff developed a three-day workshop entitled “Plantation Village,” a unit consisting of interdisciplinary, curriculum-based lessons and activities. Oakland Plantation at Cane River Creole National Historical Park was used as the focus for the series of four workshops held during the summer. Provided with information, activities, and field trips, the 46 participating teachers combined the material to model a simple lesson that they created based on their workshop experiences. The short presentations provided NSU and HE-LA staff with immediate evidence that specific concepts and workshop goals were met.

The information was geared to the middle school curriculum because it was assumed that teachers in elementary and high school levels could easily adapt the material for their specific needs. It was quite clear that guidance was needed, but each teacher had to develop his or her own lesson to suit the individual’s subject specialty, grade level, and school limitations and restrictions concerning access to computers, field trips, and other factors. In addition, teachers needed to be able to adapt and create their own heritage education lessons to facilitate years of continued use if they were to change subject area, grade level, or schools or face curriculum changes.

The first workshops were successful, judging by the evaluations and comments of the participants, but they were too site specific. Recognizing the goal of a national model, NSU and HE-LA staffs are restructuring the workshop material into a template for an agrarian unit. This new unit will aid teachers in using any plantation, farm, or ranch as the foundation for developing integrated, curriculum-based lessons and activities.

Keeping in mind the need for a template and considering what local historic resources were likely to be available for teachers, in 2003 staff from HE-LA and NSU teamed with the Louisiana Main Street Program to develop a two-day summer workshop series entitled “A Walk Downtown.” This template provided information for creating an interdisciplinary, curriculum-based unit using a historic downtown area, neighborhood, or street as the foundation. The format again incorporated presentations, hands-on activities, and field trips and required teachers to model a simple lesson based on the experience. Thirty teachers and curriculum supervisors attended these workshops.

For the summer 2004 workshops, HE-LA staff looked at the interest generated by and the success of NCPTT’s Cemetery Conservation seminars and workshops developed by the Materials Research Program. “Exploring the Past: A Tour of Cemeteries” follows much the same format as the previous heritage education workshops in aiding teachers to create interdisciplinary, curriculum-based lessons and activities using a local historic cemetery. Special activities...
Angel White, Paul Stuker, and Susan Lambert study maps during the Heritage Education—Louisiana 2001 Institute. Photo courtesy of National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

have been developed to address concerns specific to this topic, including safety precautions and preservation standards such as proper care of gravestones and markers. While much of the structure of the workshop is the same—a class-like setting for presentations and hands-on activities with a trip to the local cemetery—the workshop takes place on one day only. To cover much of the material that in past years was delivered on the first day, a pre-workshop packet was sent to the participants for review.

The No Child Left Behind legislation requiring “highly qualified” teachers in each classroom fosters the necessity for professional development opportunities for teachers. In addition, Louisiana teachers must earn Continuing Learning Units (CLU)s. HE–LA workshops provide school districts with an option for providing CLUs to increase teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Challenges
As with all programs that are continually being refined, several challenges have come up. Chief is the difficulty in assessing the success of the program. How do we know that the education and preservation messages are getting to the students in significant ways? One option is to quantify information: How many teachers are reaching how many students who are looking at how many historic sites?

Comparing the results of standardized tests such as the LEAP from year to year was not an option. Staff from NSU’s College of Education developed an Attitude Assessment that was used by the first 16 teachers in the initial year of the program. The assessment asked students to rate their interest in preservation issues, such as in saving old houses, in a short format used before and after heritage education lessons were taught. Because the assessment was a university product, it had to be constructed and delivered with very specific restraints and restrictions, such as a multitude of permission forms and the use of a control group. The process proved cumbersome for the implementing teacher and was in many cases implemented improperly and, thereby, proved not to be useful.

Another concern is how to maintain contact with participants. Once teachers leave the workshops, no formalized plan is in place to continue the dialogue or to determine if they continue to use the material and activities to develop their own lessons. While the Heritage Education—Louisiana website is one source of updated information, it is difficult to know how often it is visited by past participants. Developing and distributing an electronic newsletter has provided one way to reach out to those who have participated in HE–LA programs.

Continuing Toward Our Goal
Making sure that workshops meet teacher requirements, offering them in a format that is beneficial, continuing to use education and preservation professionals to develop and deliver the material are all strategies that should engender continued success. Thus far, teachers from school districts in three-fourths of the parishes have participated in HE–LA in some way. Providing these professional development opportunities for in-service teachers is one way of accomplishing the goals of the Heritage Education—Louisiana program.

The next logical step in expanding the program is reaching out to pre-service teachers (those students who are in university education degree programs), so that the idea of heritage education is embedded in their teaching philosophies. One project with Middle Tennessee State University’s Center for Historic Preservation is a survey of the state of heritage education in colleges and departments of education around the nation. The information will guide subsequent development of this program as a national model. In the meantime, work has begun with staff from NSU’s College of Education and School of Social Science for developing a heritage education course with anticipated implementation in the 2005 fall semester.

With these steps, we will continue toward the goal “to instill a sense of stewardship for America’s cultural resources in the nation’s grade, middle, and high school-age students so that “generations of children aware of the significance of their cultural resources grow into responsible adults who seek to conserve them.”

Sheila Richmond is Heritage Education Program manager for the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. She can be contacted at Sheila.Richmond@contractor.nps.gov. For more information visit the Heritage Education—Louisiana website at www.ncptt.nps.gov/hed/.
Teaching with Historic Places Helps Teachers Bring History to Life for Our Young People and Nurtures Our Children to Become Caring Stewards. In 1991 the National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation joined forces to create the Teaching with Historic Places program, because we preservation advocates were not then and still are not doing enough to educate our children about preserving our nation’s heritage. Another goal of the National Register of Historic Places, beyond creating a record of such places, was to make the valuable documentation on National Register listings more accessible for public education.

To determine how to bring historic places into the classroom, the National Park Service (NPS) and the Trust convened a group of nationally recognized leaders of educational organizations, curriculum specialists, school administrators, classroom teachers, and preservation advocates. They enthusiastically embraced the idea of using historic places to teach history, social studies, and other required subjects in the core curriculum, even if students cannot visit the sites. To our disappointment, the educators emphasized that it was unrealistic to introduce new subjects such as historic preservation, architecture, or archeology into the already crowded curriculum, because teachers are not mandated and do not have time to teach them. As we read about the pressures on teachers and schools today, it is obvious how wise this advice was.

Format and Content

One of our big questions concerned what kinds of materials on historic places teachers would find useful. Our advisors recommended that we work with educators to develop instructional materials in a lesson plan format teachers easily could use to enrich the instruction of required subjects. They suggested we target middle schools, making the materials flexible enough to be used in American history, geography, and civics at the upper elementary and high school levels.

Nationally known educator, historian, and textbook author Fay Metcalf, former director of the National Commission for Social Studies in the Schools, and one of our advisors, agreed to develop the format for a series of classroom-ready lesson plans based on properties listed in the National Register. Now numbering well over 100, these lesson plans are the heart of the Teaching with Historic Places (TwHP) program. Dr. Metcalf’s prototype lesson plan format has withstood the test of time and been modified only slightly in response to comments from teachers. The beauty of the lesson plans is that they can be used regardless of whether the students are able to go to the sites. When students can take field trips to these places, the lesson plans provide pre- and post-visit activities that make on-site visits more meaningful and educational.

As Fay Metcalf said in a 1993 CRM article, “my mission was to create lesson plans, using real historic places, that would not only be useful to teachers, but used by them. Part of the challenge was to infuse the lesson plans with some of the same aura possessed by the places themselves—that appeal that arouses the interest and curiosity necessary for real learning. For we realized that most of the teachers and students for whom the lessons would be applicable would never visit these sites. In addition, lessons would have to be flexible enough to fit comfortably into different school systems and curricula across the country.” (CRM, vol.16, no. 2, 1993, p. 12)

Each lesson plan includes an introduction that builds interest in the place and what can be learned from it. “About the Lesson” describes where the lesson fits into the curriculum, objectives with measurements. Recent National Historic Landmark Theme Studies have inspired the development of new TwHP lesson plans. For example, lesson plans on the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado (whose chapel is pictured above) and the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk were created this year as part of the U.S. Air Force/NPS-sponsored American Aviation Heritage Theme Study. In this way, TwHP has helped to make public education a more integral part of the National Historic Landmark program. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Air Force Academy.
The first students examine maps, in a new lesson plan on the impact of airplanes. The National Memorial in North Carolina, photos, and excerpts in the 20th century. The National Trust went on to introduce the T wHP program and distribution of the lesson plans, it posted the first lesson plans on the internet in 1998. The decision to use the NPS website to publicize T wHP and as the primary vehicle for publishing and distributing the lesson plans has been one of our best strategic choices, making the program and the lesson plans available to a very large and growing audience of educators and others not only nationwide but worldwide. In 2003 alone, the T wHP website received over 39.1 million hits, by more than 1.1 million visitors. We now realize how important the internet has become in educating both children and adults.

The website offers the means to reach a large number of teachers, students, and others of all ages. Teachers are much more likely to use the immediately accessible lesson plans. The website also allows the NPS to better explain the values of teaching with historic places and to provide instructions for teachers and preservationists on how to create their own lessons using the T wHP method. The website contains information on professional development, special thematic features, and links to other related websites, including the National Register's Discover Our Shared Heritage Travel Itineraries on registered historic places. These are linked when the places explored in T wHP lesson plans are featured in an itinerary. The T wHP and National Register home pages are linked, making it easy to familiarize educators with the National Register and the National Register Information System (NRIS), where viewers can find out about registered historic places nationwide and in their own communities. We can link from our website to a myriad of other websites.
Organization of American Historians (OAH) has reproduced three TwHP lesson plans in its journal for middle and high school teachers, the *Magazine of History*.

**Professional Development**

From the beginning, we followed recommendations to offer professional development opportunities to help educators, preservationists, and museum and site interpreters learn to use historic places as part of the curriculum and to show them how to prepare TwHP lesson plans. Fay Metcalf wrote guidelines, now updated and available on the NPS website, to help educators and preservationists prepare new lessons on registered historic places to add to the series. As early as 1991, TwHP began holding workshops for preservationists and educators on writing place-based lesson plans, and we continue to conduct frequent workshops with field studies at the National Trust and NCSS annual conferences. The TwHP method was tested in two three-credit college courses at George Mason University Graduate School of Education in Fairfax, Va., in 1993 and 1994. In 1995 the National Trust published two TwHP publications, *A Technical Source Book* and *A Curriculum Framework*, to help schools of education, state agencies, community organizations, and school districts use the TwHP approach in graduate courses, workshops, and curriculum projects. In 2002 the NPS introduced a 15-minute training video on TwHP.

As a result of these instructions and the workshops, we receive a steady stream of lesson plans from volunteer preparers for the National Register staff to edit and add to the published series. More than 115 lesson plans published to date have been authored by educators, preservationists, and site interpreters from all over the United States.

**Partners and Colleagues**

Along the way, TwHP has benefited from the support of many partners, and we have learned that you cannot have too many if you want to succeed. The NPS’s National Register of Historic Places, Parks as Classrooms, Cultural Resources Training Initiative, and Battlefield Protection Programs, and the National Trust provided the financial support to develop the program and including those of preservation organizations, which we encourage to link back to us. The website also offers users an opportunity to provide us with feedback, and the response has been very positive.

All of the lesson plans are indexed in four ways on the website: by location, theme, time period, and the National Standards for History. Now we are preparing to index them by the Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. This is consistent with the advice we received at the outset of the program to fit lesson plans on historic places into existing curricula. Today some TwHP lesson plans are available in print, but all are accessible over the internet at www.cr.nps.gov/nr.

We have worked hard to make our lessons known and accessible through channels that teachers use. The Department of Education’s website, Federal Resources for Excellence in Education (FREE), includes all of the TwHP lessons in the FREE online index, organized by subject matter. FREE acts as a clearinghouse for federal education materials and makes online teaching and learning resources from about 30 federal agencies easier to find. FREE has promoted specific TwHP lesson plans often on its home page as its “Today’s FREE Resource” feature. The National Council for the Social Studies has reprinted 22 TwHP lesson plans in *Social Education*. The TwHP lesson plan, launched in 2003, focuses on Virginia’s New Kent School (now New Kent Middle School) and the George W. Watkins School, both involved in a landmark school desegregation ruling by the Supreme Court in 1968. Photo by Susan Salvatore.
publish the first lesson plans. With monies from Parks as Classrooms, many NPS interpreters and historians have attended workshops to prepare TwpHP lesson plans for their parks. The NPS’s National Center for Preservation Technology and Training provided a grant to TwpHP to bring advisors together again to evaluate the program and the effectiveness of the lesson plans. Beyond that, the program has received support from other NPS programs: the Historic Landscape Initiative, Mather Center, Northeast Regional Office, and the Cultural Diversity Program.

Several recent National Historic Landmarks Theme Studies have led to the development of TwpHP lesson plans for properties that were designated as National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) as a result of the studies. The two schools identified and designated NHLs as part of the congenially mandated Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States Theme Study became the subject of the 100th TwpHP lesson plan, New Kent School and the George W. Watkins School: From Freedom of Choice to Integration, launched in 2003. The schools were the focus of an important 1968 U.S. Supreme Court decision, Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia, which placed an affirmative duty on school boards to integrate schools. Three Ph.D. candidates at the College of William and Mary assisted by three students of the class of 2002 at New Kent County High School prepared the lesson.

New lessons plans on the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk and the U.S. Air Force Academy were created this year as part of the U.S. Air Force/NPS–sponsored American Aviation Heritage Theme Study. As a result, TwpHP has helped broaden the National Historic Landmark program’s vision on how important it is to make public education an integral result of the identification and recognition of cultural resources.

In 1998 the National Park Foundation arranged for Target Stores, The Discovery Channel, and the Eureka Company to sponsor a kit of six TwpHP lesson plans on National Park sites, Explore Your National Parks: Historic Places. Target Stores distributed 34,000 of the lesson plan kits in its stores on its annual teacher appreciation day. The Historical Society of Washington, DC, National History Day, and the Center/Clearinghouse for Social Studies and Social Science Education (ERIC/ChESS) also have played a role in publishing and distributing the lesson plans. TwpHP has been blessed with a talented and committed professional staff willing to learn. National Register historian Beth Boland, the tireless, creative, and highly effective coordinator of the program, was ably assisted by Marilyn Harper, another National Register historian and now a contractor still working with us. Kathleen Hunter, heritage education coordinator at the National Trust at the beginning, was instrumental in getting the program off the ground, as were Buckley Jepson and Kathy Adams who were responsible for the National Trust’s work to publish the lessons. Past and present National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers contractor employees Bill Wright, Brenda Olio, and Theresa Campbell-Page have also been essential to TwpHP’s successes.

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Building on Our Accomplishments

It has been extremely gratifying to see our efforts recognized over the years. TwpHP has been honored with a White House and National Endowment for the Arts Federal Design Achievement Award, a National Park Foundation/National Park Service Park Partnership Leadership Award, an award of merit from the American Association of State and Local History, and the NPS Cultural Resources Award. At least a dozen awards and commendations

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School programs are among the most popular and successful ways that museums, historic sites, preservation groups, and historical societies can serve the children in their communities. Although thousands of school programs are presented every year, only a few have received awards from the American Association for State and Local History.¹ A review of the recent award-winning school programs for grades 4-6 (when the teaching of state and local history is introduced by public schools to students aged 10-12 years) revealed two significant patterns that demonstrate that excellent school programs are within the grasp of every museum, historic site, preservation group, and historical society.

First, the excellence of the programs is not related to the size of the budget or of the staff. These award-winning school programs were created by a wide variety of organizations, from those operated entirely by volunteers using meager funds to those with large professional staffs and million-dollar budgets.

Second, outstanding programs can be presented through a wide variety of methods ranging from field trips to traveling trunks to role-playing to websites. There are no universal programmatic ingredients, such as pre-visit materials, teacher training, or hands-on activities, that must be present to ensure success.

The key to creating outstanding school programs is the manner in which they are developed and implemented. This approach centered on three major elements: designing the program backward, encouraging creativity and originality, and placing an emphasis on both content and technique. Although no institution fully incorporated every element, all of these school programs were excellent because they adopted these methods to some extent.
**Designed Backward**

Award-winning school programs first identified the desired results, then determined acceptable evidence of success, and finally planned the learning experiences and activities. “Backward design” is perhaps best explained by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in *Understanding by Design*: “Why do we describe the most effective curricular designs as ‘backward’? We do so because many teachers begin with textbooks, favored lessons, and time-honored activities rather than deriving those tools from targeted goals or standards. We are advocating the reverse: One starts with the end—and then derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning (performances called for by the standards and the teaching needed to equip students to perform).”

As this approach is being institutionalized in public schools, it seems to have already taken hold in many museums, especially through the adoption of mission statements and strategic plans. Indeed, in many of the award-winning programs, the goals and objectives as well as the institution’s mission were prominently listed in the promotional announcements and teacher training manuals.

**Mission Minded**

One of the fundamental results of an award-winning school program is that it clearly fulfilled the museum’s mission. Unfortunately, some museums have difficulties creating good school programs because they operate without a mission statement or have unsuitable missions. Judge for yourself: Which of the following mission statements would be most helpful in creating a fourth-grade school program?

The Clark County Historical Society’s mission is to:

A. educate and preserve.

B. interpret, preserve, and promote the history of Clark County from 1850 to 1950 to residents and businesses.

Although we would all agree that museums should “educate and preserve,” for a state or local organization this mission by itself is too vague and too broad to direct its efforts. The last statement is more helpful in crafting a successful program because it provides details about time, place, subject, and audience. These details provide boundaries as well as direction.

A good mission statement should be the basis of a museum’s school program, not simply as an intellectual exercise but to provide practical guidance during its development. Furthermore, the completed program should not only fulfill the museum’s mission but also communicate it clearly to teachers and students.

**Planned Strategically**

Successful school programs began their development with a strategy that included clear goals, measurable objectives, and an organized plan. Without a strategic plan, projects can be easily derailed by new ideas, held back by the inertia of tradition, and run out of steam because of limited finances, lack of time, and shifting priorities. Although a strategic plan is a useful tool for staying on track, it may need to be adjusted during the development of the school program—but changes should be made rarely and deliberately.

Goals provide a target for the project and become “mini-missions” for the museum. Often these goals can be pulled directly from the school’s standards of learning or curriculum framework and used to guide the development of the program. Unfortunately, the more typical scenario is that a museum creates a program and then simply scans the standards to see which ones apply, resulting in a poorly conceived program that awkwardly fulfills the school’s requirements.

Objectives are the methods or tactics used to reach the goals and should be measurable, specific, and achievable. For school programs, these typically focus on the students’ skills and knowledge and are often used in tests, such as “the student will be able to recognize the major mining methods in Colorado during the late 1800s.” In the better programs, these objectives are more thoughtful. They do not simply identify facts but also require comparison, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation, such as “the student will be able to analyze the impact of placer and hydraulic mining in Colorado during the late 1800s.”

The plan should also lay out a path to guide development of the program, with each step assigned to a person with a completion date and priority level. The significant persons involved with or affected by the development of the school program should review the strategic plan. This not only improves support for and coordination of the project, but also identifies new resources and potential obstacles.

Ultimately, a program’s success is determined by how well it meets its goals and objectives, thus evaluation should be an integral part of the strategic plan. Although evaluation is often associated with surveys, it can take a variety of forms; occur before, during, and after program development; and involve museum staff, teachers, students, and parents. Although the techniques varied—pre-testing activities in pilot programs, including a survey form with materials, observing students in the classroom, measuring website usage, discussions with school teachers and administrators—the award-winning programs consistently incorporated evaluation in their planning and development.

**Sustainable**

Historic sites invest too many resources in even the smallest and simplest programs to see good ones lost. Sustainability...
Successful museum programs are a result of the museum having an understanding of how its school program fits within the larger context of historical scholarship and educational techniques.

Successful education programs are a result of the museum having an understanding of how its school program fits within the larger context of historical scholarship and educational techniques. This combination of an opportunity, a weakness, and a strength led to the development of a research library on the internet that includes more than 1,700 pages of documents and images that are now available 24 hours a day at very little cost (www.shelbycountyhistory.org).

Balances Content and Technique

Successful education programs are a result of the museum having an understanding of how its school program fits within the larger context of historical scholarship and educational techniques. In addition to seeing the big picture, they are also able to sufficiently address each of these elements to ensure they are in balance.

Historical Scholarship

At their most basic level, these award-winning programs avoid teaching history as a list of names and dates, confirming the research of the National Center for History in the Schools. In Lessons from History, the Center noted that, “Historical knowledge must go beyond the factual knowledge implicit in these lists—important though that knowledge is—to the expla-
“Molly Watkins and the Secret of the South Jetty” is a 32-page booklet of 15 lessons, each with a letter from “Molly,” a short narrative, and activities using historic objects, maps, or photographs. “Molly Watkins” is one of several elements included in the Columbia Maritime Museum’s Semper Paratus program.

From its own archives, but also the “collection” of the community, such as public monuments, cemetery headstones, and historic buildings. For example, students visit the Monumental Building, an 1870s Gothic Revival memorial hall, to make a link between a local site and the Civil War. Placing local people, places, and events in a regional and national context is crucial for students to understand how their history is related to the bigger picture.

To ensure historical accuracy and incorporate the latest interpretive theories and perspectives, some sites had trained historians on staff who helped provide content. Others sought the advice of scholars to assist with development and evaluation of materials. The national and many state humanities councils provide funding for consultants to develop school programs, and professional associations, such as AASLH and the National Council for Public History, can recommend people who are skilled at both historical content and interpretation.

Successful programs also looked at their collections in new ways, both inside and outside the organization, to make links between local and national history. As a result, the Shelby County Historical Society’s Just for Kids program examines not only documents from the Civil War.

They have a good understanding of their audience (students), recognizing not only how they learn but also how they are taught. Thanks to the research of educators and psychologists during the past few decades, we have a much better understanding of learning in museums and by children. We now recognize that such popular techniques as hands-on activities, field trips, or pre-visit materials are effective only when used appropriately.

Not satisfied with only addressing questions of who, what, when, and where, the award-winning programs also examined why. This is a demanding challenge and requires historical scholarship that is not only accurate and well documented but also incorporates thoughtful interpretation.

Successful programs also looked at their collections in new ways, both inside and outside the organization, to make links between local and national history. As a result, the Shelby County Historical Society’s Just for Kids program examines not only documents from its own archives, but also the “collection” of the community, such as public monuments, cemetery headstones, and historic buildings. For example, students visit the Monumental Building, an 1870s Gothic Revival memorial hall, to make a link between a local site and the Civil War. Placing local people, places, and events in a regional and national context is crucial for students to understand how their history is related to the bigger picture.

Educational Techniques

In the same manner, the award-winning school programs incorporated appropriate educational techniques. They have a good understanding of their audience (students), recognizing not only how they learn but also how they are taught. Thanks to the research of educators and psychologists during the past few decades, we have a much better understanding of learning in museums and by children. We now recognize that such popular techniques as hands-on activities, field trips, or pre-visit materials are effective only when used appropriately. We now incorporate multiple intelligences, learning styles, and audience interests in formulating an educational strategy. As a result, the award-winning school programs are incredibly rich in both affective and cognitive techniques and provide a variety of ways for every student to pursue his or her interests and succeed in learning.

Furthermore, there is a careful balance between new and familiar information so that learners are neither overwhelmed nor bored. Successful educational experiences build on previous knowledge for reinforcement and also introduce novel ideas to master. At the Homestead Museum, for example, A Journey Through Time introduces vocabulary in the classroom through worksheets, puzzles, and reading assignments and then reinforces it during the site visit, using the same words in different contexts.

Understanding how children are taught often requires more direct experiences. Each museum developed a thorough knowledge of its local public education system, from the broad (standards of learning, textbook adoption, and school board politics) to the narrow (classroom equipment, school schedule, and bus transportation), by not only examining textbooks and frameworks but also observing classes and interviewing teachers, students, and staff. This identified the opportunities and threats in implementing the museum’s program. For example, grade-level testing often prevents field trips for weeks in the spring or the lack of internet access impedes adoption of web-based activities.

By understanding how students learn and how they are taught, the outstanding programs were seamlessly integrated into the school system. One of the best examples of this can be found at Shadows-on-the-Tech in Louisiana, which has developed distinctive programs in nearly every grade level of the New Iberia Parish School District. For more than 25 years, Shadows has collaborated with the school district to integrate the historic site into the classroom. As a result, first-graders experience role-playing, middle school students serve as tour guides, and high schoolers conduct oral histories. Shadows also trains teachers and enriches student experiences by hosting workshops with national scholars such as Dr. Rex Ellis of Colonial Williamsburg. The school district also recommends teachers to develop, test, and revise Shadows’ programs and they regularly meet to evaluate and plan activities. It is a wonderfully collaborative environment that clearly helps both organizations better serve their community.

Developing publications, websites, and other materials for the learning and teaching of school programs is particularly challenging because attention must be paid to both function and aesthetics. The award-winning programs invested considerable attention to design, ensuring it was attractive, useful, and convenient for the users.

In developing materials, the award-winning programs kept a clear focus on the multiple users of their materials—and it varied. Typical users...
What Do Children Learn When They Go on a Field Trip to Henry Clay’s Estate?

Historic preservationists, historians, and archeologists share a deep passion for the past, a common assumption when it comes to teaching about it: that learning about past events, issues, concerns, and people is essential to developing an understanding of who we are today.

To this end, these educators develop curricula and lessons. They employ 3-D models, the internet, and primary documents; involve their students in hands-on learning experiences; and take their students on field trips to house museums, historic sites, and archeological excavations.

Hands-on learning activities and field trips in particular are considered especially enriching. Educators believe that by touching objects used by people long ago or by actually visiting the places where history happened, students will gain a unique and valuable perspective on the past that cannot be replicated in any other way.

But is this true? Do we know what students are actually learning from these field trips and hands-on activities? Is there any empirical evidence to show that these experiences are actually functioning the way we think they are? Do students see patterns of history when they find or hold an object, or is it simply an object? And just as importantly, can insights gained from focused evaluations and assessments of student learning improve our approaches to teaching about the past?

These were the questions and concerns that informed a recent study initiated by the Kentucky Archaeological Survey, whose mission, in part, is to educate Kentuckians about their rich archeological heritage, both prehistoric and historic. Designed by a history education researcher and archeologists who worked closely with a seasoned fifth-grade classroom teacher, this study targeted a group of 74 elementary school students who were being formally introduced to archeology for the first time. Its results have pro-


2 The American Historical Association provides excellent guidance for historical scholarship in its Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct, which is available at www.theaha.org.


4 Robin Williams has authored a series of practical graphic design books, including The Non-Designer’s Design Book (Peachpit Press, 1994).

5 A helpful guide is Michael Allison and Jude Kaye, Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations (New York: Wiley, 1997).

6 For a good introduction to the range of possibilities, see Judy Diamond, Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Educational Settings (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1999).


8 Robin Williams has authored a series of practical graphic design books, including The Non-Designer’s Design Book (Peachpit Press, 1994).

9 A. Guyynn Henderson and Linda S. Levstik

Notes

1 No doubt many more programs deserve to be recognized for their excellence and I encourage readers to nominate them for an award. For an overview of school programs in American museums, see True Needs, True Partners: Museums Serving Schools (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2002) available at http://www.imls.gov/pubs/pdf/m-survey.pdf.


3 A helpful guide is Michael Allison and Jude Kaye, Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations (New York: Wiley, 1997).

4 For a good introduction to the range of possibilities, see Judy Diamond, Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Educational Settings (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1999).
vided us with important insights into how students think about history as well as concrete suggestions for improving teaching approaches. Our findings are relevant for anyone involved in teaching others about the past, whether they are historic preservationists, historians, or archeologists.

Background and Context
Three sites formed the backdrop for our study: a classroom, a historic site, and a museum. Classroom instruction took place at Sylvan Elementary School (a pseudonym), a professional development school for the neighboring university. About 600 students from kindergarten through fifth grade attend Sylvan, which is in a middle-class neighborhood.

Ashland, The Henry Clay Estate, served as the field experience location. Operated as a historic site since 1964, Ashland consists of a restored/reconstructed late 19th-century home as well as outbuildings, modern gardens, and landscaping. Research has focused on studying the lives of the plantation’s former inhabitants, and so, since 1990, archeological investigations at Ashland have targeted the architectural history of the main building, documented activity areas within the 20 acres surrounding the main house, and discovered outbuildings such as privies and barns. Over the past three years, activities have expanded to include a formal education component directed at elementary school students.

The nearby university’s small anthropology museum was the third site. Although most of the museum’s displays depict regional prehistory, at least one exhibit highlights archeological research conducted at a local historic site.

We selected these fifth-grade students for several reasons. First, Sylvan’s fifth graders represented the kind of students generally involved in Kentucky Archaeological Survey-sponsored education projects: upper-grade urban/suburban elementary public school children who are experiencing an in-depth introduction to archeology for the first time.

Second, the classroom teacher involved with our project had taught an archeology unit to the entire fifth grade at Sylvan each year for the three years preceding our research. And finally, her unit of study consists of a much more intensive discovery of the subject (every week for five months) than most archeology study units, with more diverse activities and with deeper student involvement and immersion.

Learning about how archeologists “do” archeology is the unit’s main focus. It combines lessons from Intrigue of the Past, the teaching activity guide for Project Archaeology (a national curriculum for fourth to seventh grades developed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management); lessons the teacher developed; and in-class visits by archeologists, who lead the students in an artifact analysis activity and show them tools and slides of archeological fieldwork in preparation for their site visit.

A trip to an anthropology museum, which provided examples of the kinds of interpretive work that follows excavation and analysis, is also part of the unit. There, an archeologist leads the students in an activity focused on interpreting artifacts displayed in the cases. Students also develop a web page, participate in in-class discovery centers, and do writing assignments.

An outdoor classroom experience involving a visit to and participation in an ongoing archeological excavation project at Ashland. The Henry Clay Estate, is an integral part of the unit. At Ashland, the students are divided into rotating work groups. One group tours Henry Clay’s restored home, guided by a docent who provides historical background on Clay, his family, and the political activity that made Clay a prominent figure in U.S. history. A second group works under the guidance of archeologists at several excavation units, uncovering artifacts, screening soil for artifacts, and placing them in labeled bags. A third group, also supervised by archeologists, washes the artifacts. Photo courtesy of the Kentucky Archaeological Survey.
The students recover, sort, and categorize historic artifacts (such as ceramics, glass, nails, coal, and metal objects).

The students kept field notebooks and, for our study in particular, at the midpoint of the unit the teacher used a written survey to assess what students were learning. These materials, as well as written and oral status reports on student work, artifact analysis worksheets, and the like were made available to us during the project.

During and shortly after students took part in the unit, we also observed and interviewed the students ourselves. We videotaped them doing the in-class historic artifact activity and while they worked at the excavation sites and washed artifacts at Ashland. While at Ashland, we engaged them in interpretive discussions about the fieldwork (we asked questions such as: “What are the archeologists trying to find out here?” and “Why would someone want to know this?”). At the conclusion of the unit, we interviewed all of the students, and asked questions such as: “What is archeology?” “What is an artifact?” “How can artifacts tell us about the past?”

Research Results

On the whole, the Sylvan Elementary School students found their study of archeology intrinsically interesting and intriguing, a response that is in line with what archeology educators have consistently reported over the past 25 years: that the field has considerable motivational appeal for students. Student engagement cannot be dismissed lightly, for without it, accomplishing other goals becomes much more difficult. Within the context of our particular study, they demonstrated much enthusiasm not only for their work in class and in the field (at the end of the day of fieldwork, one boy reported that it had been one of the “best days in my life!”), but also for the interviews.

Children really enjoyed finding things and approached artifact interpretation with considerable zeal. They willingly speculated about the people who created and used various artifacts (qualifying words appeared regularly in their descriptions, such as maybe, sort of, I guess, we don’t know, somehow, and so forth) and engaged in extended conversations contrasting their own lives with life in the various pasts to which they were exposed.

It is clear that these children absorbed some of the information we hoped they were learning. Though they seemed to have memorized a lot of definitions and facts, in extended conversations with them and from their writing assignments, it was apparent that most of them truly did understand, for example, what an artifact was, and the notion of layers or stratigraphy.

These students came away from this unit understanding that artifacts and sites are special and require special actions (we’re not sure, however, if that equates to a respect for the past or a fear of the archeology police!). They explained that we study the past to connect ourselves to ancestors, understand other people and past cultures, prepare for further study, improve the present (i.e., to make our lives today easier or better and to find out about mistakes made long ago so that people today will not repeat them), and satisfy personal interest (the fascination of digging up the past was the purpose that they found most personally motivating). Most of these responses parallel findings from other studies of children’s and adolescents’ thinking about history.

Significantly, when contrasted with history, the students viewed archeology as interpretive and active, an open-ended and ongoing inquiry. History, on the other hand, they saw as passive, a largely completed, non-negotiable narrative.

While our research showed that the field experience clearly enhances learning, it also indicated that some of the most basic concepts slipped through the cracks. For example, it was troubling to learn that the students did not always make clear connections between material remains and the cultures that produced them. “Found objects”—rocks, fossils, pottery sherd, animal bones, human bones—are all fascinating to them. Yet, they did not understand how archeologists study past cultures through objects. They do not see patterns of history when they see artifacts, nor do they see artifacts as evidence of past human activity or culture. Artifacts are still just objects to them. They are confused about research, interpretation, and “story” and struggled with the connections between processes and interpretations, and about the nature of evidence-based archeological interpretation. Because of how they conceive of artifacts, they had a tendency to conclude that a single explanation was theoretically, if not practically, possible.

These shortcomings and this confusion may be due to a number of factors: individual students’ basic intelligence, students’ age and the maturity of their thinking processes, the kinds of information presented to them, and the way in which it was presented. In particular, our use of certain metaphors to explain these concepts and ideas may have been partly to blame. “Puzzle” and “story” were the biggest culprits.

The puzzle metaphor likens archeological research to fitting fragments together (objects or facts) to make a whole (object or idea), thus we explained to the students that doing archeology is like working a puzzle. Piecing together a puzzle does, indeed, capture some features of archeo-
ological work (and archeologists actually do piece artifacts together sometimes). Assuming that all the pieces remain, the resulting object is, at a very literal level, complete; and it certainly is true that for archeology, as with puzzles, if any pieces (artifacts) are missing, information is missing. But while this metaphor works well at the artifact level, the same cannot be said of its applicability to any assignment of meaning to the artifact in the context of a site or as part of larger patterns of culture.

Our use of this metaphor implied that when archeologists put all the puzzle pieces together, they know all about the past and the people’s ways of life (i.e., the puzzle is complete). Archeological research isn’t really like that. A regular puzzle has a border, is two-dimensional, and is static. Usually all the pieces are there, and the answer is on the front of the box. But an archeological puzzle has no borders, and it is three-dimensional. All the pieces are never there, and there is no single right answer. Often the best archeologists can do about answers is to present several explanations, and, from them, identify the most plausible one.

With regard to our use of the “story” metaphor, we told the students that artifacts and patterns of artifacts tell the story about the people who made them, used them, and left them behind. By studying artifacts and their patterns, archeologists read the story of the past. But we found little evidence that the students in our study understood that an archeological story represents an evidence-based interpretation of the past. The way in which we used this metaphor implied that this story is “made up,” like a creative writing assignment. So when asked to explain what “story” a group of artifacts might tell, students tended to create interpretations that relied more heavily on narrative structures—problem, climax, resolution—than on archeological evidence, often abandoning evidence in favor of maintaining a story line. This pattern also appears in other studies of historical thinking.1

This metaphor is misleading because the past can never be fully recaptured, and any interpretations of the past, no matter how carefully pieced together, are inevitably shaped by the questions guiding archeological inquiry, as well as the background knowledge and experience of investigators.6 As a result, no “whole story” exists or can ever exist. Archeological sites and the artifacts they contain hold as many stories as there were people who lived there. Similarly, archeology stories are not fantasies (although they are created in our imagination), and artifacts aren’t vehicles for spinning those tales. Artifacts are evidence, and archeologists base their interpretations on this evidence. Archeological stories must make logical sense. They aren’t make-believe.

In contrast, another metaphor we used—archeologists are like time detectives or forensic scientists, solving the mysteries of the past by paying close attention to the clues long-ago people left behind—was more successful. We told the students that in searching for an understanding of people’s lives, archeologists have to measure, analyze, and record detailed observations about artifacts and their patterns that provide clues (facts) about the past. Just like detectives do when they go about solving crimes (answering research questions), they use the clues to speculate about the way life was in the past (draw conclusions based on informed inferences they make about these artifacts and the patterns they observed). This metaphor helped students understand that archeological stories are inevitably partial, ambiguous, and subject to change as new pieces of evidence are found. They also understood that careful observation of artifacts leads to better inferences and a more complete story about the past; and that disturbing artifact patterns or removing artifacts from a site “messes up,” erases, or destroys the story.

Teaching Insights and Suggestions

While we gained many specific insights relevant to archeology education and its practice, here we would like to broaden our scope and discuss insights we believe are relevant to anyone involved in teaching about the past.

Whether or not students have ever visited an archeological site or historic place, they do not come to their first formal study of a subject as blank slates. They have prior notions and/or fragmentary knowledge about it. Sometimes these prior notions are correct, up to a certain point. Sometimes they are dead wrong (the idea that archeologists are mainly interested in finding fossils for instance, or the notion that the Underground Railroad was actually a set of tracks under the ground). When we come to classrooms to talk or when we are formally involved in teaching a unit, we need to remember that while we might be the first in-the-flesh architectural historian, historian, or archeologist the students have ever talked to, they have already formed ideas about what it is we do.

Metaphors are useful for clarifying, illustrating, and explaining something that is far removed from the listener’s
we studied had all the advantages—a committed teacher, a focused unit, a hands-on learning approach, the involvement of archeologists, out-of-classroom learning opportunities—and still there were important conceptual linkages they did not make. Were our expectations unrealistic? Comparatively speaking, what do students learn from a unit of study that consists of a few lessons before and after a field trip to a site? We are indeed naive if we think that a field trip experience will change students’ view of the world, and that it will encourage them to feel a sense of stewardship for our nation’s fragile cultural resources and to value the past and the places where the tangible evidence of the past remains.

As educators, our expectations about what our students actually will learn from a field trip or a hands-on lesson must be realistic. We need to ask: “What questions motivate this study?” “How can questions be introduced to these questions by this visit?” By thinking carefully about what we intend to teach, we will be open to what is possible/plausible in a particular circumstance. In this way, we can make intelligent decisions about what to include and what to omit—and, thus, not overload the lessons.

Finally, if one of our goals in teaching about the past involves influencing how students value it and the places that represent it, then all of us, historic preservationists, historians, and archeologists alike, especially need to attend to the “So what?” when we engage students in studying the past. We must ask ourselves...

“What difference will it make if my students learn this?”

“What makes learning about the events, issues, concerns, and people of the past so essential to developing an understanding of who we are today?”

“What can the study of the past provide students that nothing else can provide?...and then develop units of study that address these basic questions. Having done this, we will have fanned the flames of passion for the past in another generation.

Educators have consistently reported that archeology has great motivational appeal for students. The Sylvan students really enjoyed finding things. One boy called his day of fieldwork one of the “best days of my life!” Photo courtesy of the Kentucky Archaeological Survey.

Notes


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Teaching “Street Smarts”: The Los Angeles Conservancy’s Kids’ Guide to Broadway

Jane McNamara and Trudi Sandmeier

Finding architectural gems in the midst of a dense, layered, urban streetscape can be a challenge for even the most seasoned architectural explorer. Yet the “aha!” moment of seeing beyond unfortunate signage or a horribly mangled facade to the truly beautiful architecture hidden in plain sight can be one of life’s great rewards. Any preservationist knows that vision and imagination, the ability to see hidden beauty, is essential to our ability to save historic buildings.

It is just this experience—discovering and getting excited about historic architecture in urban landscapes—that the Los Angeles Conservancy sought to encourage with its Kids’ Guide to Broadway. This educational guidebook, complemented by a set of follow-up web-based materials, is aimed at youth from roughly eight to twelve years old.

The Broadway Initiative and the Youth & Family Outreach Initiative

The Kids’ Guide explores a six-block stretch of Broadway in downtown LA, which has an amazing wealth of historic movie palaces, department stores, and other commercial buildings from the early 1900s through the early 1930s. This same area is now home to a vibrant, bustling Latino shopping district at the street level and a number of loft housing conversions on its upper floors. Efforts are also underway to restore its historic movie palaces and rezone portions of the street to create a nightlife and entertainment district.

The Conservancy has long had a special connection to Broadway because of its important concentration of historic resources, many of which have been threatened over the years. The Broadway Historic Theater and Commercial District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and is the largest and most dense theater district in the country with twelve theaters in just seven blocks. Many of the Conservancy’s early programs and tours focused on these rich historic resources in the heart of downtown. In 1999, in an effort to bring attention and help to these architectural and cultural icons, as well as the plentiful but decaying historic commercial architecture that fills downtown, the Conservancy launched the Broadway Initiative. Through the efforts of a full-time staff person, the Conservancy works with developers, owners, shopkeepers, and other constituencies to proactively rehabilitate the street and its historic buildings.

When the Conservancy decided to launch its new Youth & Family Outreach Initiative in 2003, Broadway seemed to be the logical and appropriate focus for an early project. Prior to beginning this new phase of educational outreach, the Conservancy completed an eight-month study about how best to approach youth-based programming. Of the many conclusions outlined in this report, two emerged as particularly important:

1. To create a preservation ethic in youth, they must first gain an awareness of and excitement about the historic built environment around them.

2. Youth-based projects should have strong links to the Conservancy’s core mission of urban preservation and involve interactions with real historic places and materials.

A Broadway-focused youth project offered both the opportunity to interact with one of LA’s most interesting historic urban streetscapes as well as a strong link to one of the Conservancy’s most innovative preservation programs.

The Kids’ Guide to Broadway Project

The Kids’ Guide to Broadway was conceived in two parts: a bilingual (Spanish and English) self-guided interactive booklet about the street, and a series of web-based resources and follow-up activities for kids, parents, and teachers. Erin Sullivan, a local teacher and curriculum writer, was hired to develop these materials with the Conservancy to ensure that they were age-appropriate and linked to relevant curriculum standards. The City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department and Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa agreed to collaborate on the project through in-kind donations and assistance with distribution, and the Bank of America offered financial support as part of its underwriting of the Broadway Initiative.

As one of the first projects of the new Youth & Family Outreach Initiative, it was crucial to all involved that the Kids’ Guide serve as a strong model for the Conservancy’s future preservation education efforts. Working from the conclusions of the Youth & Family Outreach Study, the project team identified four key approaches for the Kids’ Guide:

1. Engage kids with the built environment by giving them tools for exploring what they can actually see in their communities today.

2. Focus on real, everyday historic fabric rather than pristine restored sites to help kids “discover” the great buildings all around them.

3. Teach kids to “read” an urban streetscape to find links to the past by using their imaginations to look beyond bad remodels, dirt, changed uses, etc.

4. Link the past to the future by helping kids value where they live and understand how preservation can be part of making these places even better.
The Booklet

With these four basic tenets in mind, the project team embarked on the hard work of actually creating fun, practical education materials about Broadway. The self-guided interactive booklet was chosen to be the centerpiece of the project. This format was selected because it could be used both by parents and kids exploring together and by teachers who wanted to create their own field trips to Broadway. This versatility greatly increases the potential audience for the Kids’ Guide. In addition, it allows teachers and other educators to develop their own ways to use the guide rather than being tied to a guided tour or set curriculum, which was identified as very important in the focus groups held during the Youth & Family Outreach Study.

Making the booklet bilingual was another important choice for the project. As mentioned previously, Broadway is currently a major shopping destination for the city’s Latino community. And, while the guide targets children who are generally reading English, their parents may not be. Having Spanish-speaking parents who bring their children to Broadway on the weekends. In an effort to make the booklet as cross-cultural as possible, the booklet randomly alternates the two languages rather than privileging one or the other by consistently putting it first. One drawback of a bilingual guide is the increased text it requires, particularly for youth-focused materials where images are crucial. In the case of the Kids’ Guide to Broadway, however, we felt having both languages was so important that we were willing to deal with this issue (and, luckily, we had a designer who was able to create a great looking guide despite the large amount of text).

The reading level chosen for the booklet was third/fourth grade. This ensures that the booklet is appropriate for the two most relevant curriculum links in LA schools: local and community history in the third grade and California history in the fourth grade. The third/fourth grade reading level is also a good one for adults learning English, which makes the booklet helpful for people who primarily speak Spanish, and potentially makes it useful for ESL teachers as well.

The structure of the guide itself is quite simple, based on the four key approaches described above. The short introduction to the guide is light on history and strong on encouraging children to explore and imagine—the goal is to get them excited about Broadway not to give them an in-depth history lesson. The next section, “How to Look,” is in many ways the most important in the guide. It gives kids some simple tools for discovering historic architecture in an urban environment, such as looking up and down and finding “ghosts” of past structures and signs. This section also includes a basic vocabulary of architectural features and building materials specific to Broadway. And, it encourages children to look at the streetscape as a whole and absorb the distinctive “feel” of Broadway.

The rest of the guide is given over to having children explore specific historic buildings along Broadway. Each of the 12 buildings featured in the guide was chosen to engage participants in a different way, or with a different type of building, through close observation. We consciously did not include writing or drawing exercises in the guide, both because they are impractical on a street as crowded as Broadway and because we wanted to keep the kids’ attention on the buildings themselves. The building-focused activities are as simple as getting children to walk inside the Bradbury Building, a relatively nondescript 19th-century brick office building outside that hides one of LA’s most dramatic interiors, or having them find the “ghost” of a ticket booth in the terra cotta sidewalk in front of a movie palace turned electronics store. We also included observation activities designed to help kids see what preservation benefits can be accomplished through such simple actions as cleaning a building. And, we ask participants to use their imaginations to think about what it might be like to live in a historic office building or what might lie beneath a sadly “remodeled” facade.

What we did not try to do with this guide is teach architectural or urban history. It does not include dates of buildings, architects’ names, descriptions of different styles, or details of historic events related to Broadway. Its purpose is to get children to open their eyes and see in order to get excited about the historic buildings around them. This crucial first step lays the groundwork for further exploration and learning, whether in a structured classroom environment or in a less formal way. It is also meant to light a spark—making it fun for kids to search out old buildings in their own neighborhood or wherever they go.

The Web-based Activities

To encourage follow up to the Kids’ Guide, we created a series of pages on the Conservancy’s website (www.laconservancy.org/kids/kidspage.ph4). This was both a practical decision—the web is the least expensive way to provide a lot of content—and one based on the Conservancy’s Youth & Family Outreach Study. In the study, teachers strongly suggested that the web is one of the best ways for them to access materials and resources to use in their classrooms. The web materials involve three components:

1. Resources, both booklists and links to other websites, to help kids and adults learn more about the history of Broadway and Los Angeles, about specific buildings, and about historic architecture.

2. Follow-up activities for parents and children to do together, such as spotting
items on Broadway for a scavenger hunt for a return visit to the street. These activities were also conceived to be appropriate for non-school groups, such as scout troops, boys’ and girls’ clubs, and library programs.

3. Follow-up classroom activities, each of which has an explicit link to a California State curriculum standard and can be adapted up or down for various elementary grade levels. These are not full lesson plans but rather short easy-to-integrate activities that can be used in a number of different ways in the classroom—the format that teachers requested as part of the Conservancy’s study process.

Distribution and Publicity

Knowing that the booklet and web materials would only be effective if they were actually used, distribution strategies were central to the Kids’ Guide project planning from the beginning. Luckily the Conservancy had several strong partners for this aspect of the project. The City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department sponsored the printing of the booklet, which allowed us to print a large number in four colors and to distribute them free of charge. Early on, Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa, whose district includes the Broadway National Register district, committed to distribute the booklet to every fourth-grade classroom and every library in his district. He also agreed to host a publicity event, in partnership with Margie Johnson Reese, the general manager of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, to showcase the results of some of the follow-up projects from the web and draw public attention to the availability of the booklet and web materials.

Along with distributing the booklet to schools and libraries, the Conservancy reached out both to its own membership and to Broadway shoppers. To engage the many families who are Conservancy members, the guide was first launched at the Conservancy’s fall 2003 “Broadway Behind-the-Scenes” special tour. Generally these big tours, which attract up to 1,000 people, are for adults only. But with the Kids’ Guide available, the Conservancy was able to market the tour to family groups in its membership. An article in the Conservancy’s newsletter, which has a circulation of roughly 8,500 households, also publicized its availability to our membership, resulting in many requests to receive copies of the booklet to share with children, grandchildren, and classrooms. Several of our members also made sure that their local school libraries received copies of the booklet. In addition, the booklet has been distributed at Conservancy events, such as our popular “Last Remaining Seats” film series held annually in the historic movie palaces on Broadway, an event that attracts more than 10,000 attendees over a six-week period.

To reach families who use Broadway on a regular basis, the Conservancy worked with Clifton’s Cafeteria, a historic restaurant on Broadway that is included in the booklet. As a popular spot for families who shop on Broadway, Clifton’s is an ideal partner to distribute the Kids’ Guide, and to date they have given away more than 500 copies. In addition, more than 1,000 copies of the guide were distributed at the annual “Fiesta Broadway” Cinco de Mayo celebration, a huge street fair particularly popular in the Latino community. The guide is also available on the Conservancy’s website and it can be ordered by mail for just the cost of postage. Future plans include marketing the guide to local scout groups and other youth-focused community-based organizations, as well as encouraging wider use in schools through postings on teacher list-serves.

Our Goal as Preservation Educators

Responding to the Outreach Study recommendations and matching activities to curriculum standards have been essential for creating and promoting the Kids’ Guide to Broadway program. But all along we have been guided by something more fundamental: We knew that everyone loves a good treasure hunt, especially children. Building on this premise, we primarily designed the Kids’ Guide to illustrate that there are treasures all around us—if only you take the time to look up, or down, and notice them—whether they are buildings or lamp posts, terrazzo sidewalks or ghost signs from times gone by.

We also knew that to build new preservation constituencies, kids must get engaged in the imagination and vision of historic preservation—not just see the pristine restored house museums but recognize and understand historic buildings in their natural habitat and in the places they live, shop, and play. Our challenge, as preservation advocates and educators, is to share the thrill of discovering architectural “diamonds in the rough” with young people and channel that energy and excitement into valuing and caring for these places for years to come.

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Ten Things You Can Do to Improve Heritage Education in Your Community

1. Know what is being offered by the local preservation organization, the historical society, the museums, and libraries. Ask them about their capacity and their needs.

You will be most effective if you are well informed about the programs and activities already being offered in your community.

Do they offer programs to school groups? Are those full or are there spaces that could be used by school groups or others?
Do they hold teacher institutes? What topics do they cover? How many teachers can attend? How many actually do attend? Do the teachers bring their classes to the institution after they attend the training?
Are there walking tours or events about local history?
What needs do the institutions see that are not being met at present? What help is needed?

2. Volunteer to assist in leading programs, to expand existing programs, or to develop new programs.

After talking to staff at local institutions, you will have a much better idea of where the gaps are. Seriously consider whether you can make a time contribution based on your experience and availability. Do your skills match what is needed? Could you and several friends work on a project or program together?

3. Learn about the social studies and history curricula taught at local schools. What local sites connect to these national or state themes?

With the teaching reforms contained in the new education laws such as No Child Left Behind, teachers are even more pressed for time. They do not have the time to research the connection between local sites and the national history themes that they must teach. If you know what curriculum is taught locally, you can do the research and assist the teachers by making a clear connection with local sites. You can then provide the school district and the local historic sites with this information.

4. Contact the school district to find out if it needs supplementary materials relating to history and social studies.

Teachers are often expected to provide supplementary classroom materials such as maps, supplementary reading, posters, illustrations, etc., at their own expense. You could contact the school district or a school principal and assemble a “needs catalog” of desired materials. You could contribute toward fulfilling the needs yourself or pass the catalog around to likely donors.

5. Write a Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan in collaboration with a local historic site. Share the lesson plan with the school district.

In recognition of the time pressure on teachers, the National Park Service started a series of lesson plans based on historic places that are “classroom-ready.” There are now more than 100 of these lesson plans available online at www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp. If lesson plans are not available for sites in your area you might consider writing one. Two publications will help you. One is available from the National Trust for Historic Preservation: A Curriculum Framework for Professional Training and Development. This publication contains practical advice for teachers, preservationists, and museum and site interpreters for developing programs and instructional materials that focus on historic places as teaching tools. See www.preservationbooks.org. The National Park Service has assembled an “author’s packet” that describes the process and content of a lesson plan and invites authors to contribute their completed work. See www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/authors.htm.

6. Assemble a “traveling trunk.” A traveling trunk is an assembly of copies of documents, artifacts, and materials that illustrate an important event or period in history.

Shadows-on-the-Teche, a National Trust Historic Site in Louisiana, is one of the thousands of historic places you can visit to explore your heritage. Photo by Ron Blunt.
While researching and assembling a traveling trunk can require substantial independent research, collection of replica materials, a clear understanding of the state standards of learning, and experience in education, it fills an important need. The trunk can travel to the classroom when the class cannot travel to a site. The trunk can be used in a number of ways over a number of days, depending on the contents and the teacher. Because all children do not learn in the same way, the trunk offers an alternative to lectures, films, etc., by providing touchable materials. To see the variety of topics and contents that some museums and historic sites have developed, search online for “Traveling Trunks.”

7. Volunteer to assist a local school in celebrating “Historic Schools Day” or “Historic Preservation Week.”

There are always occasions to celebrate the history of your community and its historic places. Two opportunities are “Historic Schools Day” (www.nationaltrust.org/historic_schools_day/index.html) and “Historic Preservation Week.” (www.nationaltrust.org/preservationweek/promoting.html). Both of the National Trust web sites offer ideas for engaging the community in understanding and appreciating their local history.

8. Visit a National Trust or other historic site in your area. Introduce yourself to the staff, ask for their suggestions about how to share information on local history, and tell them you love history too!

You will be pleasantly surprised, I am sure, to find people who share your commitment to historic places and education at the local historic sites. Whether they are publicly or privately owned, the sites attract employees and volunteers for whom history is a passion. They have often dedicated their lives to learning and sharing that history with others.

9. Contact your national, state, and local representatives and ask for their support in making “place-based” American history an integral part of education in schools.

In order to understand history, and to recognize one’s own place in history, people must see a connection to themselves and the places where they live and work. If American history is “out of reach” and remote, unconnected to local resources and local experiences, then the basis for our development as a people will also be out of reach. In a democratic society we can not afford to let that happen. Your voice on this topic matters.

10. Make a donation to the National Trust or a local historic site for heritage education programming.

Whether your contribution to a historic place is time, research materials, enthusiasm or dollars, your help will expand the site’s ability to reach more people.

Katherine V. Stevenson is the heritage education advisor at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.