

Year 2
Narrative Interim Report
October 21, 2005 - October 20, 2006

Title of Project: Teaching History with On-Line Resources

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Introduction

During year two of the project, we continued to make excellent progress towards creating and completing our website, <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/> (see Figure 1). We moved toward making final design and content decisions as well as producing and completing that content. We used field testing to inform our site's final design and began the process of dissemination and publicity. Our activities included some that overlapped with year one (e.g., design) and some with year three (e.g., publicity and dissemination.) We also added two significant pieces to the site's design: an introduction to the site that explains and demonstrates the importance and nature of historical thinking, and a separate section geared to teacher educators. The latter was made possible, in part, by additional funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.



Figure 1

Activity—Completing Site Design and Programming

In year two, we continued to build on our basic site design ideas developed in year one. We elaborated the layout to include all of the complex elements of both the student versions of our five units and the accompanying teacher versions. As we completed and posted the materials for the site, we had to also revise our working design. For example, we learned that we had too many reading questions for each document: the number

hindered the usability of the site, and we had to limit the number of questions to three per document. The sheer complexity of the site demanded that we continue to do user testing as we populated the design with content. User testing helped us streamline and simplify the interface.

During Winter, 2005-2006, the programming team worked to build the student notebook element of the site. Programmed using PHP and Adobe Flash, the notebook includes a number of unique features. In particular, it provides a space in which students can read the primary sources, review additional resource materials, and answer guided questions. The left pane of the notebook uses Flash to allow the students to view the primary sources in two states: the original and with additional help. (The left pane also permits students to “blow up” historical documents for close investigation.) The right pane of the notebook gives students access to additional resources (vocabulary, supplemental images, additional context from an historian, and historian think-alouds) along with guiding questions (see Figure 2). This scaffolding is among the features that distinguish our site. Our premise is that by providing students with this careful scaffolding on a limited set of documents, they will learn the historical thinking strategies necessary for working in the uncontrolled environment of the Web.

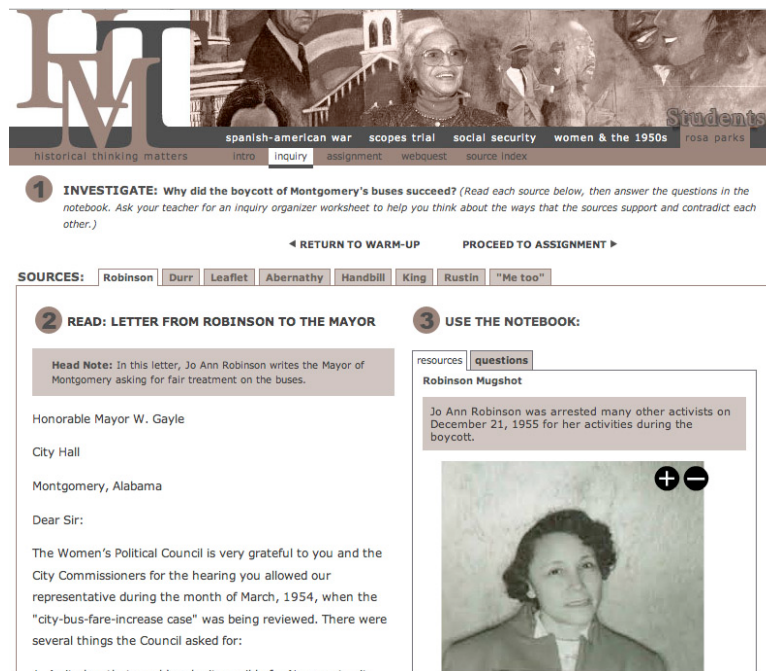


Figure 2

After having logged-in, students can type and save their answers to the guiding questions so that they can access that material later when they compose their essay during in the assignment portion of the investigation. As students work to answer the guiding questions, they can select the “Give me a hint” button, which produces a marked-up version of the source. The mark-up consists of highlighted sections of the text or image, and additional helpful annotations (see Figure 3). Together these features produce a variety of levels of scaffolding so that students can take advantage of the help and

support that they need to read and analyze sources effectively. All of this material is then available to students as they work to complete the assessment. Finally, students have the opportunity to email their work directly to their teachers.



Figure 3

In addition to completing the design and programming of the basic student and teacher sites, we designed and largely completed two new aspects of the site in the spring of 2006. We created a movie using Adobe Flash that introduces teachers and students to the site's approach to historical thinking. This movie (at <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/why.php>) shows why historical thinking is at the heart of the discipline, explains historical reading strategies, and shows what these look like in practice—all of this through an engaging case study probing what happened on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775. This brief movie not only serves as an introduction to the reading strategies taught on the site (sourcing, contextualization, close reading, and corroboration), but also stands alone as an overview of our general approach.

We also created a separate, linked site for teacher educators. We designed and produced most of the content for this site during 2006. This means that teacher educators will be able to read about our approach, locate references to open-source literature they can use to teach and understand this approach, and find two lessons designed for use in the "Teaching History/Social Studies" methods course for candidates in pre-service teacher education programs.

Activity—Completing Materials

Student Side

We completed all or most of the student materials for four of our five units (Spanish-American War, Scopes Trial, Social Security, Rosa Parks). For these four units we:

- Developed the final historical question for the unit;
- Harvested historical texts from the web for the unit;
- Prepared those texts for our teaching and learning environment by
 - editing for length, readability, and significance to the unit,
 - adding an introduction (header) and easily discernable information about the document's creation to the text, and
 - creating reading supports, including vocabulary, annotations, questions, and additional background information for the text;
- Collected think-alouds on documents and document sets from both historians and high school students.

We also completed other components designed for student use. These included the introductory movies that frame the unit and engage the user, and the Webquests, which support a user's guided foray into digital archives outside our site.

Teacher Site

Simultaneously, we worked to complete materials for the teacher sites for each unit. The teacher sites include a variety of features that help teachers plan and teach document-based historical reasoning using materials on the student site. We completed some of these features for all of the teacher sites. This included writing guides that correlated state standards to each of our four completed investigations. We wrote similar guides that tied our content to its treatment in each of the four major U.S. history textbooks for the high school market. We have already completed these teacher components for the Spanish-American War and the Rosa Parks/Civil Rights units, and we have made significant progress on two others—the Scopes Trial and the 1920s, and Social Security and the New Deal. We are still gathering student work (generated when students engage with our materials), and completing lesson plans that draw on our insights from pilot testing in real classrooms.

Activity—Piloting Materials

Although our team has expertise and many years of experience in the teaching and learning of historical reading, the process of piloting the materials in real-world settings has helped us fine tune their usefulness and fit for our target users—students, high school teachers, and teacher educators. We have learned valuable lessons from having both historians and high school students “think-aloud” with documents and document sets. For example, high school students' struggles with the Scopes document set sent us back to the drawing board to create a set more accessible to the adolescent reader. Hearing historians analyze the Social Security documents helped us write questions to support teenagers' analysis of particular texts. We also did think-alouds on the design of the site with practicing teachers. They responded enthusiastically to the interactive notebook feature, and see it as a special draw to the site.

All of this testing is relevant to the larger open access goals of the project. Working with students has confirmed our intuition that they often lack the skills to make effective and analytical use of the historical documents that they encounter online. True open access, therefore, means not only making historical sources available for free on the Web. It also means explicitly teaching students the skills and strategies they need to read those documents in sophisticated ways. The emergence of vast digital archives has put “the novice in the archive” for the first time. Our goal is to insure that these novices do not remain so forever.

We have used the beta Spanish-American War unit in a Bay Area high school classroom and have made plans to continue piloting the units in the third year of the grant. High school teachers in San Jose and Oakland, California, and Superior, Wisconsin will use our materials with their students in the coming months. Their efforts will yield student work (e.g., essays, projects) to analyze and post on the teacher site, and will provide us with feedback that will help finalize lesson plans for the teacher site.

We have also used materials from the site in a variety of professional development efforts funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Teaching American History grants and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship program. Urban teachers in Oakland, California, and Cleveland, Ohio have used materials from the Social Security, Rosa Parks, and Spanish-American War units to learn more about teaching historical reading. Finally, we have used the materials in teacher education courses at three institutions: Stanford University, University of California at Santa Cruz, and California State University, Northridge.

Progress Towards Goals

We are making steady progress towards our goals. In our original proposal, we planned to finish betas of four units by the end of the second year. We have completed one of those modules, have mostly finished two others, and have partial content for the last. We have also added one more unit (Women in the 1950s) to our number and we have partially prepared that unit. New features of the site (i.e., *Why Historical Thinking Matters* movie, teacher educator site) that didn’t appear in the original proposal are also completed. We continue to pilot materials and will continue to do so into year three of the grant. Because of the iterative nature of the design and production process, a cycle in which we produce, critique and pilot, and then revise materials—many of our materials are just a step away from being completed and uploaded to our site.

Our eye remains fixed on the ultimate goal of creating a site where users can learn to read and think historically, and preparing them to engage in their own historical investigations. This includes creating user tools to support these forays, including an explicit framework for historical reading that focuses on asking questions to “source, contextualize, corroborate, and closely read” historical documents. Teachers can find lesson plans using our materials that span one, three, or five days so they can fit our materials into their own

courses. Teachers can also find multiple versions of the document sets to use with struggling readers or Spanish speaking students.

All of our website's features contribute to modeling a web-based architecture for a teaching and learning environment. The multiple interconnected platforms that we have (student, teacher, teacher educator, introduction) show how different audiences may need different supports, but that all of the features can be grounded in strong student materials. Particular components of the site also provide valuable models for educators. For example, each prepared document and its accompanying tools model how a teacher might prepare and scaffold additional documents for their students. This is a key task for helping teachers learn how to harvest their own documents on the Web.

Modifications and Lessons Learned

The primary modifications we made this year have already been noted, the Introductory lesson (and movie) and the Teacher Educator site.

The lessons we learned this year were mostly related to working processes and sequences. While the George Mason University team led by Roy Rosenzweig is accustomed to thinking about web-based environments, the Stanford team led by Sam Wineburg is accustomed to thinking about high school classrooms. We have learned that seeing the materials on the web is critical to their evaluation and that the initial posting of these materials should be viewed as an intermediate, rather than final, step. We now avoid calling something "finished" until we can see and judge the work in its intended digital environment.

In addition, we have learned that earlier pilot testing can guide our final products and make them more usable. Other lessons of this sort are making our development process more efficient.

Dissemination and Publicity

Originally, the processes of dissemination and publicity were scheduled for year three of the grant. We have, however, started the task of getting the word out. Team members have written articles and made conference presentations about the site. These include:

Leon, S. (2006). Historical Thinking Matters: Revolutionizing the Teaching and Learning of History with Online Sources. *Gifted Education Communicator*, 37(3).

O'Malley, M. (2007, in press). Historical Thinking Matters: Using Online Sources to Teach the Scopes Trial. *OAH Magazine of History*.

We have presented our work at conferences for educational researchers and historians.

Martin, D., Wineburg, S., Monte-Sano, C., & Reisman, A., (San Francisco, 2006). "Historical Thinking Matters: Using Think-alouds as Web-Based Instructional Tools." Paper presented at American Educational Research Association.

Monte-Sano, C. (Philadelphia, 2006). "Putting It All Together: Developing Curriculum Modules for the Internet." Paper presented at Center for History and New Media session at the American Historical Association.

In the upcoming year, we are already scheduled to present our work in the following venues:

American Historical Association (Atlanta, 2007). "Preparing the Next Generation of History/Social Studies Teachers: Putting Theory into Practice."

Organization of American Historians (Minneapolis, 2007). "Issues in the Preparation of New History Teachers: The Promise of the Future."

New York State Council for the Social Studies (Rochester, NY, 2007). "Teaching Historical Reasoning: New Approaches."

California Council for the Social Studies (Oakland, Ca, 2007). Historical Thinking Matters: A Teaching Tool For U.S. History Teachers."

Also, the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University will host a booth at the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) annual meeting in November 2006, Washington, D.C. where teachers can learn about this site. We have started to investigate different publicity scenarios and costs. In the early weeks of next year, we will formulate a publicity and dissemination plan that we will carry out in our final year of the grant.