

National History Education Clearinghouse
Usability Testing
Summer 2009

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Round I

Where: Colorado Springs, CO

Who: *America and the World* TAH workshop (three volunteers)

Notes: participants heard a talk about the NHEC prior to the testing; server timed out, did not get to finish third testing session

Overview:

- History Content, Best Practices and Teaching Materials are the sections that the teachers find the most useful and appealing. Anything that we can do to help them optimize these sections is time well spent. Perhaps we could make them more prominent than the other sections; allow more space for section explanations, etc.
- “Featured” section (i.e. photo, quiz, Ask a...) are confusing. For example, one teacher asked how the featured lesson plan/photo was linked to the quiz just because they were beside each other, another teacher was confused by the *Our Authors Write* section, etc. When moving about that area on the homepage and splash pages, they seemed confused on where to click.
- Teachers judge the sections based on featured items; will avoid sections where featured items do not interest them or seem confusing – they will even bypass *view all*. Need to be more specific and obvious about the scope of each section, the variety of materials teachers will find, etc. Teachers go to “**what they already know about**” from my talk, etc. Here is where NHEC user videos will be extremely useful. Also teachers who “train” their fellow teachers will have readily available videos to share with their colleagues (which will help with outreach).
 - Probably a good idea to do some user testing with teachers who are less familiar with the NHEC i.e. don’t see a presentation on the website prior to testing
- Need to provide teachers with search guidelines to help them get to what they are looking for – for example, no easy way to get to “multimedia” i.e. not lengthy lectures, but documentary clips, etc.
 - Online History Lectures is a useful database but the ability to search for what they are looking for is limited; maybe needs to be separated into PD videos vs. videos to show in the classroom (like the NBC icue videos)
 - Phrases such as “full search feature,” as is stated for Website Reviews, is vague.
 - Keyword search box should be the first option; on top

- Issues and Research might be more tempting if it had historiographical entries, in addition to teaching and learning research; for example, this group was *really* interested in the idea of the Atlantic World – what is the Atlantic World and what is the state of scholarship on the Atlantic World? Our idea of *Research Briefs* could be expanded. Maybe this is what was envisioned with the *Get Smart Quick* feature?
- We need to more fully consider where teachers are at and how we can lead them to more advanced levels through creative design and positioning of resources, videos, explanations, etc. on the website.
 - Teachers tend to come to resources with a sense of their level and look for resources that are geared to that level i.e. beginner, intermediate, advanced (for Best Practices, Digital Tools etc.). Is there some tool that could help them get to the resources that they feel are they are ready for in these sections, so that they are not overwhelmed?
 - Digital Tools is necessary but should include basic tools as much as “modern” (term used by teachers) tools, such as *Twitter* and *Blogs*.
 - Even common (to us) vocabulary like “think-aloud” can be unknown and confusing; “sourcing” even more so. In the end, they will avoid things they are unsure about (so much, so little time), which defeats our purpose. Maybe re-think how we title new additions; improve *At a Glance* so it includes important vocabulary terms...
- Length is key; teachers tend to avoid long entries
 - For longer entries and in general, some teachers ask if there could be a “print” button
 - One user commented that she would “actually read” the *Seeing (and Engaging in) Historical Thinking: An Interactive Tutorial* overview – one example of a user-friendly word count
- Users did not utilize *view all* link, breadcrumbs, and were not drawn to information in upper-right hand corner
 - Confusion on what RSS feeds are
 - Users tend to use the section headers/tabs bar and the back button to get back to where they want to go, not the breadcrumbs
- Users are definitely drawn to the links that are highlighted when you scroll across them
- Could the “What’s New” features rotate so the same thing does not stay on top for more than a few days?

Notes from Sessions

A. Jeannie Dietrich

- High School in Colorado Springs, CO (9th and 10th grades)
- 4 years experience
- Internet use varies because they frequently move classrooms
 - Favorite websites? maps related; government websites
- She had the winning lesson plan from last workshop; won a trip to NCHE in Boston

Exploring the Homepage:

- Best Practices was the most interesting to her; then Teaching Materials and History Content - TAH grants, Professional Development, Issues and Research – less interesting to her
- *Quiz* and *What's New* could be highlighted in some way
- PD – expects to find stuff related to MA programs
- Top right hand corner hidden
- Systematically avoids logins
- Drawn to logo but didn't know what it was...
- Felt that brief descriptions were helpful

Click from Homepage:

Went to **Best Practices**

- Judgment based on featured items – would ignore section if featured items didn't interest her
- Clicked on Teaching with Documentary Films – too long
- Like the “share” options (could there be a print button?)
- Would go to HTM sourcing feature b/c she knows about it from talk
- Bypass Teaching with Textbooks (doesn't interest her as much b/c she doesn't rely heavily on the textbook)
- Really confused by *Our Authors Write* feature section

Next went to **History Content**

- Ask a Historian title “How did Colonel become Kernel” caught her eye
- Tools for Teachers: when she saw *Blogs* and *Twitter* featured she ignored it b/c she doesn't use them and is not interested in using them
- Online History Lectures title misleading? What kind of multimedia is there – just lectures? Documentary clips?
- Directory of Historical Places search needs work.
 - No results for Japanese internment camp she was looking for; when she choose American Indian, something she expected to come up – Mesa Verde – didn't come up.
 - When she saw “Place Type” it seemed she thought they meant the location
- Search boxes should be on top of drop-down boxes

Task: Where can you find multimedia? Not history lectures, videos etc.?

- Went to Teaching Materials first (Gateway to History Lesson Plans)
- Next she went to History Content – Gateway to History Content – searched for “video on immigration,” some hits.

Task : Search for maps for World War I

- Went to History Content Gateway and searched for “maps of Europe 1918” – got some hits, but suggested we need more explanation about what you will find through the search (there are lots of different ways to search on the NHEC – clarifying the search options may help with these types of comments)
 - One hit referenced Yugoslavia, which gave her the sense that the search was “a little off”

Other:

- Avoids full website search
- Time it took to load pages *didn't* frustrate her – “she remembers dialup”

B. Ronald Gorr

- Air Academy High School, Colorado Springs, CO (teaches AP, mostly juniors)
- 14+ years experience
- Use technology once a week in classroom; daily to prepare lessons; has created websites in the past
 - Favorite websites: American Memory, Avalon Project
 - Used databases like Lexus/Nexus when he had access

Exploring the Homepage:

- Layout is easy to read
- Likes backpack idea; option to create folders would be helpful
- Because of the NHEC presentation he knows what to expect
 - Visit History Content first, then Best Practices and Teaching Materials – even if he didn't know about the NHEC first, he would have gone to History Content first
- Expectations for PD: how to teach teachers to use resources like the NHEC; he works with teachers at his school who are less willing to use the Internet in teaching
- Highlight what's new on the NHEC in the What's New feature
- Likes how simple the design is – sometimes websites do too much – navigation is key i.e. guided discovery and exploration

Click from Homepage: Went to **History Content**

- Line up featured items with traditional school year – History Channel and American Heritage does this
- Digital Tools – sometimes “too much” ex. Twitter
 - Make sure to also go back to basics i.e. power point, etc. etc. make sure we don't assume the skills people have
- All these resources can be overwhelming for some teachers

Task: Create a unit for AP US history class – Homestead Act to Wounded Knee Massacre in a day – knows this is unrealistic – find related documents (“it's all about teaching it better and faster”)

- Search in history content gateway – “dawes act”
- Liked results, found a NARA website that includes map (was really interested in the map) – would put it in his backpack and move on – could we design backpack similar to “cart” feature in Amazon?

What about **Best Practices**?

- It would be secondary for him and he would tell beginning teachers the same – they should build a foundation first i.e content

What he would expect from **Issues and Research**?

- what MA teachers are teaching to their students
- Updates in historiography – i.e. The Atlantic World

C. Donald Davis (server timed out, could not complete entire testing)

- St. Mary's High School in Colorado Springs, CO
- Junior AP courses; freshmen geography/history courses
- 37+ years teaching
- Uses Google the most

Exploring the Homepage:

- Likes the setup – feels like he would be less lost on the NHEC than other websites
- Top featured section on homepage really confusing – didn't understand how things related

Round II

Where: St. Petersburg Florida

Who: Florida Humanities Council summer institute

Notes: Because of weather and problems with the Internet only one out of three user testing sessions were completed; user did NOT see my presentation prior to testing session

D. Bert Mullins

- 26/27 years teaching experience
- about 13 years in middle school/13 years in high school (now in Manatee County)
- AP American history
- Uses Internet sparingly, but feels comfortable with it

Exploring the Homepage:

- He was confused by the title; when he sees “Clearinghouse” he thinks for-profit and he had no idea whether it was just American history
- Featured “Stating Your Case...How to Write a Thesis” Teaching Guide caught his attention immediately – need more materials to help teach “history” writing (later, during my presentation, asked group if this was needed and they all enthusiastically agreed)
- Was attracted to Weekly History Quiz, but he was confused. Asked questions, such as What exactly is it? Does it change? Is it always sports related? Is it for elementary teachers or just secondary?
- More interested in History Content than Best Practices; does a lot of PD and feels he gets “too much” BP; gets old (but could be useful for others)
- Wondered if there is anything he can use immediately; not sure where to go to find that kind of material
- Wondered if there was sources for local history (not the first time I got this comment)
- Featured and What’s New should fit into the chronology of the school year
- Thinks the layout of the homepage is easy to understand/color bars are good
- Likes clicking on pictures
- Likes the “Ask a” feature but wonders who is answering the questions – could it be more personable? Feels some people might be reluctant b/c their question would be perceived as stupid
- Wondered if it is easy to get images off of the website (didn’t seem clear to him that you link to other websites)

Click from Homepage: Went to **History Content**

- Pictures draw his attention to website reviews
- Confused by what Gateway to History Content means; after he explored the Gateway and the Website Reviews, he wondered if there was any way to connect the two
- Thought the Gateway would be a great tool for student use (many teachers make this comment)

Task: Always looking for help in teaching students writing skills, so he went to “Stating Your Case” Thesis Teaching Guide

- Likes that there are PDFs
- Confused; is it for the teacher or student or both?