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## Integrating historic site-based laboratories into pre-service teacher education

Christine Baron <sup>a,\*</sup>, Christine Woyshner <sup>b,1,2</sup>, Philip Haberkern <sup>c,3</sup><sup>a</sup> Boston University, School of Education, 2 Silber Way, Boston, MA 02215, United States<sup>b</sup> Temple University, Teaching and Learning Department, 1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19122, United States<sup>c</sup> Boston University, Department of History, 226 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215, United States

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### ABSTRACT

In order to change the perception of history as collection facts, historians and history educators must countermand pre-service history teachers' experience with and perception of historians as mere transmitters of knowledge. To do this, historians and history educators must provide pre-service history teachers' opportunities to work alongside historians in the field as a regular feature of their preparation programs. This exposure not only changes the pre-service teachers' perceptions of the work of history practitioners and provides deeper understanding of the construction of history, but also enables future teachers to expand their use of site-based learning in their classrooms. Rather than advocating the development of entirely new programs, the authors outline two models, based on the history education programs at Temple University and Boston University, for integrating historic site-based laboratory work into the existing structures of teacher education programs.

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### Introduction

Despite herculean efforts by historians, schools, and museums to broaden the historical narrative beyond a “mainly Whiggish, political narrative ... and the activities of the male “top people” (Booth, 1994; Handler & Gable, 1997; Lewis, 2005; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998; Tchen, 1992), there remains a sense that history is a series of factual catechisms to be memorized and quickly forgotten. Decades of work by history educators have done little to change students' perception of history as a collection of “essential facts” that function as the “multiplication tables of history ... to be known as automatically as those in arithmetic” (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1978).

This perception comes primarily from the “observational apprenticeships” that history students, particularly those who intend to become history teachers, engage in while sitting in history classrooms and lecture halls from their elementary through collegiate experiences (VanSledright, 2010). For many students, their only experience observing historians is as “sage on the stage” lecturers. The years of study and research, the choosing of sources, the weighing of evidence, even the

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 617 353 3314, cell: +1 978 239 6265.

E-mail addresses: [Cbaron24@BU.Edu](mailto:Cbaron24@BU.Edu) (C. Baron), [CWoyshne@temple.edu](mailto:CWoyshne@temple.edu) (C. Woyshner), [Phaberke@bu.edu](mailto:Phaberke@bu.edu) (P. Haberkern).

<sup>1</sup> Director, Graduate Certification Programs.

<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +1 215 204 6147.

<sup>3</sup> Tel.: +1 617 353 8314.

effort necessary to craft lectures takes place well out of sight of students. While history professors describe history as a “problem solving” (Barr et al., 1978; Booth, 1994; Fischer, 1971; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2013) discipline, rarely do students or teachers see, let alone practice, the processes with which they solve historical problems. The message historians send, however unintentional, is that they are “repositories of knowledge” (Shoemaker, 2013) and that teaching history is a “unidirectional process” that involves “conveying/sharing/transmitting scholarship to uninformed student minds” (VanSledright, 2010). Accordingly, few college students understand that the work of historians lies primarily in the construction of historical narratives via research and the analysis of historical sources, rather than in the mere delivery of that information (Hynd-Shanahan, Holschuh, & Hubbard, 2004; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Wineburg, 1991).

The formidable challenge of pre-service history education is to countermand much of this decade-long observational apprenticeship, exposing students to the work of historians, often for the first time, and then preparing them to teach with these new-found understandings. Previous efforts to include expert practices into teacher education have tended towards large-scale, university-based, grant-funded programs and projects to facilitate the shift from knowledge-transmission to a problem-solving history and social studies instruction (Brown, 1996; Dow, 1991; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2013; Ragland & Woestman, 2009; Symcox, 2002). Over the years, these projects fade away for a host of predictable reasons, most often because the grant funds and personnel disappear and the administration of projects is not institutionalized.

Yet the need to provide pre-service teachers with access to and practice with disciplinary experts and their methods has never been more critical. In 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), in the country, released a multi-year study of the state of teacher education programs. The panel urged Schools of Education to redesign their programs to ensure that “laboratory-based experiences” are fully integrated throughout the teacher candidates’ coursework (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2013). Within every other discipline taught in K-12 schools, there are standards and traditions for what laboratory practice entails from experimental science labs (Committee on Conceptual Framework for the New K-12 Science Education Standards; National Research Council Council, 2012) to foreign language labs (Salaberry, 2001) to writers’ workshops (Calkins & Harwayne, 1987) History stands as the exception.

Since the release of this report, NCATE merged with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) to create a unified voice to guide teacher preparation. CAEP is using this 2010 report as the foundation for its standards for clinical preparation in teacher preparation, thus adding greater urgency to developing and understanding the ways in which laboratory practice can be used to prepare history teachers.

Further, there is a significant research that shows that mentoring relationships for pre-service teachers coupled with engaging in discipline-rich opportunities embedded in communities of practice are essential for developing teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and practice (Borko, 2004; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2013; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009).

Rather than devising a new round of grant-funded programming, we propose a simpler proposition to address the need for laboratory practice in history: offer pre-service history teachers the opportunity to engage in active apprenticeship opportunities alongside historians in the field – archives, museums, historic sites, etc. – through existing course or field experience structures. The cost of such opportunities can be as minimal as a phone call – a local one at that – that encourages greater communication and coordination between history departments and schools of education and offer a richness of experience well beyond.

We offer examples here of two distinctly different programs: the *Cultural Fieldwork Initiative* at Temple University and the *History of Boston/History Lab* sequence for pre-service teachers at Boston University. While these programs draw upon the historical thinking and literacy literature, e.g., Baron (2012), Booth (1994), Hynd-Shanahan et al. (2004), Lee and Ashby (2000), Seixas and Morton (2013), Spoehr and Spoehr (1994), VanSledright (2010), Wineburg (1991), it is most useful to consider them in the light of Van Drie and Van Boxtel’s (2008) work on student historical reasoning as it represents a more holistic framework for encompassing the non-hierarchical interplay between developing an understanding of historical concepts and engaging in authentic historical practice that Historic Site-based Laboratory experiences should entail (Baron, 2014).

Accordingly, these programs offers hands-on opportunities for pre-service teachers to work with history practitioners to learn how to (1) pose historical questions about historical materials and places; (2) use a range of authentic sources, including documents, material culture, and historic places; (3) consider the historical context of people and places related to local history; (4) develop arguments about the how and why of historical events and persons as well as the veracity of the sources that recount their role in the larger historical context; (5) use substantive concepts, the historical structures, phenomena, and persons of the historical past, (e.g., the Colonial-Revival, mercantilism, George Washington, Industrial Revolution, etc.) for developing interpretations; and (6) practice with the methodological concepts that historians use to investigate and describe historical processes and periods (e.g., source, evidence, change, etc.) (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008).

Distinct from single-visit field trip experiences, these programs offer pre-service teachers the opportunity to engage historic sites through *repeated exposure* to the historic site and its materials over the course of a semester or longer. Perhaps most critically, pre-service teachers have the opportunities to develop their own historical reasoning and research skills through *mentorship from history practitioners*.

The combination of these factors allows the pre-service teachers the time, mentorship, and modeling necessary to create lessons and materials that provide similarly authentic experiences for their students (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Clarke et al., 2013; Hobson et al., 2009; Knapp, 2003).

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