

Living History in the Classroom

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Living History in the Classroom: Performance and Pedagogy

EDITED BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

It is in our nature to need stories. They are our earliest sciences, a kind of people-physics. Their logic is how we naturally think. They configure our biology, and how we feel, in ways long essential for our survival.

—Jag Bhalla (2013)

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Foreword

In this new publication, you will find the intersection of Living History, Storytelling and all of the tools in History and Social Studies education reviewed and analyzed with a compelling framework from Dr Lisa Heuvel to create a positive learning environment for students in K-Higher Education. This notion of collaborative integration can provide an impactful voice for the teacher, the student, the historian, museum educator, and the performer. Seasoned interpreters, master teachers, historians, and museum educators demonstrate the power of oral, customary, and material lore, while readers experience what makes history live as they uncover the surprise and wonder of “the untold stories” of Americans working together in tenuous times. They illuminate the road to uncover the marginalized, disenfranchised, and unheard voices of our past as well as different points of view on tried and true historical figures and events. These authors help you find educational resources and materials that incorporate all of the “voices” that have always been a part of the American narrative, yet may not have always been heard. And they enthusiastically remind us that (B. Weldon) “effective interpretation lifts history off the page in the textbook and brings it to life.”

By exploring the power of storytelling, first-person interpretation, and oral histories educators can help their students to study difference, diversity, and civic education among many other historic events and people through a lens of social justice issues, now and in the past. Today we know how technology has improved and supported social studies and history education with dynamic learning environments and research at the tip of our fingers. Research from in-service teachers and pre-service teachers reveals how students can learn about the American experience through the use of technology. The goal of “the history classroom is to move the student from content consumer to content creator” (D. Van Eck).

Social Studies education today often centers around highlighting social justice issues in various geographic locations around the US, connecting students to historical issues in their communities through storytelling, first-person interpretation, and hands-on research activities. To reinforce this notion of storytelling one must remember that “you will continuously be researching, updating, revising, and like all good science, it can change.” (S. Arnold). Good educators use folklore, oral histories, primary sources, and artifacts or material culture to develop and support their performance. Interpreter Valerie Holmes, reminds us that “we can help people to see there may be another way of looking at things in a difficult and painful situation and offering a different perspective” while

emphasizing “the history (we) are sharing always has to have a connection to today.” This book will help educators to compel colleagues and students to tell their stories and explore the notion of justice for all.

Research suggests that students in pre-service social studies method’s courses (T. Green) have a better historical understanding and improved their historical literacy skills when they had to learn *how to bring the past alive through first person performances*. Students were able to craft lessons that contained tenets of museum education with hands-on materials and strategies to use with their students out in the field. It all really centers around process...the process of historical research, historical analysis, and breathing life into a person from the past “to make the audience think about their own values and actions.” (D. Tucker)

For in-service teachers, these lessons can be crafted and designed with History’s Habits of Mind from the National Council for History Education (NCHE) as well as the C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards (NCSS, 2013) to explore the powerful potential of living history and performance in classrooms. This text helps classroom teachers to gain confidence in developing, presenting, and integrating literary stories, family stories, folktales, historical stories, and material culture as part of a professional repertoire. As Dr Lawrence Paska, Executive Director of the National Council for Social Studies, mentions in his introductory remarks, “communicating the results of our interpretation – is the act of taking informed action.” Dr Bill Fetsko reminds us “that one should anticipate an element of controversy in undertaking (first-person characterization)” be it high schoolers or the very young, since characters are people, who were not perfect and most likely had hidden flaws. Dr Kathryn Swanson offers tips on analyzing material culture and the importance of using it in your research practices “by offering deeper insights into the daily life of the historical figures you are depicting.”

Through integrative work in the Social Studies and the Language Arts arena students in school settings will be able to attain the following outcomes: (1) understand the role of narrative in thinking and learning about social justice; (2) experiment with a variety of story structures and storytelling styles as it relates to diversity issues; (3) explore ways to extend stories to promote larger curricular objectives, activities, and outcomes in civic education; and (4) develop a “tool kit” of stories, and relevant pedagogical applications for use in their professional settings as social studies teachers. It is in “letting someone else tell the story, when they become the storytellers, that moves (the student) along to exploration” (J. Swanson) connecting their historical thinking and their performing arts skills. J. Cross reminds us of the importance to not only do the research, and to hone your performance skills, but to always “connect the landmarks” of students loved ones to “landmarks in their own town” thus reinforcing the notion of place-based education.

In Jay Anderson’s concept of Living History, (people) “attempt to simulate life in another time” (Anderson, 1991, p. 3). He believes the reason people attempt to carry out a living history scenario revolves around three concepts: “1) to interpret material culture more effectively, usually at a living history museum; 2) to test an archaeological thesis to generate data for historical ethnographies; and 3) to

participate in an enjoyable recreational activity that is also a learning experience.” I posit that educators will want to focus on concept one, while students will want to enjoy the benefits of concept three. In its creative and symbolic form, living history can mirror tenets of drama, ritual, pageantry, and play. It borrows theater pedagogy by utilizing parallel techniques such as costuming (period clothing), props (artifacts), sets (historic sites), role playing (identifying with historical characters), and the designation of time and space as special and unique. Carl Becker describes it as “a history that does work in the world and influences the course of history.” Scott Magelssen posits, “A form of theater in which participants use performance to create a world, tell a story, entertain, and teach lessons.” I particularly like Arthur Hazelius’s definition: “A living museum that ... depicts folklife through its living characteristics.” And finally, teachers and students use Living History as a pedagogical form, supported by Stacy Roth’s (Roth, 1998) tenets to guide their planning. She says, “Living history interpreters ... must be historians, anthropologists and effective teachers.” By using first-person interpretation, teachers are able to provide their students with an opportunity to conduct research on a person from the past using a variety of primary sources, documents, and artifacts to bring the person to life.

Students can also use Reader’s Theater, a form of creative drama, a simple yet dramatic art form where readers interpret a script to present a scene to an audience. Traditionally, there is no set or special lighting. Movement is minimal and readers are either sitting on stools or chairs or standing in a makeshift stage area (Rubright, 1996). Reader’s Theater can be used frequently in a classroom to enhance reading comprehension, fluency, and oral interpretation skills. For presentations, (T. Potter) the readers are often dressed in solid colors to provide a dramatic effect. Reader’s Theater scripts can be written by students of all ages. Scripts can include a narrator and several different characters’ voices. Gesture, movement, and music can be added for a polished and developed presentation. Cheryl and Ron Adkisson share their passion for performance with middle schoolers after all is said and done, “challenging, daunting, but in the end, can be life changing for student and teacher alike! The implications for having students perform like this are profound.”

Overall, the authors hope you and your students will strengthen your historical literacy skills while exploring the American experience by discovering creative drama and performance, living history, and historical research skills to enrich the language arts and social studies curriculum. Be it the clash of cultures, the Revolutionary War period, the Great Depression, (or) to our most recent world pandemic, let your students apply those lessons learned and make “connections through museum-integrated learning” (J. Cross). Let the social sciences and the performing arts be your guiding force as you continue to teach about social justice for all.

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Our human need for stories transcends boundaries of human difference, as these authors attest. To share their experiences requires people who believe in their worth and support their transmission. As coauthors, we are grateful to Charlotte Maiorana and Charlotte "Charlie" Wilson at Emerald Group Publishing. Charlotte's encouragement "across the pond" at first query and acceptance, and Charlie's continued support throughout has been the mainstay of this project. James Whiteley and Abi Masha capably expanded our Emerald team with their design and manuscript expertise, bringing this book into reality, along with Mohamed Imrankhan of TNQ Technologies Pvt. Ltd. Our appreciation also goes to the anonymous peer reviewers who saw its potential and recommended that it move forward: I hope that you see it in print.

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