MORE THAN PRIMARY SOURCES: TEACHING ABOUT THE ARCHIVAL PROFESSION AS A METHOD OF K–12 OUTREACH

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***ABSTRACT**:* Traditional archival outreach methods for K–12 students teach children how to be historians—not archivists—by emphasizing critical thinking skills and document analysis. In contrast, K–12 outreach in the field of archaeology simultaneously emphasizes archaeological work, historical analysis, and critical thinking. This article examines both the archival and archaeological K–12 outreach models and draws from one of the authors' experiences at The History Center, in Diboll, Texas, to suggest changes to archival K–12 outreach that will leverage the profession's preexisting interactions with students to advocate for archives.

Introduction

Many primary and secondary school students interact with archival materials in the classroom, but access is often offered without any explicit link to the repositories charged with the preservation and management of the documents. Students might develop an appreciation for primary sources without ever understanding that there is a profession and field of study devoted to the care and custody of historical records. So while archives have an expanding community of users—the result of national educational reform efforts such as the Common Core[1]—popular understanding of archives continues to lag. Archivists have an opportunity to advocate for the profession by expanding existing models of interaction with primary and secondary schools. By modifying the profession's approach to K–12 outreach, archivists have the chance to inform the public about the value of archives from an early age and build knowledge about archives and archival work.

The field of archaeology provides an example of how archives might improve K–12 outreach by integrating professional information into its outreach model. Archaeology is a relevant comparison because, like archives, programs can operate out of cultural heritage institutions. Both disciplines involve historical analysis of the past and can be

integrated into social studies curricula. While the comparison is not perfect, archaeologists' outreach practices serve as an excellent example of how to create lesson plans and community programs that teach primary content as well as the tenets of the profession. As a comparison to archival K–12 outreach, archaeological educational outreach raises valuable points about how to use the relationships archivists have already forged with the K–12 community to also explain itself as a profession.

Some might argue that archaeology is easier to teach and to make palatable to children because lessons can be both physical and exotic; students can dig for or handle artifacts, and often archaeology is used to teach about the ancient world. True, students do not get to actually dig for documents. Yet documents can be similarly interactive learning tools, especially if archivists broaden their focus to include teaching archival processes in addition to document analysis. Moreover, local history archives are more personally relevant to students than ancient or foreign history. Records of famous and "ordinary" people, as well as memorable events and influential organizations, can pique student interest as readily as artifacts. While some might also argue that archaeology is an easier discipline to discuss with students because of preexisting public knowledge about the field, this argument becomes circular. If archivists promote archival work to younger people, the profession may achieve the same popular recognition as archaeology.

Knowledge gained in the classroom has the potential to reap further benefits as students become adults. In an article on the subject of how archives graduate students can learn to advocate effectively, Richard Cox et al. recognized the opportunities to be gained by considering K–12 outreach a form of advocacy.[2] Students' understanding of archival work as a valuable profession has the potential to engender better community relationships, as well as result in more diverse acquisitions and increased funding. Adults who have been taught the civic role of archives as children may consider archival repositories when choosing which organizations to charitably support. Moreover, if traditionally underrepresented groups understand that their voices are needed in the archival record, archivists can foster stronger relationships with communities they are supposed to be serving.

This article looks first at previous scholarship on both archival advocacy and K–12 outreach. It then describes and models current interaction with the K–12 community through an examination of institutional practices across the United States. It examines educational outreach in the field of archaeology to highlight elements of that profession's classroom programs and to suggest how they can be adapted to the archival sphere. It draws parallels between the archaeological educational model and direct experiences at The History Center in Diboll, Texas, to show that it is possible to integrate archival advocacy into K–12 outreach. The new model that we propose encourages archivists to teach about the profession at the same time they use primary sources to teach historical, critical, or technological thinking to students. In other words, it encourages K–12 outreach to develop *archival competency*—specific knowledge about archival work—at the same time it aims to develop *archival literacy*.

The Public Perception of Archives

It is not surprising that K–12 students and the general public remain largely ignorant of the work of archivists and continue to overlook the role archives play in daily life. This ignorance has persisted for decades through common, unintentionally negative stereotypes about the profession, archivists' insecurity about societal roles, and their uneasiness with or unwillingness to advocate consistently about professional issues that affect greater society. Society of American Archivists president David Gracy led the Task Force on Archives and Society in 1983 that undertook the first serious examination of the public perception of the profession.[3] Influenced by the 1984 Levy Report, it recommended outreach programs emphasizing archival use as a method for building support and improving professional image.[4] Interest in outreach, use, and users of archives grew in the 1980s and the 1990s, culminating in the first book dedicated to public relations in the archival profession.[5] But archivists continue to struggle for recognition. More recent discussion includes calls for intervention in public policy issues related to ethical recordkeeping, open government, and citizens' rights as newer approaches for conveying the profession's worth.[6]

Despite these enduring challenges, there is growing—if unrecognized—public interest in archival work. The explosive growth of digital photography, video, sound recordings, and e-mail have made the core practices of arrangement, description, and preservation pertinent to nearly everyone. Richard Cox cites a growing body of self-help books and computer software for managing personal records as evidence that the general public is, despite limited knowledge of the archival profession, engaged in preserving their family records. Further evidence includes television shows such as NBC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* and PBS's *History Detectives* that often showcase archives and archivists, as well as a growing number of workshops available to the public on personal record keeping.[7] Cox argues that the public's interest in personal record keeping presents an excellent opportunity to offer advice on preserving family collections and at the same time to provide a clearer sense of the archival mission.[8] These trends suggest the potential for archivists to engender interest in archival practice in students early in life when they are more impressionable. Under the new model, by the time they reach adulthood, students will be better aware of archives and the expert knowledge archivists provide in preserving personal records.

K–12 Outreach Models

As with archival outreach, the literature on the interaction between archivists and the K–12 community developed during the 1980s. In part, the rising interest in student interaction reflected changes in teaching methodology in history and social studies classrooms that had been discussed in education literature since the 1960s. Canadian archivist Ken Osborne described this evolution that emphasized instruction using primary sources. He suggested strategies for promoting the use of archival collections in the classroom including teacher education programs, classroom instruction on the work and role of archives, exhibitions and visits, projects involving students in archival

research, and the production of archives-based teaching kits.[9] Since Osborne's paper, archival literature provides evidence of success in teacher workshops and primary source analysis. With some exceptions, most literature on K–12 outreach activities still ignores direct instruction on the work and role of archivists. With little understanding of archivists' professional role, the anxieties of the 1980s regarding the public's perception of archives are perpetuated.

Successful outreach programs often depend on K–12 teachers' awareness of available resources and their comfort level in using primary sources in the classroom. In the spirit of Osborne's call for teacher education programs, archivists have organized successful workshops designed to educate teachers about locating and using archival materials in the curriculum. Archivists at Utah State University hosted a Library of Congress "Teaching with Primary Sources Program" where local educators learned about the nature of primary sources, familiarized themselves with available digital libraries, and developed resource sets of digitized materials.[10] Louisiana teachers were directly involved in creating a digital collection about the Louisiana Purchase that included evaluating the collection and a workshop on how to use the digital materials.[11] The two studies' different approaches—the Utah program's focus on teacher instruction and the Louisiana project's fostering of teacher involvement—have both proven successful in preparing teachers to work with primary sources.

The use of documents in primary and secondary classrooms often coincides with pedagogical trends. The increase in document-based questions on standardized tests encourages teachers to incorporate primary source analysis into lesson plans. Some authors call for archivists to become more active as educators and to share their knowledge about locating and using archival records.[12] The archivist's classroom role often involves the use of teaching kits or packets of documents focused on a specific topic or theme, and some suggest using a school's records or those from local organizations and ordinary people to forge better connections with the materials.[13] The development of the Internet as a teaching tool has encouraged national and state archives and historical societies to provide a wealth of digital primary source packets, lesson plans, and teaching guides to assist educators.[14] Using archival materials in the classroom has been tied to John Dewey's inquiry-based pedagogical method, which "emphasizes the process of discovery on the part of the student rather than the straightforward transmission of knowledge from teacher to student." Similarly, Marcus C. Robyns encourages archivists to teach critical thinking skills.[15] Both inquiry-based learning and critical thinking skills focus on document analysis, such as teaching students to ask contextual questions about a document's content, intended audience, function, original purpose, and creation, as well as the creator's background and biases. Several studies use this approach in both K–12 and higher education classrooms, but none discusses the work and role of archivists in society.[16]

A more recent shift in K–12 outreach aims to teach students effective archival research skills in addition to teaching them how to analyze and assess primary source documents. *Archival literacy*, akin to information literacy, is now a commonly used term to describe the knowledge of how to locate and use primary sources. To possess archival literacy means to understand the documentary and rights-protecting value of records, and to be able "to apply evidence-seeking as well as information-seeking

skills."[17] Elizabeth Yakel argues that documents-based teaching should also develop a student's archival literacy, which encompasses search, retrieval, identification, selection, and use of primary sources.[18]

While most studies describe document analysis exercises, there are some examples of K–12 students partaking in projects similar to archival work. With the aid of teachers, students as young as second grade created a website on John D. Rockefeller using digitized primary sources that included a photograph album.[19] Oral history projects are also popular. Students in Massachusetts interviewed family members about life from World War I to the 1990s, and students in St. Louis, Missouri, interviewed senior citizens about their education and work experience in the city. These projects can outlive the assignment's lifespan and can develop into collections that are later donated to an archives. This realization has prompted some educators to think about a project's archival potential and make better efforts to incorporate preservation and descriptive standards into the assignment.[20] Some high schools have established school archives with programs that give students hands-on experience performing archival tasks. These opportunities can create deeper connections between students and archives in addition to helping them gain an understanding of the profession. As Ashville School archives projects coordinator Diana Sanderson states, "My students were thoroughly taken with the idea that students have something of worth for the archives."[21] Projects such as these provide a preexisting avenue for archivists to include expanded lessons on archival work and the profession's mission within primary source instruction.

The Archaeological K–12 Outreach Model

Archival K–12 outreach models focus on primary sources and their analysis with scant attention to teaching students about the profession. In contrast, the foremost goal for archaeology educational programs as stated by the Society for American Archaeology is to teach archaeological context and method and the benefits of controlled digging to students. The introduction to the lesson plans on the society's website emphasizes exposing kids to the "practice" of archaeology—minimizing historical and critical thinking skills.[22] Furthermore, educating teachers and students about archaeology "as a profession" is a major characteristic of the way archaeologists interact with elementary and secondary schools. Students also take part in simulated or authentic archaeological digs to learn archaeological practice. Outside of the classroom, museum summer camps and community programs for children provide an opportunity to participate in real or simulated digs.

The literature on teaching with archaeology reveals a number of case studies demonstrating these practices in the classroom and the field. Educator Marg Costello writes of her goal to teach students to "become archaeologists." She wanted her students to learn what archaeologists do on a dig, how archaeologists interpret evidence, and that "archaeologists are thinking, feeling men and women like us."[23] Leading an analysis of Mayan codices, for example, Costello demonstrated how it is possible for students to learn about both Mayan culture and archaeological interpretation. Students learned concurrently about the role of the archaeologist and world history, a reflection of the

nature of archaeology as simultaneously an academic discipline and a professional practice.

Through a number of programs, archaeologists provide both teacher training and classroom lectures for students. Former Smithsonian education specialist Ruth O. Selig uses the Smithsonian Institution/George Washington University "Anthropology for Teachers Program" and an initiative at the University of Wyoming, Laramie, as examples of programs offering teachers a solid foundation in anthropology, of which archaeology is an academic subfield.[24] The programs help teachers integrate these subjects into their teaching, aid them in better using community resources for teaching anthropology, and create a network of teachers, anthropologists, and museum educators interested in encouraging more precollege anthropology. "Project Archaeology: Investigating Shelter" is a current program supplementing science and social studies curricula that teaches educators and students the fundamentals of the profession and encourages them to respect and protect the nation's cultural heritage. The program offers professional development workshops to prepare teachers for engaging students in inquiry-based lessons using archaeological approaches to learn about the past.[25] Classroom presentations provide another avenue for teaching students about professional practice. Carol J. Ellick, an educator who specializes in archaeological outreach, lists concepts archaeologists should incorporate into a lecture, including explanations of what archaeology is, the steps of the archaeological process, and preservation methods, all of which can be adapted for archival outreach.[26]

Outside of the classroom, students act as archaeologists at sample field sites. During camp at the Museum for Florida History, students "excavate, record, and interpret" ersatz archaeology sites and learn about archaeological research and local history.[27] City officials in Baltimore founded the Baltimore Center for Urban Archaeology, which managed a community archaeological dig as a chance for the community, including children, to step into the role of archaeologist and experience the field firsthand. The public interaction resulted in media coverage that drew attention to the project and attracted hundreds of volunteers and thousands of visitors who learned the value of archaeology. The project also presented an opportunity to appeal for local funding; plaques at the dig site honor donors.[28] Both the community project in Baltimore and the camp in Florida spread awareness about archaeology through hands-on exposure to the practice of digging. The archaeological examples demonstrate the possibility of teaching professional method in conjunction with an academic discipline.

Where to Go from Here

Archivists can learn from what archaeologists are doing in the classroom and focus on teaching about archival practice in addition to document analysis. This change will help children to better understand the role of archival work in historical research and the documentary record. It will build upon the skills emphasized when teaching archival literacy or archival intelligence, both of which are important components of educational programs because they help to demystify the profession. Archival competency will teach students how to behave as archivists. It will continue ongoing efforts

at developing public recognition for the field, and it will lay a framework for personal digital archiving from an early age.

This new model draws the archival profession into classroom discourse, which has heretofore been obscured. Following the lead of the Society for American Archaeology, the Society of American Archivists could consider a web presence on archival education in the classroom with resources for incorporating primary sources into the curriculum and educating students about archival work. This should include a clear statement of the purpose for and benefits of interacting with the K–12 community that includes both archival competency and archival intelligence. Such a statement would express that the purpose of K–12 archival outreach is to facilitate educators' access to archival collections to increase both archival literacy and archival competency from an early age, so that through document-based instruction, children learn both the resource and civic value of archives. This information can be integrated into the existing Professional Issues and Advocacy web page, though community endeavors including K–12 outreach and public outreach such as Archives Month and "I Found It in the Archives" may be better conveyed when given their own web presence and not intermixed with professional advocacy issues.[29]

Experience at The History Center in Diboll, Texas, provides a model for introducing K–12 students to the methodology of the archival profession. The History Center functions primarily as a research archives with collections on the East Texas lumber industry and railroads, and the social and economic history of Angelina County. It also mounts indoor and outdoor exhibits, offers staff-guided tours, hosts occasional public events, and is a leader in the popular and growing East Texas native plant movement.[30] Students from local and regional K–12 schools were the primary tour groups at the center. Tours showcased the center's exhibits and archival reading room with the goal of engaging students with archival work, teaching the difference between primary and secondary sources, encouraging critical thinking about primary sources, and leaving students with an understanding that they also create records of importance.

Access to primary sources can easily be coupled with explanations of the archivist's role in providing the materials. Because archives are new to most students, tours began by comparing and contrasting archival repositories with libraries because students are familiar with them. Students learned that archives are a place where people study the past, but unlike their school libraries, archives house unique materials that do not circulate. Students were introduced to the definition of a *record* in the archival sense during an explanation of the concept of enduring value as a characteristic of archival records. This explanation provided an avenue to discuss the difference between primary and secondary sources as well. The interaction proved to be a good introduction as the tour progressed into more specific examples of archival work.

Archaeologists have shown how artifact analysis and simulated digs can segue into discussion about their profession. Likewise, the nature of archival work can be incorporated into the primary source analysis lessons that prevail in the current K–12 instruction model. Preservation is an easy topic for making this transition. To forge personal connections for the students with the materials, all records used during the tour were created by local businesses and individuals. The records included business ledgers, manuscripts, photographs, newspapers, microfilm, and artifacts. In some activities,

students contrasted the characteristics of nineteenth- and mid-twentieth-century newspapers, comparing photographs of segregated schools in 1907 and company houses with their own schools and homes, and examining payroll ledgers to understand how primary sources contain historical information. The discussion transitioned from document analysis into how the materials demonstrate changes in record-keeping formats and technologies. Examples of common preservation issues related to these materials such as acidic paper, acid migration, adhesive damage, and rusty fasteners were displayed. Students were shown archival boxes and folders, photograph sleeves, and microfilm to demonstrate basic ways in which archivists securely house records in chemically stable enclosures. In the vault, instructors explained the effects of temperature and humidity on records and the importance of climate-controlled storage.

The proliferation of electronic devices has made digital preservation a skill relevant to everybody, and lessons on basic electronic-record-keeping strategies should be considered. Drawing parallels between the electronic records students create and their analog counterparts is one way to introduce a basic understanding of digital preservation. Scrapbooks, correspondence, print or slide photographs, and other analog formats may seem foreign to younger students used to modern equivalents: e-mail, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, digital photographs, and text messaging. At The History Center, students were asked to brainstorm about the types of records they create in the course of a day, drawing parallels between their responses and the content of the collections. Students were given a brief explanation about the fragility of digital files to make them aware of the need for proactive management and basic preservation procedures that are within the students' capabilities, such as backing up files and file naming.

As digital archives bring the profession closer to fields such as computer science, interaction with secondary school students should focus on digital literacy skills important to digital archiving. Kari Kraus writes that digital literacy is becoming synonymous with cultural literacy, "I've witnessed firsthand the indispensable role younger generations play in developing new tools and resources—such as emulators and crowd-sourced databases—to ensure ongoing access to our cultural past."[31] While still rooted in tradition, the archival profession is in a state of flux, and it needs to readjust its K–12 outreach to reflect the changing nature of archival work, to emphasize the importance of personal digital archives, and to assert its relevancy to younger generations.

Archivists can teach students about the archival mission in a formal classroom setting. Lessons can include explaining how the records got from the creator to the archives. As in the archaeological model, students can become archivists through real or simulated activities such as writing the initial elements of a finding aid based on the collections used in the classroom. A finding aid worksheet contextualized for students as a part of archival work teaches historical thinking—as students investigate the biography or administrative history of the creator—but it also emphasizes archival practice. This kind of assignment might only appeal to educators who have a firm grasp of how archives function, but if the finding aid is considered as a worksheet to be filled out, it becomes an educational activity reinforcing historical context and interpretation.

Local archives can develop programs that give the public and students a more active role in the archival process.[32] As previously noted, archaeological digs have been transformed into public events. Local archives can pair with area middle and high

schools to work on describing records, or, if using born-digital or digitized content, they could crowdsource projects to the students. At The History Center, high school students work weekend hours processing collections and transcribing oral histories. Some former History Center student workers have pursued undergraduate degrees in history and anthropology. Employing area students exposes them to primary sources from their own environment, educates them about local history, and promotes the archival profession to people at a young age.

Archivists can engage students further by assisting in establishing archives at local K–12 schools. School archives emphasize institutional legacy and can help foster a sense of belonging. Researchers have found that a school's sense of community is a major predictor of student success.[33] The Hunterdon Central Regional High School (HCRHS) in Flemington, New Jersey, was the subject of a case study in establishing an archives that discusses funding mechanisms, operational procedures, outreach programs, and future goals. The project was successful because of broad community involvement and the assistance of professional archivists at Rutgers University who consulted on archival practice, participated on the HCRHS Archives Advisory Board, and provided services through the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region. History students were included on the advisory board, and over the course of the project they created exhibitions, cataloged materials using MARC-like worksheets, and performed basic preservation tasks. Students participated enthusiastically, and the Advisory Board is exploring plans to increase student involvement in the archives.[34]

Conclusion

This article presents some suggestions for educating young people about archives. Archaeologists and education-minded scientists and engineers use other methods to appeal to young people, including children's books and publications and educational video games.[35] The characteristic these modes of outreach share is that they create an opportunity to describe a profession in positive and understandable terms. By targeting some archival advocacy at children, archivists can begin to dispel stubborn stereotypes of the musty, dusty archives in favor of a more representative view of archival work. Creative outreach methods encourage a favorable professional narrative that leverages students' interest in primary sources for better understanding of the archival field. Further research on this topic should examine the benefits of educating children about the archival profession while teaching them where to find and how to use primary sources. The new outreach method promoted in this article is multigenerational, and it will take time to build the kind of foundational public knowledge that will truly benefit the profession. An initial study, however, might examine students' understanding and perception of archives and archival work before and after lessons or field trips that include archival competency as a learning objective. Such a study might also gauge what impression students develop about archives after a more traditional lesson, if they develop an impression at all. If the archival profession wants to engender support and respect, as well as rely on individuals to manage their own digital assets until

they come to reside in an archives, then it must proactively educate the public about the field. The educational trends involving teaching with primary sources makes the classroom a natural place to extend current advocacy efforts. Expecting children to be as familiar with archives as they are with the libraries and museums they visit more regularly is unrealistic; however, it is not unreasonable for students to acquire a basic understanding about where and how historical documents are preserved. The new outreach method presented in this article will create a stronger impression of archives in students by allowing them to experience archival work firsthand.

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NOTES

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