

## USING PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIALS: A CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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How do students learn history? How can teachers ensure attention to the details of the past, develop historical investigation skills, and stimulate a creative response to historical materials? It is not an easy task. And complaints of failing to teach a common cultural context to all students are becoming louder and louder. Historians blame teachers for the lack of basic knowledge college students bring to their introductory classes. Educators complain that historians have failed to provide a compelling synthesis and a model for integrating social history scholarship into textbooks and course syllabi. In addition, teachers complain most college instructors have little understanding of the nature of teaching elementary and secondary students.<sup>1</sup>

For several years the Education Department of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Elementary Education Program in the Department of Child and Family Development at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, have collaborated on a class for teachers in which the study and teaching of history are given equal weight. The development of "historical mindedness" for teachers and students has been a primary goal of the collaboration. The characteristics of historical mindedness include: "a sensitivity to how other times and places differ from our own; awareness of basic continuities in human affairs over time; ability to note and explain significant changes; sensitivity to multiple causation; and an awareness that all written history is a reconstruction that inadequately reflects the past as it really happened."<sup>2</sup> Out of this collaboration has evolved a model for teaching history curriculum development. The class uses primary sources as the basic textbook through which teachers both study a topic and write curriculum. The primary goals of the class are to help teachers develop "historical mindedness" and to use this understanding to create materials that help students at particular developmental stages to also become "historical minded." Within the framework of these overarching goals, which may not be realized for many years, there are many historical skills younger people can practice, historical concepts they can begin to understand, and historical topics they can investigate.

Three questions need to be addressed in developing historical understanding with younger people: 1) How do students learn history? 2) How can the use of primary source materials contribute to students' understanding of history? 3) What curriculum development process is helpful in constructing effective history learning experiences for students? This article will discuss the answers to these questions by describing a tested curriculum development process using three case studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry F. Bedford, "Letters." *Magazine of History*, 4 (1989): 43.

<sup>2</sup> C. Furay & M.J. Salevouris, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1988, 11.



The class broke the curriculum development into four stages: the research stage, the sorting stage, the activity development stage, and the lesson writing stage. During the research stage, a general historical theme is developed and various primary and secondary source materials are reviewed. The context (historical time and place) is described for teacher use. Possible questions to be answered or hypotheses to be tested are generated.

The sorting stage involves careful review of primary source materials that could lead to the collecting of relevant information. A particular grade level is chosen, with consideration of the students' stage of development. The facts, inferences, and generalizations that pupils will draw from the materials are listed. Also described during this stage are the historical investigation skills that students will use.

During the activity development stage, consideration is given to the adaptation of primary source materials in order to be meaningful to students at their developmental level. Evidence gathering worksheets are developed to assist students as they gather facts, make inferences, and draw conclusions or arrive at generalizations. These worksheets can also facilitate students' exploration of the struggles faced by people of the past and allow testing of hypotheses using various information sources. Sometimes vocabulary guide sheets are also developed. These sheets can help students with unfamiliar historical terms like "forge."

The final stage is the writing of the lesson plan. Components within the lesson plan include consideration of student motivation, the objective or purpose of the lesson, how the learning experience will be explained, modeled, and practiced. How students learning will be monitored, evaluated, and practiced is also reviewed.

#### *Case Studies Illustrating Curriculum Development Process*

Three case studies describe how this curriculum process takes place, using the theme "lives of children and families at the turn of the century." A historical study of the family can be organized in three basic ways. The family can be studied as a unit of society. In this case a researcher might investigate such topics as household size, family roles, rural versus urban patterns at a particular point in time. It is a static or slice-of-time look at the family. Or, the family can be studied as a changing, dynamic unit through a study over time. Some of the topics in such a study might be lifecycle: daily, weekly, or annual timetables, and demographic patterns that compare several decades of time. A third basic way to organize a study of the family would be to look at the family in relationship to other social systems or institutions. In such a study the topics might be kin networks, geography and ethnicity, consumer patterns, socialization, ideology, and religion.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Case Study One: Family life in Cloquet, Minnesota--1900-1910*

##### Research Stage

The research stage involved first reading a general history of Cloquet, Minnesota. Primary source materials that could yield insight into the lives of

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie McLellan, unpublished lecture notes. Minnesota History Workshop, St. Paul, 1986.



children and families were also surveyed. These materials included census records, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, artifacts, business directories, photographs, newspapers, old textbooks, reminiscences, and oral histories. Questions began to emerge: 1) Was the community prosperous or economically depressed and how would this impact children and families? 2) What was the ethnic diversity or similarity within the community? 3) What were typical household structures? 4) What child rearing expectations were then in effect? 5) What values were inherent in child rearing? 6) What were difficulties faced by children and families? 7) What leisure time and community celebrations were available to children and families?

### The Sorting Stage

In the sorting stage, the secondary school level was chosen for a unit of six lessons related to the lives of children and families in Cloquet. Specific materials chosen for use in the unit were: 1) 1900 United States Federal Census for Cloquet (formerly called Knife Falls, Minnesota); 2) 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Cloquet; 3) selected articles from the *Ladies Home Journal*, 1900-1910; 4) newspaper articles from Cloquet's *Pine Knot*, 1900-1910; 5) a business directory, *Cloquet Home of the White Pine* (1907); 6) a reminiscence of boyhood in Cloquet in 1906; 7) photographs from the picture file of the Carlton County Historical Society; 8) McGuffey Readers for First, Third, and Fifth Levels.

Facts to be collected from each primary source were identified and related to the following inferences: 1) the community climate was prosperous and optimistic; 2) ethnicity was diverse when considering the community as a whole, but people actually lived in pockets of specific ethnic groups; 3) although household structures differed, mothers were usually at home, enabling children to be cared for by their own mothers; 4) different child rearing expectations existed for boys and girls; 5) festivals and community celebrations were important events for children and their families; and 6) people were expected to work hard, contribute significantly to family life, and do well at school. The particular historical investigation and thinking skills emphasized in the activities included: 1) compiling and organizing information; 2) evaluating the relevance and factuality of the information; 3) comparing similarities and differences; 4) drawing inferences and generalizations; and 5) becoming aware of the complexities of the past.

### Activity Development Stage

Evidence gathering worksheets were developed for each of the primary source materials. Questions were written to assist students in the collection of facts. These, in turn, were combined into inferences and generalizations. For example, for the information collection worksheet related to newspaper and journal articles, students were asked to describe the major idea of their articles and the details that supported those key ideas. They were then asked to summarize the values reflected in the articles and how those values might affect parent-child relationships. Finally, they were asked to generalize about different socialization patterns for boys and girls and the effects of such patterns on family life in small town in the United States at the turn of the century. (See Figure 1 for the worksheet developed for this activity.)



### Lesson Writing Stage

Six lesson plans were written to include consideration for motivation and goal setting, introducing the lesson and modeling expectations, and monitoring and evaluating the students' learning. For example, students using the newspaper and journal articles first made hypotheses about child rearing techniques and expectations at the turn of the century. They then analyzed one newspaper article as a large group, collecting facts, making inferences, and composing generalizations. Working in small groups with packets of different articles, facts were collected and inferences were drawn. After sharing these with the total group, generalizations about socialization practices for boys and girls in the early 1900s were drawn.

### *Case Study Two: Urban Fringe Farm Families 1860-1900*

### Research Stage

This case study was developed to use with teachers in a workshop in which they investigated the experiences of the Heman and Jane Debow Stevens Gibbs family, a Euro-American family who moved to Minnesota during the early statehood period. The research stage of the study included a survey of relevant agricultural and rural studies sources, an unpublished interpretive plan for the Gibbs Farm Museum, research in the Gibbs Family papers, and work with an unpublished computer data base of agricultural production for the township in which the Gibbs farm was located.<sup>4</sup>

The primary sources in this study included: household and agricultural census data for all families in the township from 1860-1880; specific census information for the Gibbs family over 40 years; township plat maps; two account books listing all the purchases and groceries the family bought in one year; letters between family members; and the farm house and property. Preliminary questions emerged from this initial interview: Did the close proximity of the city of St. Paul influence production on the farm? Did family life change as the city's physical boundaries encroached on the farm, and as transportation into the city became easier and faster? In what ways did the nearby city influence this farm family?

### The Sorting Stage

The questions defined in the research stage were refined in the sorting stage. Each resource would be asked to answer basically the same question. What changes in social and economic patterns, if any, could be explained by the location of this farm just outside the city limits? The specific primary resources chosen for the investigation included 1) 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1900 household census for the Gibbs family; 2) 1860, 1870, and 1880 agricultural census for the farm; 3) plat maps from 1867 and 1892; 4) an account book listing all purchases for 1881; 5) an account book listing all groceries purchased from one store during 1881; and 6) the physical farmhouse.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Menard, *Urban Fringe Farmers: Agriculture in Ramsey County, Minnesota 1860-1900*. Data analysis in unpublished report submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1982; K. Dillard, "Farming in the Shadow of the Cities: The Not-So-Rural History of Rose Township Farmers, 1850-1900," *Ramsey County History*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1985), 3-19.



Evidence was collected from all these primary sources and led to the following inferences: 1) Agricultural production changed rapidly between 1860 and 1880 from semi-subsistence, to market production, to truck farming. It later shifted once more in the early twentieth century to nursery and greenhouse production; 2) Family composition changed throughout the family's life cycle in predictable ways, but all members stayed in farm-related occupations; 3) Family life remained centered around this farm (except for one daughter who married and moved away); 4) Family buying patterns were influenced by proximity to an urban center; 5) Physical evidence in the house, and some buying patterns, suggested the persistence of more rural patterns to this family's economic and social life.

These inferences, suggested after the evidence was compiled from each source, led to the conclusion that rural families living close to growing urban centers were influenced primarily in their farm production and economic status. Some social and lifestyle patterns showed urban influence, but overall the sources documented a persistence in social patterns already established in the family, and a continuing pattern of rural values related to living and working together on a farm.

#### Activity Development Stage

When the case study was used with teachers, worksheets were not developed. They used the materials as a "primary source packet" through which they would develop their own activities and corresponding worksheets.<sup>5</sup> When this investigative unit was used with junior high students, specific evidence collecting worksheets were developed. A vocabulary sheet was also developed to use when the students encountered unfamiliar words in the account records. Items such as Arnica (an herb used as a liniment) and Saleratus (Sodium Bicarbonate used as a leavening agent in raising breads) are not on a family's grocery list these days.

Each worksheet asked students to collect specific evidence from a set of sources, to sort or organize that information, and then to draw inferences and conclusions. It is important that worksheets used in a historical investigation model do not stop at evidence collection. The higher level skills involving analysis and generalization must be structured into the students' work. Some teachers prefer to have the worksheet stop at the inference level, and to reach generalizations in a whole group discussion. (See Figure 2 for the worksheet used with the Agricultural Census.)

#### Lesson Writing Stage

In this stage a lesson plan for the junior high was written. It is important to include an explicit model of the investigative process and an introductory motivation activity when working with students. An introduction to the family members was chosen for the motivating activity. As a large group students were introduced to the 1860 census and to the Gibbs household. They were asked to choose a family member and write a week of diary entries based on the census record. In the discussion of their entries that followed the instructor pointed out the examples of gender roles, family relationships, work on a farm, and economic status to which

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<sup>5</sup> W. Leon, "Preparing a Primary Source Material Package on Your Community's History," *Social Education*, 44 (1980): 612-618.



their diaries alluded. This concept list was compiled on the board and retained for the entire unit. After completing the unit these concepts would be defined by students in more specific terms. Next, the students were asked to predict changes in the family at ten-year intervals for 40 years. The introductory activity then led naturally into an investigation of their "predictions."

### *Case Study Three: The Messages in Women's Magazine Ads, 1897-1910*

#### Research Stage

Women's magazines, which increased in popularity at the end of the nineteenth century, gave advice to women in several ways and about many topics. There were articles that gave explicit advice about housekeeping, childcare, relationships with men and husbands, and health and nutrition. There were also ads that gave information about new consumer products. This advertising promoted certain cultural roles for women, suggested changes in the nature of housework, and addressed certain concerns women had about caring for their families.

The primary source research for this lesson focused on the advertising found in journals such as *Women's Home Companion*. Secondary sources about housekeeping, women's roles, and family economics and work were also used. Advertising was a new media in the late nineteenth century, and it helped to diffuse the new national consumer culture that had come into existence after the Civil War. When analyzed, the ads suggested that there were now plenty of new prepared foods and new labor-saving products available to women consumers. The ads also suggest that women were assigned to taking care of the home and family, and that housework entailed a certain set of high standards.

Some of the questions that defined the research at this stage were: Into what categories of information do the ads fall? What do they tell us about prescribed roles for women? What do they tell us about new products and new technology developed to sell to the home market? What information do they give about the home environment of the family?

#### Sorting Stage

At this stage fourteen ads were chosen as representative of the kind of ads used throughout the thirteen years of magazines in the original study. An analysis of these specific ads was completed. The ads were classified by their messages into the following categories: 1) creating an educated home; 2) creating a healthy home; and 3) creating an efficient home. This classification led to three inferences: that women were responsible for providing a stimulating home environment geared to the education of young children; that women should be very concerned about keeping children safe, clean, and healthy; and that women's work in the home would be easier if women used new, more efficient products. The generalization this analysis led to was that the primary prescribed role for women was to raise educated, healthy, well-behaved children, and they do so by participating as major consumers of products manufactured outside the home.



Activity Stage

This lesson was designed with upper elementary students in mind, but was given to teachers as a model of history curriculum development during a teacher workshop. It was also intended to be a part of a larger study unit on the changing roles of American women in the twentieth century. There are three major content objectives for this unit: 1) Students will recognize that women were expected to be major consumers of new technology and food products; 2) Students will recognize that the prescribed or preferred role for women centered around taking care of children and the family home; 3) Students will understand that even magazine advertising can give a historian information about the past. The historical skills students would practice in this unit include compiling and organizing information and drawing conclusions from evidence.

Teachers were given the fourteen ads in small groups and asked to classify them according to these categories: 1) creating an educated home; 2) creating a healthy home; 3) creating an efficient home. Teachers were then asked to describe what the ads told them about women's roles. They were asked to write three specific inferences, one for each category of ads. Then they were asked to draw generalizations about women's prescribed roles. When using this unit with students this information should be collected on an evidence gathering worksheet. (See Figure 3 for the worksheet developed in this activity.)

This worksheet begins with the sorting or evidence gathering stage in which students sort the ads into the categories. In the next section students draw inferences from the evidence. The third section asks students to reaffirm their inferences and begin to move to the generalization level. In the last section students attempt an expository argument.

Lesson Development

Modeling the use of a primary source before getting down to the actual group work is always helpful when working with students. In this case, the modeling might happen in a large group discussion of contemporary magazines as a source of information about our society. Particularly helpful would be for the class to examine several different kinds of magazines--some geared to special topics such as sports or news, others directed to specific age, ethnic, or gender groups. The class could discuss the different kinds of articles and features found in such a variety of magazines, and how different the ads are in each type of magazine. With contemporary examples the class could also discuss the differences between real and idealized images of women. The instructor would then introduce the class to the older magazines and take the class through the analysis of one ad before beginning the activity.

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DISCUSSION

Primary source curriculum materials have been and are currently available from many local and national publishers. And many of these provide excellent models. For example, in one of the units of the Chicago Neighborhood History Project, students use maps to define neighborhood, real estate guides to answer



questions about land use, and a reminiscence to determine the quality of life.<sup>6</sup> In *Northern Lights: Going to the Sources*, Steve Sandell has developed an activity book in which students gather evidence from a variety of primary sources. They use diary entries to gather evidence about how explorers got to Minnesota, photographs to document change in a community, and census records to test hypotheses about a community's residents.<sup>7</sup> Old Sturbridge Village has published social history materials that use oral history, photographs, and maps to compare and contrast towns of the 1820s, 1900s, and the present.<sup>8</sup> They have also published several document packets that allow students to investigate social history topics such as youth, family, and courtship.<sup>9</sup> The National Archives has published several primary source kits to supplement U.S. history coursework.<sup>10</sup>

If the end goal of studying history is to develop historical mindedness, then the teaching and study of history must allow for both the acquisition of content knowledge and the practice of historical investigation skills. Teacher training in history education should encourage and nurture the development of history curricula in which both can take place--for teachers and for students. This model teaches non-historians historical research methodology by allowing them to practice it in a case study approach. In turn, it encourages teachers to allow students to practice it as well.

The development of effective learning experiences using primary source materials requires careful curriculum planning. Using the four steps of the curriculum development process outlined in this article assures that students use effective historical investigation skills in order to arrive at accurate content knowledge. Both the content of history and the process of learning are addressed in this model.

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<sup>6</sup> Chicago Neighborhood History Project. *Unit III: Defining a Neighborhood*. Chicago: National Endowment for the Humanities, n.d.

<sup>7</sup> S. Sandell, *Northern Lights: Going to the Sources*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Old Sturbridge Village, *Guide to the Small Town Sourcebook*. Sturbridge, MA: Old Sturbridge Village, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Old Sturbridge Village, *Educational Resource Packets*, Sturbridge, MA: Old Sturbridge Village, 1978.

<sup>10</sup> National Archives and SIRS, *U.S. History Documents: Supplemental Teaching Units*, Boca Raton, FL: SIRS, Inc.



## APPENDIX

Figure 1. Sample information-gathering worksheet for the journal primary source materials

LADIES HOME JOURNAL ARTICLES

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Group \_\_\_\_\_

GATHERING FACTS

1. From the packet given your group, select one article.
2. Read the article and answer the following questions:
  - a. What is the major idea of the article?
  - b. What details support this main idea?

DRAWING INFERENCES

Share your recording of ideas from the previous section with other members of your group. Be sure one person records the ideas shared. Then draw inferences and record them here. Think about the child-rearing values expressed in the articles. Also think about how these values affected day-to-day interactions between parents and children.

MAKING GENERALIZATIONS

To make generalizations, think about the hypotheses you made as a class at the beginning of this lesson. Do your facts and inferences support these hypotheses? Make a generalization about recommended child-rearing practices in the early 1900s and how these practices may have affected and been affected by societal norms.



### Figure 2. Worksheet: Agricultural Census for the Gibbs Family

1. List the improved and unimproved acres the Gibbs family own in each of the following years:

1860	_____	=	_____
1870	_____	=	_____
1880	_____	=	_____

2. What is the value of the following:

	the farm	machinery	livestock
1860	_____	_____	_____
1870	_____	_____	_____
1880	_____	_____	_____

3. What kinds of animals are the Gibbs' raising? And how many of each?

	Horses	Milk Cows	Swine	Chickens
1860	_____	_____	_____	_____
1870	_____	_____	_____	_____
1880	_____	_____	_____	_____

4. What kinds of crops are they growing? How much of each?

wheat eggs corn oats flax potatoes butter hay buckwheat beans peas

1860	_____
1870	_____
1880	_____

5. Why didn't the Gibbs' expand their farm during these years?

6. Where might the Gibbs be selling the crops they raise?

7. An urban fringe farmer has certain characteristics. These farmers tend to raise more vegetables and less grains. They sell more dairy products. They farm less than 80 acres. They have less money invested in machinery. The value of their land increases rapidly. Which of these characteristics does the Gibbs family have? List them. Would you call him an "urban fringe farmer"?



### Figure 3. Worksheet: Women's Roles through Magazine Advertising

1. Sort the ads according to these categories. List the product and a few descriptive words used in the ad.

Creating an  
Educated Home

Creating a  
Healthy Home

Creating an  
Efficient Home

Plants - decorative/easy  
upkeep

Phonograph - lively  
home/keep children at  
home

Piano - develop musical  
talents

Dusting product  
clean/easy

Book & formula  
nutrition

Sanitary crib - safety

Stork Pants - dry babies

Jello - wholesome

Tapioca - nourishing

Heinz - pure product

Dusting product - save  
time

Heater - safe, clean,  
efficient, reduce cost of  
living

Pancake Mix - cost  
efficient, less trouble,  
simple

Tapioca - fast  
Macaroni & Cheese -  
simple/brief prep

2. Write three statements (one for each category) about the roles of women as described by these magazine ads.

a) Women are responsible for . . .

b) Women are concerned about and responsible for . . .

c) Women's work will be easier . . .

3. Finish the following statements:

a) Magazine ads from this time can give me information about . . .

b) Women participate in the economy by . . .

4. In one paragraph argue for or against this statement: The roles of middle class women at the beginning of the twentieth century were primarily limited to caring for children and family home. They did this best by becoming "good" consumers.