

SOAR Research Proposal – Summer 2014

Project Title: Constructing Curriculum Materials from Primary Source Archival Materials

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Robert Mayer, Professor, Education Department

Administrative Advisor: Janet A. Ohles, MLS, MPH, Director, Reeves Library

Student Researcher: Mary Nehme

Start Date: May 26, 2014

End Date: August 16, 2014

Project Description:

The purposes of this research project are to:

- Examine current research on teaching with primary documents in order to promote historical thinking and interview practicing educators in the middle- and high-school levels who use primary documents to teach historical thinking
- Conduct library research and interview practicing educators to identify how middle- and secondary-school teachers integrate civic literacy through the teaching of historical thinking into their curriculum
- Identify existing curriculum utilizing teaching techniques, such as thought experiments and digital documentaries, to engage students in the study of history and to develop a sense of civic literacy
- Develop instructional materials using digitized issues of *The Comenian* based on the library research and interviews to incorporate teaching that will engage middle- and secondary-school students learning how to think historically and in developing a sense of civic responsibility

Background: Often history is taught in a manner that allows events to be distant and seem unimportant. Primary documents can allow students to experience historic immediacy and recognize historic significance. The years encompassing World War I will be used for this SOAR project. *The Comenian* provides a unique glimpse into the lives of both those on the college campus during the War years and their thoughts on US involvement in the War. It also has articles from young men who served the U.S. military for the war effort. For historians and students of history, such documents as *The Comenian* can be used to go get in close to the lives of people who lived during World War I and experience how the lived experiences of these people hold historic significance.

In the first academic issue of 1914, *The Comenian* had a short 4-paragraph article entitled “Hades” about the war. In it, Krupp Steel was hailed as a destroyer of efficiency. The war was described as “diabolical” and the “Causes? There are none!” (volume 24, no. 1 p. 9). In February 1917, a 3 ½ page article, “Universal Military Training,” addresses both reasons for and against such training. The article concludes that universal military training will help develop boys into citizens (p. 56-59). By May 1919, the lead article, “The Impressions of France” gives an American soldier’s view of France, one that the author describes as being different from the view seen from the window of a first-class railway carriage or Paris hotel.

As one example: *The Comenian* provides an interesting context from which to add a curriculum component to existing curriculum. Currently, the Philadelphia middle school curriculum includes a Juvenile Justice / Criminal Justice program for 7th and 8th graders. The goal of the program is to teach these adolescents about the consequences of delinquent/criminal behavior. The program also covers victim issues, such as the impact of gun violence. Students are able to explore the relevance of the topic to their own lives, to avoid becoming involved in delinquent/criminal activities, and offer anti-crime strategies.¹

The curriculum module developed in this grant might add a civic engagement perspective through incorporating a thought experiment using the “Reforming the Reformatory” lead article in the December 1915 of *The Comenian*. E.g., What would the author of this Reformatory article think about adding gyms, libraries and TV rooms to the prison system? Do these additions address the points made in his article? Would he still promote more reformatory work and what types of reforms would he be promoting today?

Another example that has relevance today is an article in October 1913, “The New Immigration.” During this timeframe in American history, immigrants were arriving from eastern Europe and Italy to the U.S. shores. The societal sentiment about these new immigrants is a familiar refrain today, “Extreme statements and hysterical warnings are many as to the dangers from the new immigration.” (vol. 23, no. 1, p. 5).

The foregoing discussion demonstrates some examples of how the archival issues of *The Comenian* provide a wealth of information from which to construct curricular projects for the 7-12 grades. The SOAR student will be able to read through these years of *The Comenian* and draw upon them to use the primary source material to develop curricular materials and plans.

By learning how to construct historical arguments through the use of primary documents as evidence, students in the grades 7-12 will learn how to engage in reasoned evidence-based discourse. This is the sort of discourse one needs for civic engagement in a democracy.

Role of the Student, Mentor and Library Administrator

¹ <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/uploads/hC/-1/hC-1Tn4Hi6WiVgpP-MogDQ/Juv-Jus-Cur-7th-Grade09.pdf>

The student researcher will conduct library research and will interview teachers with respect to using primary source materials and teaching techniques, such as digital documentaries and thought experiments, in the 7-12 social studies curriculum. The student researcher will, based on the research and interviews, construct model curriculum projects for 7-12 social studies curriculum. The project will culminate with a research paper that incorporates the research and interviews and provides curricular materials and plans from the website for both the middle- and secondary-school social studies teachers, and a link to the digitized issues of *The Comenian*. The research paper will serve as a literature review 1 foundation for the curriculum project. The mentor will meet with the student on a regular basis to discuss her project. The library director will ensure that the years that encompass World War I of *The Comenian* will be digitized at Back Stage, a local company that is well-known throughout archives, museums and libraries for their quality products. A searchable and digitized version of these years from *The Comenian* will be uploaded to the Reeves Library website. Additionally, the web site will be constructed to incorporate and highlight the curriculum materials developed by the student researcher. ²These materials will be fully accessible for anyone anywhere to download and use.

Timetable

Research will begin at the start of the summer session and will continue through the ten-week period. Dr. Mayer is engaged in another project from June 8-28. During this time, Mary will work on the research aspects of the project with Janet Ohles. Interviews with social studies teachers will begin early while 7-12 classes are still in session. The completed research project will be submitted one week prior to the end of the session to allow time for final revisions.

Discipline-Appropriate Scholarly Research

The student researcher is working toward a degree in History and toward social studies 7-12 certification. Interviewing practicing social studies teachers about the effectiveness of utilizing new curriculum to teach social studies will be of professional benefit to the student researcher. Library research to serve as the basis for developing a new curriculum approach will also be of professional benefit to the student researcher.

Dissemination

The student researcher will have the opportunity to share her experience with her colleagues. The library director will work with the Moravian College's public relations department to widely advertise the availability of the curricular examples from the webpage. Additionally, she will work collaboratively with Dr. Robert Mayer to disseminate information about the project in educational venues and will also disseminate information about this project widely throughout the library field.

² Janet Ohles, library director, has had previous experience in translating a print educational manual into a webpage.

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Student Researcher: Mary Nehme

Major: History (and Secondary Education Certification)

Expected Date of Graduation: May 2015

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Mayer, Professor, Education Department

On-Campus Housing Requested? TBA

Student Statement of Purpose

My professor had told me of an opportunity to do a SOAR project pertaining to my field over the summer that involved constructing curriculum materials from primary source materials. When I first found out about the project I had some reservations about it, unsure of whether I could handle it or not, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Given that I graduate next year, this is my last summer to have a chance to do something like this. I realize that the task at hand is a lot to take on, but I pride myself on taking risks and challenging myself to do things I never would have thought of doing otherwise. Therefore, after discussing it with both my professor and Mrs. Ohles, the person behind the project, I know that doing this project will benefit me greatly in the long run. Not only does this project give me a chance to have real-world experience in both history and education, but it's also a great resume builder as well!

I'm hoping that I will be able to create exemplary model curriculum projects for the 7-12 social studies curriculum. Part of my responsibility as the student researcher for this SOAR project will be to formulate a research paper that incorporates the research and interviews of secondary school educators and provide a unit plan that will become available on the website for both the middle- and secondary-school social studies teachers. By interviewing practicing social studies teachers about the effectiveness of utilizing digital documentaries to teach social studies and conducting library research to serve as the basis for developing a new curriculum approach, I'm sure to gain a professional benefit which I can certainly use in my own classroom one day. This is the exact type of experience I have been waiting for since I started my college career. I wanted some opportunity that would give me a chance to do something related to Social Studies Education, and now that this opportunity has arose, I do not plan on missing out!