



Brandeis University

Marya R. Levenson
*Professor of the
Practice in Education and
The Harry S. Levitan
Director of Education*

Education Program
Mailstop 022
P.O. Box 549110
Waltham, MA 02454-9110

781-736-2002
781-736-5020 Fax
mlevenso@brandeis.edu
www.brandeis.edu/programs/education

To: Provost Lisa Lynch
From: Marya R. Levenson
Re: Proposal for funds to implement the HistoryMakers Project
Date: Sept. 22, 2016

Julieanna Richardson's presentation about the oral histories that she and others have collected for the HistoryMakers Project encouraged me to think about how high school history teachers would be able to use this rich resource. When I reached out to two school districts to inquire whether they would be interested in incorporating these materials into their U.S. History courses, Kerry Dunne, the history department chair at Weston and instructor of the History Pedagogy class at Brandeis, and Derek Vandergrift, the history chair of the Waltham Schools, were enthusiastic to explore how these oral histories could enable their students to understand history as a rich story reflecting many peoples' voices.

The challenge of engaging high school students in learning history is that there is so much material to "cover." In addition, students feel as though they have heard it all before because they have been learning U.S. history in elementary and middle school classes. One of the ways to motivate students and engage them in inquiry-based learning can be through the use of oral histories where students hear about the lives, challenges, and accomplishments of history makers, including those not mentioned in history text books.

This proposal would enable the high school teachers and Brandeis students learning to be history teachers to learn about the content of the oral histories in the HistoryMakers, how to use these oral histories effectively in high school classrooms, and to disseminate what they have learned among their colleagues in their schools and potentially to a broader audience at a regional conference. While focusing on the HistoryMakers, these educators would also gain skills which will enable them to use other oral histories to deepen the knowledge and perceptions of their students. We will also assess the teachers' and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of incorporating the HistoryMakers' oral histories into the curriculum.

This proposed collaboration would create connections among two local school district teachers, the Brandeis Afro and African-American Department, the Education Program, and Brandeis undergraduates and MAT students learning how to teach history. With the support of the History department chairs in Weston and Waltham, Michael Diluzio and Mary Patton, two history teachers from Waltham High, and Monny Cochran and Robin Wanosky, two history teachers from Weston High, are excited to participate in this program. We are also requesting funds for the teachers to present about the use of HistoryMakers at a regional social studies teachers conference.

On behalf of my high school colleagues, I am proposing the following activities and assessment.

- 1) The four US history teachers will be released to participate in a professional development day (9-3:30 pm) for the four US history teachers at Brandeis during which Ned Rossiter, former history department chair at Newton North High School, and Prof. Marya Levenson will help them explore ways to use HistoryMakers resources. (There are so many oral histories in the resource that they will need to think about which to use when.) In addition, Prof. Chad Williams, chair of the AAAS department, will speak with the teachers about the use of oral history and the Charlestown Syllabus: Readings on Race, Racism, and Racial Violence, by Chad Williams and Kidada Williams. (Brandeis seniors and MAT History students would be invited to Prof. Williams' presentation.)
- 2) The four teachers will use and (document the use of) the materials in their classes. (This activity will require funds to purchase subscriptions for the four teachers to use of the HistoryMatters materials.)
- 3) The teachers will present what they have developed to the Weston and Waltham History departments during regularly scheduled department meeting time.
- 4) After the teachers introduce the oral histories into their curricula, Marya and Ned will reconvene the group after school to discuss what worked (and didn't work) and why.
- 5) With the help of their department chairs, the teachers will write and submit a proposal to speak about using HistoryMakers in high school history classes at a regional social studies workshop.
- 6) Kerry Dunne will invite the teachers to meet with the 2017 fall Brandeis History Pedagogy class to share what the challenges and accomplishments during the 2016-17 academic year.

Assessment:

In consultation with Brandeis faculty, the high school teachers will evaluate both the content and the teaching/learning process. The assessment results will be shared with the History Department Chairs and the Brandeis Education Program.

Summary of Piloted Use of The HistoryMakers Digital Archive
As Part of the 2016 Provost Grant Proposal of Professor Marya Levenson

Prepared by Laura Messner, Instructional Design Specialist

Introduction

As part of an initiative to promote faculty engagement with The HistoryMakers Digital Archive (THM), Brandeis Provost Lisa Lynch sponsored faculty fellowships offered to faculty interested in exploring the use of THM in their research and teaching. Marya Levenson, director of Brandeis' education program (and a former high school history teacher) participated, and was awarded a grant. Her application is attached, but essentially, she connected with the history department chairs of two local (Boston suburban) high schools: Weston High School and Waltham High School. In all, 4 teachers (2 from each district, excluding the department chairs) chose to participate. Professor Levenson's proposal directed the participants to meet for a professional development day to explore and discuss the contents of the archive, and then to plan lessons they could realistically implement in the coming semester with their students. They would then report their feedback on both their and their students' experiences with the archives, and their overall thoughts on using it as a teaching and learning tool.

Weston High School is the #8 ranked public school in Massachusetts. Its student population (~700 students) is 30% minorities; with 6% considered economically disadvantaged. Weston participates in METCO, the voluntary de-segregation busing program in the Boston area. Waltham High School is a large and ethnically, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse school also located in one of Boston's immediate suburbs. Its student population (~1,400 students) is 53% minority, with 47% considered economically disadvantaged.*

*According to U.S. News & World Report's 2017 high school rankings.

Overview of Process

The team met in December for a day of professional development. In attendance were the teachers and department chairs, Professor Levenson, myself, Ned Rossiter (a former teacher and administrator in Newton, MA); with special guest Chad Williams, the chair of African and Afro-American Studies at Brandeis. The day was framed by a discussion of the importance of the historical discipline, as well as the role history plays in developing critical thinking in students. Central to that discussion was a critique of the mainstream historical narrative, and the ways in which marginalized populations are not adequately or accurately represented, which was together a powerful and important context for informing teachers' work with the archive. I introduced the teachers to the archive's content and features, as well as the origin and mission of The HistoryMakers organization,, and Professor Williams introduced his book *The Charleston Syllabus*, a collection of primary source documents that illuminate the racial tension, discrimination and violence in America's history. His compelling talk underscored the urgency for the work the teachers set out to accomplish.

The teachers collaborated to create the lesson plans, and then committed to teaching them during the next few months, and finally to uploading the plans as well as any other ancillary/related materials and feedback to a shared Google folder (Dionti has access to this). A concluding discussion was planned (perhaps timed to coincide with the Black Lives Matter Symposium Brandeis was hosting in the Spring), but these plans never materialized. There was, however, a series of follow-up discussions conducted via email.

Results

Over the course of the next few months, teachers used the archive with their students and reported the results of their efforts. Feedback was informal - taken anecdotally - but teachers generally reported enthusiasm and engagement on behalf of their students with the archive. Students enjoyed its uniqueness as a resource (noting the oral history videos paired with the transcripts), the vastness & diversity of its contents, and relative ease of use. It is worth noting that part of the professional development day was dedicated to in-advance troubleshooting: teachers anticipated login difficulties with complicated, multiple usernames and passwords. Each school was given a single username (school name) and password (mascot). Further, teachers made arrangements in advance to ensure that there were enough devices and headphones to go around.

The 4 teachers developed lesson plans that used the archive in the following ways:

1. Asked students to identify how a textbook described the black experience during the 1920s, and then subsequently to redefine it using content from the archives. They subsequently conducted a comparative analysis of the two.
2. Students used the contents of the archives to challenge the mainstream narrative about the United States during the Great Depression (& the idea that it created a universally-experienced economic hardship for all Americans, in contrast to relative prosperity before the Depression).
3. Students developed their research skills (specifically boolean searching and source evaluation) by engaging with topics in African American history through the archive, conducting additional primary source research, and then writing an essay on their findings.
4. Students participated in a primary source analysis focusing on oral history as a type of source. In this instance, the teacher asked students to analyze stories from a pre-selected list (of World War 2 era content), and connect their analysis to broader themes from the time.
5. One of the 4 teachers chose to use the archive again, this time with her AP US History classes in a project that commenced after they took the AP exam in the Spring. Students were asked to explore a topic of their choosing in 20th century American history using either oral history testimony from The HistoryMakers or using testimony from oral histories they conducted themselves.

Note: Please consult supportive materials contained in Google folder for more detail.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The HistoryMakers digital archive has significant potential as a tool in secondary history classrooms. It's features and format as a digital tool fit well with current education initiatives to improve digital literacy and build 21st century skills. Its content supports efforts to diversify the perspectives that inform students' study of history, and the archive is in line with, or in direct support of, Common Core standards in terms of both content and skill development.**

Professor Levenson's grant proposal included a provision where the archive would be introduced to university students studying to be history teachers. Pedagogy and methods courses at the university level provide an opportunity for rising teachers to explore a resource and develop ideas about how to apply it in the context of a classroom. It would be important to follow up with Professor Levenson and Kerry Dunne (adjunct instructor at Brandeis and Weston High School's history department chair) to find out the results of this introduction.

The National Council for the Social Studies is a professional organization for history teachers. Secondary high school teachers, especially those with experience with the archive, provide a potential connection to this

organization, as well as a mutually beneficial opportunity to present their work with the archive's contents at one of its conferences. This idea was brought up as part of Professor Levenson's proposal; I am not sure if there have been efforts to put that into action. I do think it is an avenue which should be explored, and that the context of this grant is a unique opportunity to make it happen.

** See, p. 7 http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf