

# Primary Sources in K–12 Education: Opportunities for Archives

Julia Hendry

## Abstract

Recent developments in the field of K–12 (kindergarten through twelfth grade) education have made archival resources essential tools for many teachers. Inquiry-based learning, document-based questions, and high stakes standardized testing have converged to make primary resources an important teaching tool in elementary and secondary education. Teaching and testing K–12 students require analysis of primary documents, so that archival records take their place alongside the test tube and the textbook in many American classrooms. These trends represent an opportunity for archives to expand their patron base, establish contacts in the community, contribute to the vitality of public education in their communities, and cultivate the next generation of archives' users, donors, and supporters. This paper encourages archivists to consider K–12 students and their teachers when planning programs, digital products, and services.

## Literature Review

The archival profession has long sought to understand how and why researchers use archival records. Understanding the use of archival materials can help archivists make appraisal and processing decisions, "make program modifications intended to increase and facilitate use,"<sup>1</sup> and justify archival programs to funders, argued William Maher in a 1986 *Midwestern Archivist* article. Increasingly, the archival literature has concerned itself with the ways in which direct and indirect researchers make use of archival records. The most recent edition of the Society of American Archivists' reference manual, for example, devotes an entire chapter to "identifying uses and users of archives."<sup>2</sup> In the past

<sup>1</sup> William J. Maher, "The Use of User Studies," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 15.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts*. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005).

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES

twenty years, studies of specific user groups have become more common within the archival literature. Most of these investigations, however, focus on familiar types of archival researchers. A 2003 issue of *American Archivist* dedicated to studying users of archives, for example, included an article about U.S. historians, another about genealogists, and a user study of academic and professional researchers.<sup>3</sup>

The topic of service to young people has come up periodically over the past twenty years in a number of contexts, including the debate over what it means to be a professional archivist. In 1986, Ken Osborne argued in *Archivaria* that, as a profession, archivists had established their roles as experts in historical research, records management, and preservation, but were ignoring an important duty to be educators as well. He called for a renewed role for archivists in the Canadian educational process, particularly in elementary and secondary schools.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Sharon Cook, also writing in *Archivaria*, echoed Osborne's call for more public programming in public archives and for a more systematic program of publishing Canadian history primary sources for use in the K-12 classroom.<sup>5</sup>

In the United States, Marcus Robyns has been outspoken in his assertion that archivists should play a more active role in educating students, particularly in the important skill of critical thinking.<sup>6</sup> While Robyns applauds the trend in archives toward establishing instruction programs for students, he is dismayed that "these programs stress familiarizing students with reading room procedures, archival finding aids, and collections. As if confronted by an invisible barrier, archivists seem unwilling to take a further step and provide instruction and guidance in historical research methods and critical thinking in the analysis of primary sources."<sup>7</sup> For Robyns, the role of the archivist should involve more than simply making archival materials available and extend to teaching students how to evaluate them critically.

Another context for the discussion of K-12 users of archival resources has been in the creation of digital collections and tools. Many archives recognized early that elementary and secondary students and their teachers are a large potential audience for on-line collections of primary sources. In 1998, Anne Gilliland-Swetland was among the first to identify a number of trends, both in educational theory and in technology, leading to increased integration of

<sup>3</sup> *American Archivist* 66 (Spring/Summer 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Ken Osborne, "Archives in the Classroom," *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986-87): 16-40.

<sup>5</sup> Sharon Anne Cook, "Connecting Archives and the Classroom," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997): 102-17.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Robyns, "The Archivist as Educator: Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into Historical Research Methods Instruction," *American Archivist* 64 (Winter 2001): 363-84.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Robyns, "Reviews—Archives in Education," *American Archivist* 63, no. 1 (2000): 189.

primary sources into the K–12 classroom.<sup>8</sup> In particular, Gilliland-Swetland noted the trend toward student-centered learning and expressed optimism about how multimedia technologies or “computer-enhanced learning” could supplement traditional lessons. Her study of participants at the University of California at Los Angeles’ (UCLA) summer Primary Sources Institute in the library’s Special Collections Department identified a number of characteristics of useful digitization projects as well as potential barriers to use by K–12 students and teachers.

Particularly helpful is the follow-up study from UCLA, which discusses a pilot project during which students in both science and social studies classrooms undertook an intensive study of an archival collection.<sup>9</sup> This study is particularly useful because it focuses on the perspectives of the teachers—key players in a successful K–12 project. Following Gilliland-Swetland, others have provided instructive advice based on their experiences creating digital libraries of primary sources aimed at K–12 students.<sup>10</sup> Not least among these has been the massive American Memory project at the Library of Congress<sup>11</sup> and the print and on-line efforts of the National Archives and Records Administration.<sup>12</sup>

While the archival literature of the past twenty years provides a handful of articles discussing elementary and secondary students as users or potential users of archives, the education literature from just the past five years yields dozens of books, hundreds of articles, and uncounted Web sites devoted to the topic of incorporating primary sources into classroom instruction. For example, a search of the ERIC education database returned 452 articles with the descriptor “primary sources” published between 2000 and 2005.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, educators are writing about archival records considerably more often than archivists are writing about teaching young people. Why the current interest among educators in archival materials? Ascendant pedagogical theories about the importance of “inquiry-based learning,” combined with the content of many standardized tests, makes the use of primary materials *de rigueur* in many elementary and secondary school classrooms.

<sup>8</sup> Anne Gilliland-Swetland, “An Explanation of K–12 User Needs for Digital Primary Source Materials,” *American Archivist* 61, no. 1 (1998): 136–57.

<sup>9</sup> Anne J. Gilliland-Swetland, Yasmin B. Kafai, and William E. Landis, “Integrating Primary Sources into the Elementary School Classroom: A Case Study of Teachers’ Perspectives,” *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999): 89–116.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Tara Zachary Laver, “Off the Shelf and into the Classroom: Working with K–12 Teachers to Integrate Digitized Collections into Classroom Instruction,” *Southeastern Librarian* 50, no. 4 (2003): 32–37.

<sup>11</sup> See “The Learning Page,” the gateway to the American Memory Project for teachers at <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/>, accessed 14 March 2006.

<sup>12</sup> The *Teaching with Documents* series from the National Archives, for example, consists of teaching kits on a variety of topics in American history containing reproductions of documents held by NARA as well as lesson plans and student documents. This series also appears regularly in the journal *Social Education*.

<sup>13</sup> Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, accessed 24 April 2006.

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES**Inquiry-Based Learning**

Teachers are increasingly incorporating archival resources into their lessons because of the trend in education toward using the “raw materials” of scholarship. Across the disciplines, curricular and subject standards are beginning to emphasize the process of learning and evaluating information over mastering the content of a given subject area. In the education literature, this is known as “inquiry-based learning,” an approach to teaching that emphasizes the process of discovery on the part of the student, rather than the straightforward transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. Or, as one educational theorist put it, “inquiry is any activity aimed at extracting meaning from experience.”<sup>14</sup> This approach is student driven and focuses on asking good questions, rather than finding definitive answers. It encourages students to consider multiple perspectives, and most importantly, to think critically about the subject at hand.

While inquiry-based learning is a relatively recent approach to teaching, educational theorists have long advocated “learning by doing.” In the early twentieth century, progressive education reformer John Dewey emphasized the importance of child-centered experiences in his treatise *Experience and Education*.<sup>15</sup> Before Dewey, Francis Parker anticipated innovators of the modern inquiry movement when he suggested that students would learn geography more effectively on field trips, observing and mapping the land around them, than in the classroom.<sup>16</sup> In the 1950s, when American educators sought to improve the state of science education in response to the Soviet launch of *Sputnik*, theorist Jerome Bruner and the National Academy of Sciences called for a science curriculum with an emphasis on discovery, not knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the post-*Sputnik* era saw an overhaul of curricula in many subjects. The “New Social Studies” movement of the 1950s and 1960s similarly emphasized the process of discovery and the use of primary sources in the classroom.

By the 1990s, this emphasis on the skills of inquiry and the use of primary materials in addition to knowledge of content had worked its way into almost all national subject standards. These standards, typically issued by the National Council of Teachers in a given subject and based on research in the field, set out best practices and identify skills that students should acquire in the classroom. Ideally, they help guide curriculum development at the local level. For

<sup>14</sup> Richard H. Audet, “Inquiry: A Continuum of Ideas, Issues, and Practices” in *Integrating Inquiry Across the Curriculum*, ed. Richard H. Audet and Linda K. Jordan (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>15</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

<sup>16</sup> Francis Parker, *How to Study Geography* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897).

<sup>17</sup> Alan Canestrari, “Social Studies and Geography: Beyond Rote Memorization,” in *Integrating Inquiry*, ed. Audet and Jordan, 22.

example, the curriculum standards for social studies say that by the end of high school, students should be able to “read maps, interpret graphs, detect bias in visual materials, interpret the social and political messages of cartoons, [and] interpret history through artifacts.”<sup>18</sup>

Inquiry-based learning has been part of science education in American schools for many years, as the field has long recognized the importance of experimentation. In an inquiry-based science classroom, instead of simply reading about the properties of carbon dioxide or listening to their teacher describe the combustion properties of the gas, students might observe what happens when they insert a lighted candle into a test tube of baking soda and vinegar in the science lab.<sup>19</sup> Although science educators pioneered this approach to education, inquiry-based learning is currently promoted and implemented as an effective teaching method for most subjects and at different stages of K–12 education.

In mathematics, elementary school children do not simply learn formulas to solve problems on paper. In an inquiry-based classroom, students learning to find the common denominator between two sets of fractions compare the sizes of “manipulatives,” or blocks representing fractions of the whole, to discover for themselves whether  $\frac{3}{8}$  is larger or smaller than  $\frac{1}{3}$ .<sup>20</sup> Similarly, a geography teacher might lead the class through an exercise in reading historical maps and photographs and examining real-time satellite images to demonstrate the impact of human civilizations on the natural world.<sup>21</sup> In history, students engaged in inquiry-based learning set aside textbook interpretations of historical events and come to their own conclusions by examining such primary documents as letters, political cartoons, governmental reports, or photographs.

Proponents of the inquiry approach point to a number of advantages. First, it helps students develop mental “schemas” in a given subject, in a way that a more straightforward emphasis on “the facts” does not. As Linda Levstik and Keith Barton point out, research on the differences between experts and novices in a number of fields suggests that it is not merely the amount of knowledge that separates the two levels. Instead, experts have more organized schemas, or “a

<sup>18</sup> National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington: National Council for the Social Studies, 1994), 148.

<sup>19</sup> “The Science House,” North Carolina State University, at [http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/pams/science\\_house/learn/CountertopChem/exp9.html](http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/pams/science_house/learn/CountertopChem/exp9.html), accessed 9 March 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Jenny Tsankova and Galina Dobrynia, “Mathematics: Developing Curious Students,” in *Integrating Inquiry*, ed. Audet and Jordan, 92.

<sup>21</sup> Martha B. Sharma and Gary S. Elbow, *Using Internet Primary Sources to Teach Critical Thinking Skills in Geography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 79–80. See also Gerald A. Danzer and Jacqueline Wolf, eds., *Source Maps and the Social Studies: Essays, Lesson Plans, and Materials from Cartographic Traditions in Western Civilization. The University of Illinois at Chicago World History Project, 1993*. (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1994); and James M. Hurley, James D. Proctor, and Robert E. Ford, “Collaborative Inquiry at a Distance: Using the Internet in Geography Education,” *Journal of Geography* 98, no. 3 (1999): 128–40.

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES

better understanding of the key concepts in their field and a more developed understanding of when and how to apply those concepts.”<sup>22</sup> Learning through discovery, argue proponents, helps students develop these cognitive frameworks.

Second, in a world where the universe of knowledge is so vast, advocates of the inquiry method argue that no individual can master more than a tiny slice of it. Instead, these proponents suggest that equipping students with the skills to discover and analyze information on their own is as important as imparting content information. The Internet, with its vast quantities of unvetted data, has become the first place many people look for answers, so that habits of questioning, evaluating, and assessing information are particularly important for students to acquire as part of their basic education.<sup>23</sup>

Third, the skills learned in an inquiry-based classroom—forming hypotheses, questioning received wisdom, examining raw data, entertaining a variety of perspectives, and drawing conclusions—are scholarly habits. The work of a student in an inquiry-based classroom more closely resembles that of a professional chemist, mathematician, or historian than that of a student in a teacher-centered classroom.

Although the skills acquired through inquiry-based learning would prepare a student well for a career in the academy, advocates of this type of education argue they have broader uses. Students who learn to think critically also bring these skills to the economic and civic marketplace. Critical thinking fosters not only creativity, but also an analytical approach to issues and the consideration of a variety of viewpoints, leading, proponents say, to more reasoned decision making in the workplace and critical evaluation at the ballot box.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, advocates of the inquiry approach argue that, done well, this method can be more engaging and rewarding for students, parents, and teachers. Students become active, rather than passive, participants in their education and theoretically become more enthusiastic about the process.<sup>25</sup> The inquiry approach and the use of primary documents lend themselves to a study of historically marginalized groups, including women, Native Americans, immigrants, and African Americans, since a single textbook can rarely cover these different subjects in depth. As Levstik and Barton argue, it may be easier for students in a culturally diverse classroom to relate to such lessons.<sup>26</sup> Research projects, in

<sup>22</sup> Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton, *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools* (Manwah, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 16.

<sup>23</sup> Sharma and Elbow, *Using Internet Primary Sources*, 225.

<sup>24</sup> Sharma and Elbow, *Using Internet Primary Sources*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Sharma and Elbow, *Using Internet Primary Sources*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Levstik and Barton, *Doing History*, 15.

particular, can encourage community collaborations and parental participation. Inquiry-based projects can be interesting and stimulating for teachers, giving them new ways to approach standardized curriculum topics.

### Archival Records in the Classroom

Since a component of inquiry-based learning involves using the “raw materials” of a given subject, many lessons use primary documents of the type found in archival repositories across the country. Many K–12 users of archival resources are history and social studies teachers. Indeed, the social studies education literature abounds with lessons, ideas, and plans that take advantage of primary documents, usually those that have been digitized and are available on the Web. In a recent issue of *Social Education*, for example, Ruth Sandwell describes a document-based project for high school history students based on an unsolved nineteenth-century murder. As part of this project, students examine a series of primary documents dealing with the murder of William Robinson, an African American settler on colonial Canada’s Saltspring Island in 1868, including diaries, letters, trial records, photographs, drawings, and maps. After analyzing the documents, students are asked to “re-evaluate the verdict in the trial of Robinson’s killer in the context of the direct evidence presented at the trial, and the more indirect evidence about the community, particularly concerning land ownership and racialized social relations.”<sup>27</sup>

Other assignments more closely resemble university-level research projects in which students are given or conceive a research question and are sent out to investigate the issue using primary as well as secondary sources. Many archivists assist students doing this type of research for their National History Day projects—a competition for history students modeled on the science fair.<sup>28</sup> In both these cases, one of the goals of using primary resources is to encourage students to “think historically.”<sup>29</sup> That is, students should learn to observe closely the features of documentary evidence, to identify bias within the document, to analyze the primary documents based on knowledge of their context, to speculate about causes and consequences, to make personal connections, and to use evidence to support their speculations.

<sup>27</sup> Ruth Sandwell, “‘Who Killed William Robinson?’ Exploring a Nineteenth-century Murder Online,” *Social Education* 68, no. 3 (2004): 210–14.

<sup>28</sup> See: <http://www.nationalhistoryday.org>.

<sup>29</sup> Bill Tally and Laren B. Goldenberg, “Fostering Historical Thinking with Digitized Primary Sources,” *Journal of Research on Technology in Education* 38, no. 1 (2005): 1. See also Gerald Danzer and Mark Newman, “Primary Sources in the Teaching of History,” in *Bring History Alive! A Sourcebook for Teaching United States History*, ed. K. Ankeney, R. Del Rio, G. Nash, and D. Vigilante (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1997).

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES

These activities are often designed to counteract an impression sometimes given by textbooks that history is a series of established facts instead of “a situated and contingent dialogue among people about how to best interpret fragments of evidence contained in primary documents about the past,”<sup>30</sup> as Ruth Sandwell puts it.

While history teachers may be the most common users of archival documents, inquiry-based learning in several subjects calls for the use of primary documents. The manual *Using Internet Primary Sources to Teach Critical Thinking in Geography*, for example, was written explicitly to help teachers meet the standards in *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards* established by the National Council for Teachers of Geography in 1994.<sup>31</sup> Among the exercises it describes is a unit on epidemics that uses primary resources from the influenza epidemic of 1918 in the United States. In this unit, students are encouraged to use contemporary maps, letters, and newspaper clippings to draw conclusions about the nature, causes, spread, and impact of the epidemic.<sup>32</sup>

As many of these examples suggest, implementing primary sources and inquiry-based education into the classroom is an ambitious task. It requires teachers to set aside the textbook, find appropriate primary sources, and develop a series of projects to guide students through the learning process. Furthermore, such student-centered activities require a disciplined classroom, in which children are able to work independently or in small groups without becoming disruptive. The discipline required for such self-directed learning is a significant challenge for many teachers in “struggling schools,” as the more practical proponents of the inquiry method concede.<sup>33</sup>

**Document-based Questions**

The use of primary sources in the classroom, however, is increasingly mandated by the content of high-stakes standardized testing. Even teachers who do not necessarily believe in the theories of inquiry-based learning are increasingly compelled to introduce primary documents into their teaching to prepare their students for document-based questions (DBQs) on standardized tests. Long a feature of the Advance Placement (AP) exams in history for college-bound high school seniors, DBQs have also been appearing more frequently on standardized state exams, most notably in New York State. Since 2001, DBQs have been

<sup>30</sup> Sandwell, “‘Who Killed William Robinson?’ ” 211.

<sup>31</sup> Standards at National Council for Geographic Education at <http://www.ncge.org/about/membership.cfm>, accessed 24 January 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Sharma and Elbow, *Using Internet Primary Sources*, 154

<sup>33</sup> Deanna Kuhn, *Education for Thinking* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 18–21.



an important component of the New York State Regents exam taken in tenth and eleventh grades by all New York students. They have also been incorporated into that state's standardized tests in fifth and eighth grades.

On the Regents and Advanced Placement (AP) exams, students are given a series of primary documents that could include letters, government documents, political cartoons, broadsides, maps, photographs, graphs, newspaper accounts, speeches, or excerpts from memoirs. The students are asked to answer a series of short-answer questions and an essay question, in which they are expected to synthesize information from the documents.<sup>34</sup> These questions require students to make comparisons and analogies, use subject knowledge learned throughout the year to evaluate the documents, or take positions on an issue and support their conclusions. To get full marks, students must examine the topic from more than one perspective and "apply skills of historical analysis."<sup>35</sup> DBQs for younger students in New York follow the same principles, but use fewer text-based documents. For example, a second-grade student might be asked to draw information from a photograph, and a middle school student could interpret a historical political cartoon.<sup>36</sup> It appears that other states are following the lead of New York in encouraging the use of documents in the classroom and incorporating them into standardized tests. A typical fourth-grade social studies exam as part of the Illinois State Achievement Test, for example, asks students to analyze charts, graphs, photographs, and political cartoons.<sup>37</sup>

The use of DBQs on classroom and standardized tests is part of a larger movement in education toward what is known as "authentic assessment," an approach to testing that seeks to evaluate students based on tasks that are valued in their own right, such as problem solving, writing, and thinking critically.<sup>38</sup> For example, multiple-choice exams test students' knowledge of certain content areas. However, answering multiple-choice questions is not itself a skill that students will often use outside the classroom. Interpreting a historical political cartoon, however, not only tests a student's knowledge of a particular historical issue, but his or her ability to analyze a portion of the newspaper critically.

<sup>34</sup> S. G. Grant, "When an 'A' Is Not Enough: Analyzing the New York State Global History and Geography Exam," *Education Policy Analysis Archive* 9, no. 39 (2001), available at <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n39.html>, accessed 13 January 2006; Robert Blackey, "Advanced Placement European History: An Anatomy of the Essay Examination, 1956–2000," *The History Teacher* 35, no. 3 (2002): 311–42.

<sup>35</sup> New York State Education Department, "What Are Document-Based Questions and Why Are We Doing Them?" available at <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/dbq/iione.html>, accessed 15 March 2006.

<sup>36</sup> New York State Education Department, "What Are Document-Based Questions," <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/dbq/iione.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Illinois State Board of Education, "ISAT Social Science Performance Definitions Grade 4," available at [http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/socscience\\_isat\\_perfdef\\_grade4.htm](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/socscience_isat_perfdef_grade4.htm), accessed 16 March 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Robert L. Linn and Norman E. Gronlund, *Measurement and Assessment in Teaching*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River: N. J.: Merrill, 2000), 40.

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES

Many educators have long decried the use of multiple-choice questions on standardized tests in social studies, arguing that this type of test simply assesses a student's grasp of certain subject content and does not evaluate the critical thinking skills that are the real object of social studies education.<sup>39</sup> Further, it gives the impression that history, for example, is a series of "facts" that are either correct, or incorrect, rather than a series of arguments that are more or less convincing. Using authentic assessment techniques like DBQs gives educators the opportunity to evaluate students' grasp of content, but also their ability to interpret and analyze documents, entertain multiple perspectives, and construct a clear argument.

Not everyone is a proponent of DBQs. Opponents argue that they put too much emphasis on reading ability, and students with poor reading skills cannot succeed at DBQs no matter how good their other skills are. Others argue that it is very difficult to grade DBQs consistently—especially in large pools, such as those in statewide standardized tests. Still others do not object to DBQs themselves, but to the way in which they are administered, the choice of documents used, and the ways in which the documents are sometimes edited for content or style.<sup>40</sup>

**Legislative Trends**

The increasingly high-stakes nature of these standardized tests, however, compels even teachers who criticize this method to incorporate documents into their teaching and to prepare their students to answer this type of test question. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ties federal funding to performance on test scores and brings pressure on school boards, principals, and individual teachers to "teach to the test" and prepare their students for the types of questions found on standardized tests. In compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act, the State of Massachusetts is implementing a new set of standardized tests called the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. The tests in history and social science will emphasize the analysis of primary documents. At grades five, seven, and eleven, these tests will include "modules" in which students answer multiple-choice questions and an open-response question, all based on a primary document.<sup>41</sup>

While the No Child Left Behind Act is concerned with testing in general, the American History Achievement Act twice introduced in Congress seeks to

<sup>39</sup> Grant, "When an 'A' Is Not Enough," <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n39.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Linn and Gronlund, *Measurement and Assessment*, 225–26; Grant, "When 'A' Is Not Enough," <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n39.html>; Kate Maxwell, interview by Margot Adler, "Writers and activists lead successful campaign to reverse a practice of changing literature in a New York exam to avoid any potentially negative text," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, 8 June 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Massachusetts Department of Education, "Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System," available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/about1.html>, accessed 13 January 2006.

introduce further testing on topics of American history. The act, introduced in July 2004 and again in April 2005, seeks to test eighth- and twelfth-grade American history students across ten states. The goal, said sponsor Lamar Alexander (D-Tenn.) in his speech introducing the bill, is to improve “testing of American history so that we can determine where history is being taught well—and where it is being taught poorly—so that improvements can be made. We also know,” he argues, “that when testing is focused on a specific subject, states and school districts are more likely to step up to the challenge and improve performance.”<sup>42</sup> Although the bill did not come to a vote, its introduction in Congress suggests that the pressure for teachers and students to perform on standardized tests in history will continue.

### Opportunities for Archives

The confluence of these factors—pedagogical theory in support of inquiry-based learning, the use of DBQs on standardized tests, and a political climate that has raised the stakes for these standardized tests—helps to explain why there is so much literature in the field of education on using primary documents in the classroom. Yet, despite a widespread acceptance of the value of using documents in the classroom, it appears that many teachers find this to be a difficult task. Acquiring appropriate primary documents, then designing good lesson plans, is time consuming and difficult for educators who may have no experience using archival materials themselves. One recent study found that even high school social studies teachers who do incorporate primary documents into their teaching typically use “classroom-based” primary sources, meaning those found in “texts, ancillary text materials and primary source packets,”<sup>43</sup> rather than those that they have gathered themselves. While these teachers value the use of primary documents, they do not actively seek out new materials, relying instead on published sources.

Furthermore, it appears from the education literature that although many K–12 teachers appreciate the value of using primary sources in the classroom to ignite the imaginations of their students and to encourage critical thinking, the teachers themselves are not asking very sophisticated questions about the teaching materials they select. For example, most of the “how-to” articles suggest using one or two largely decontextualized historic documents. These educators do not seem to be concerned with considering individual documents in relation to the archival collection as a whole or even considering the archival collection

<sup>42</sup> Lamar Alexander, “American History Achievement Act Introduction,” 23 July 2004, available at [http://alexander.senate.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Speeches.Detail&Speech\\_id=22&Month=7&Year=2004](http://alexander.senate.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Speeches.Detail&Speech_id=22&Month=7&Year=2004), accessed 19 March 2006.

<sup>43</sup> D. Hicks, J. P. Doolittle, and J. Lee, “Social Studies Teachers Use of Classroom Based and Web-Based Historical Primary Sources,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 32, no. 2 (2004): 223.

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES

as the unit of study. This may be, in part, because they are seeking to prepare their students to answer DBQs, which also rely on a small number of documents out of context.

The education literature that stresses the importance of looking for bias in a document tends to focus, simplistically, on the intentions of the document's author. It does not ask other, more "archival" questions such as: Who was the intended audience for this document? Why did someone need to record this information? Why did the author of this document choose to record this information in this manner?

Nor do teachers appear to be asking their students to look deeper into issues of authenticity. For example, they do not ask questions about the provenance of a document or collection. Nor do they wonder if there might be gaps in the custodial history that would call the authenticity of a document into question.

These findings—that many teachers continue to rely on published primary sources for use in the classroom, combined with the fact that few are asking "archival questions" about the documents that they do find—suggest two opportunities for archivists. The first is to work with teachers to find appropriate resources to be used in the K-12 classroom. The second is to incorporate archival expertise into the teaching of primary sources at the elementary and secondary levels.

**Incorporating Archival Records into the K-12 Classroom**

How can archivists hope to better serve classroom teachers and to help them find appropriate primary materials for their lessons? The first step is undoubtedly to understand the very precise requirements of K-12 teachers. A survey of the education literature reveals that elementary and secondary educators use archival resources very differently from most other researchers and have needs that are not intuitive to archivists used to working with scholars. For example, teachers place great importance on the ability to integrate primary materials into the state curriculum. In a recent article aimed at practicing teachers, Daniel Rulli, for example, suggests that documents that lend themselves to discussions of U.S. constitutional provisions or important historical trends or processes are particularly useful,<sup>44</sup> in addition to materials that document the subject area covered by the state curriculum.

Similarly, the education literature emphasizes the practical need teachers have to find documents that will capture the imagination of their students. The literature reveals some suggestions, including documents from the local community, historical records that document children's lives, items that are visually

<sup>44</sup> Daniel F. Rulli, "Big and Famous Is Not Always Best: Guidelines for Selecting Teachable Documents," *Social Education* 67, no. 7 (2003): 378–81.

arresting, and materials with exemplary value such as ticket stubs and shopping lists. Others emphasize that to accommodate children's attention spans and reading levels, documents must not be too long or illegible, or use too much unfamiliar terminology. Clearly, this user group has different, more particular needs than the researchers whom many archivists are used to assisting. When was the last time an academic historian, for example, inquired at the reference desk for a document that was legible, colorful, not too long, easy to read, and brought to mind a provision of the U.S. Constitution?

Copyright is another important issue for teachers, for they typically copy, distribute, post on-line, and even modify documents for various reading levels. Materials in the public domain or to which the archival repository clearly owns the rights are the best candidates for use in K-12 classrooms so that teachers do not run afoul of the law.

Archivists hoping to create programs or digital products aimed at elementary and secondary schools would be well advised to supplement the general guidelines found in the education and archival literature with a survey of local needs. Many school districts post very detailed curriculum information on their Web sites. Local organizations of school teachers may also be persuaded to offer suggestions or feedback about proposed archival programs.

Archivists hoping to reach out to K-12 teachers should also understand how those who do use primary documents in their classes find these materials. The practical education literature offers some insight, suggesting that very few teachers actually visit archival repositories in search of primary documents. Instead, teachers are encouraged to search their own attics for materials, or to find documents on-line.<sup>45</sup> (Of course, many of the primary documents found on the Internet have been put there by archival repositories.) There are, no doubt, a number of reasons for this. Certainly, finding primary documents on-line is less time consuming and perhaps less daunting than visiting an archives. Furthermore, teachers who likely have little experience doing primary research themselves may not know about the holdings of local archival repositories.

That many teachers turn to the Web for primary documents to use in their classrooms suggests that archival repositories hoping to reach out to precollegiate educators would do well to create on-line collections aimed directly at K-12 teachers and students. Of course, this is not a revolutionary idea—many archival repositories have already done this. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), for example, has long supported the use of primary documents in the classroom. NARA's program of documentary publishing includes volumes aimed at K-12 students, and the agency runs a training program for teachers. The NARA Web site for students and teachers contains an

<sup>45</sup> Susan Owens, "From Attics to Graveyards: How to Locate Primary Documents for Your Classroom," *Social Education* 67, no. 7 (2003): 386-89; James A. Percoco, "Primarily, It's Serendipity," *Social Education* 67, no. 7 (2003): 401-5.

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES

impressive number of digitized documents along with lesson plans covering topics from the revolutionary period to the present.

The Library of Congress's American Memory Web site is similarly aimed at educators, and it also provides tools such as lesson plans and activities to facilitate the use of digitized primary materials in the classroom. However, as Matthew Lyons has pointed out, neither of these sites is perfect. In his 2002 article, Lyons criticized the NARA Web site, in particular, for its traditional approach to interpreting American history with emphases on military and political history.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, with a projected 55 million school-aged children in the United States for the 2006-2007 school year, there is clearly room for more than a handful of large repositories providing on-line primary resources for K-12 education.<sup>47</sup>

By seizing this opportunity to share their resources with K-12 students and educators, archivists have a chance to make a real impact on classroom instruction. For example, many archival repositories house information about their local community, uniquely documenting local history and culture. Readily available local history documents allow educators to teach the state and local history topics that are important parts of the curriculum in most states. Items of local interest also have the potential to capture students' interest in a way that stories of far-away events do not. Finding documents that are intriguing to their students is clearly a priority for teachers. Children might be particularly interested in looking at historical photos of their own community, for example, to discover how the built environment has changed.

### Integrating Archives into K-12 Education

The second opportunity for archives, beyond simply making resources available in person or on-line, is for professional archivists to lend their expertise to the teaching of primary resources. As the classroom implementation of the Digital Portfolio Archives Project at UCLA described by Gilliland-Swetland, Kafai, and Landis illustrates, archivists have much to offer in designing a meaningful classroom activity for elementary or secondary school students. In this project, the design team included teachers and archivists. It is notable because the fifth-grade students who took part in this project looked at an entire archival collection (the Donald Ryder Dickey Collection). This collection was chosen not only for its relevance to the curriculum (the history and landscape of Southern California) and its abundance of interesting visual materials, but also because "the research team felt that both the arrangement and description provided

<sup>46</sup> Matthew Lyons, "K-12 Instruction and Digital Access to Archival Materials," *Journal of Archival Organization* 1, no. 1 (2002): 19-34.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/statistical-abstract.html>, accessed 28 January 2007.

considerable insight into Dickey's documentation practices and would help the students think about how the work of naturalists had changed over time."<sup>48</sup> The project worked with teachers to delve more deeply into "archival questions" than those projects typically described in the education literature.

For archivists without the resources to conduct as comprehensive a project, several other opportunities remain to become more involved with K–12 education. Many archivists already participate in the National History Day initiative. In Chicago, for instance, the Chicago Metro History Education Center, which administers the history fair in the greater Chicago region, offers workshops on doing primary research for teachers and students. Local archivists teach many of these classes. Many archival repositories, especially in smaller communities, brace for the beginning of history fair season when their reading rooms fill with inquisitive middle and high school students. Archivists wishing to understand how these students use primary sources will find it instructive to serve as judges for local history fair competitions. Witnessing the results of student projects gives a good sense of the types of documents students have found in their research, where they found them, and how they are using them. Understanding this may help archivists to create workshops for teachers focusing on the aspects of archival research that students find particularly difficult.

Archivists in academic settings have a unique opportunity to influence how the next generation of teachers thinks about primary documents. Archivists and special collections librarians on university campuses typically offer classes aimed at graduate students, often in history, to inform students of the repository's holdings and to give advice on doing archival research. Academic archivists should offer similar services to education students and preservice teachers. These classes could teach basic archival principles, introduce future teachers to the types of materials typically found in archives, and offer some strategies for locating them. One of the goals of such a class would be to demonstrate that doing archival research is not as overwhelming as it might seem to the novice. A more ambitious but worthwhile goal is for archivists to teach education majors how to create effective lesson using archival documents. Adam Friedman's 2005 study<sup>49</sup> of high school teachers indicates that those without training in the use of primary documents in the classroom do not tend to use these materials effectively. Teachers need training to learn how to integrate primary documents effectively into the curriculum in a way that is more than illustrative, argues Friedman. Who better to offer such instruction than archivists?

Finally, many working teachers are compelled by both a commitment to lifelong learning and recertification requirements to attend continuing education

<sup>48</sup> Gilliland-Swetland, Kafai, and Landis, "Integrating Primary Sources," 99.

<sup>49</sup> Adam M. Friedman, "World History Teachers' Use of Digital Primary Sources: The Effect of Training," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 34, no. 1 (2006): 138–39.

PRIMARY SOURCES IN K-12 EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHIVES

classes every year. Archival repositories of all types can offer such classes or workshops for teachers who hope to further integrate primary documents into their teaching. The Maryland Historical Society (MdHS) is one archival repository leading in this way. The MdHS offers workshops for teachers on locating primary sources in a variety of curriculum areas. Its staff will also go to individual schools to offer in-service training customized to the needs of the individual school.<sup>50</sup> This type of education can be especially successful if the repository works closely with local school officials, customizes its teaching based on the local curriculum, and offers continuing education credits for working teachers.

**Conclusion**

The movement toward using archival documents in the K-12 classroom, fueled by trends in educational theory and the current zeal for standardized testing, presents an unprecedented opportunity for the archival community to become involved in elementary and secondary education. Indeed, archivists have much to contribute to document-based education. Not only can archival repositories make appropriate materials available for study by K-12 students, archivists have unparalleled expertise in finding, selecting, and interpreting primary documents.

Increased use of archival repositories by K-12 students would also benefit archival programs in a number of ways. For repositories that rely on statistics to justify their existence to resource allocators, targeting students or teachers in outreach initiatives is a good way to increase use of facilities and research materials. Encouraging the use of its records by students can improve the diversity of a repository's user base and create broader access to the materials in its care. Such outreach activities can also help to create ties to the community and help cultivate the next generation of archival users, donors, and supporters.

Indeed, the increasing use of primary documents by elementary and secondary school students offers archivists an excellent opportunity to educate future decision makers about the riches held within the nation's archives and their importance in understanding its history. As archival topics continue to make it onto the evening news—from the reclassification of public records in the National Archives to the destruction of historical records on the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast—it is becoming clearer than ever that many archival matters are significant public policy issues. What better way to ensure that the policy makers and voters of tomorrow are both critical thinkers and sensitive to archival concerns than to introduce them at an early age to the usefulness of archives?

<sup>50</sup> Maryland Historical Society, "Professional Development Workshops for Teachers," available at <http://www.mdhs.org/teachers/workshops.html>, accessed 25 March 2006.