




America's Past Through The Eyes of Local History: *A Feasibility Study*

The Valcour Battle Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) has been developing an educational project that features student inquiry into local history and geography designed to address the goals below:



1. To develop civic understanding of the origins and processes of our constitutional form of governance and way of life by engaging the study of the history and geography of the local township where learners live.

2. To engage students in the processes of creating knowledge in history and geography using primary sources drawn from the records of the local setting.

3. To fully utilize computer and communications technologies in support of learning.

4. To employ an individualized, computer-based assessment and evaluation system that utilizes general systems theory with particular emphasis on systems design as a way of learning and systems analysis as a strategy for assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes. This system uses the input, storage and manipulation capabilities of the computer in creating a student maintained record of experiences that shows what was actually produced from those experiences.


5. To engage students in processes that result in learning how to learn, how to organize information and express conclusions based on the facts.



Elements of this Feasibility Study

1. Systems thinking as it pertains to the study of local history and geography is the overarching goal of this project. This being the case, data gathered from each participant at the beginning of the project and at the end of a defined segment must provide evidence of each student's ability to communicate knowledge about the relationships of the parts of systems found within the local scene. Therefore, the Environmental Relationships Test will be administered as pre and post tests used in revealing growth.

2. Since individual members of the group may be at different levels of intellectual development, data must be gathered to identify the level of functioning of each participant. A battery of "conservation experiments" and other exercises drawn from the works of Jean Piaget, Viktor Lowenfeld and Jerome Bruner will be administered at the outset of this project. This information will be factored into judgments about evidences of growth or lack of growth expected to result from the project.



3. For purposes of this project, learning will be defined by the model presented in Bloom's Taxonomy of Objectives, cognitive domain and Robert Gagne's model of cumulative learning.

4. For purposes of testing the feasibility of essential elements of this project, the scope of experiences will be limited to three: a) ancestral research as outlined in the Student's Edition on americaspastthroughtheeyesoflocalhistory.com. b) the history and geography of the Townships of Peru/Ausable and Chesterfield in 1836, starting with materials from *Gordon's Gazetteer*, supplemented by additional data accessed through the website, dataforamericaspastthroughlocalhistory.com and c) installation and maintenance of individualized learning records using the Constructive Assessment, Recordkeeping and Evaluation System (CARES).



Dialogue

There is a need to elicit direct feedback from school personnel as to the feasibility of implementation for this project. The dialogue will focus on two major parts:

- 1) A strategy for learning that utilizes the methods and materials of history and geography, including an assessment, record keeping and evaluation component and
- 2) A design and utilization plan for development of a regional data bank of primary sources that can be accessed on line within classrooms.



Points of discussion will include among others:

1) How the learning strategy matches the methods of history and geography and fits in with concepts of systems design.

2) How systems analysis is used to determine what has been learned and what is required to achieve a level of mastery appropriate to the developmental characteristics and levels of the students.

3) Where and how this plan can fit with existing local curriculum and state level requirements.

4) Its potential impact on the learning outcomes at the local level and those required by the state.

5) Implementation strategies to gain acceptance by those decision makers whose approvals are required.

Valcour Battle Chapter Launches History Program in Schools

In 2015 members of the Valcour Battle Chapter, SAR which serves Clinton, Essex and Franklin counties in New York, were presented with a proposal from compatriot Robert Arnold to develop a program to help elementary teachers with local history. Bob, Professor Emeritus of Education, State University of New York, formed a committee consisting of himself, Registrar Brian Cook, President Craig Russell and past president Jim Hayes to determine what was needed.

After several meetings, the committee determined that there was a fundamental need to improve citizenship and participation in local, state and national issues and that this improvement depended on students developing an understanding of their own histories and the history of their towns. This overarching objective was presented to the Chapter and received approval.

At the same time, the committee realized there were many potential impediments to the development of such a program. State and national education groups limited the amount of time to be given to such a program due to a concentration on selective “common core” subjects. There were few, if any, reference materials to develop plans for instruction. History was still being taught as an “important events” subject rather than as a stream of trends with outcomes. Finally, there was a growing awareness that overall citizenship was on the decline as evidenced by voter turnout and participation in local and national causes.

Committee chair, Bob Arnold, had experience over the years with elementary students working on project-based learning, utilizing the methods and materials of the disciplines of history and suggested this as a method to the committee. In the past, such an approach had been somewhat limited due to the lack of access to original documents for research. The committee believed that today, with a wealth of information via the internet those limitations can be removed. In addition, it was determined that a study to determine the feasibility for implementation of this plan would best be initiated in 4th- 6th grades.

The committee next determined that the curriculum should concentrate on three primary areas of study: personal history (genealogy), the natural physical setting of their town (geography) and the social, cultural, political and economic activities of the town (social studies). It was determined that the program and reference materials should be available on-line. A grant of \$1,000 from the chapter was used to hire a web developer to program materials developed by the committee. The resulting teacher and student materials can be found on the website: americaspastthroughtheeyesoflocalhistory.com

Using examples drawn for Clinton, Essex and Franklin counties, a companion website was developed that contains documents needed for developing an understanding of local history. This website can be accessed at: dataforamericaspastthroughlocalhistory.com

This material is designed to be “portable” and can be used by virtually any SAR chapter working with their local schools. Our vision for the SAR and other organizations dedicated to the principles of our founding fathers is to make a difference in shaping today’s world.

The on-line materials were recently beta tested at the Keesville Elementary School of the Ausable Valley Central School District with participants of two fifth grade classes involving forty students. The committee started with teacher training in September on the genealogy component which was followed

by two months of student activity in tracing their own roots. In late November, the students presented their findings at a “family history night” at the school. Each student had a table top display showing their genealogy and recorded presentations of their findings were available on a website. The event was attended by many family members, teaching and administrative staff and by all accounts, the students had fun doing documents-based learning that addresses the New York State Learning Standards.

The second part of the program will be launched in January with teacher training on the local geography and history components. The reference materials are already linked to the websites for easy access that includes a compendium of revolutionary war burials in the three county area compiled by the committee.

After the beta test of the second part of the program, it will be reviewed for changes and further website development that may be needed for which contributions would be gratefully accepted.

Family History Night, Keeseville, NY Student research with reference documents

Includes photos taken at the Family Exposition