History Day: Adapting the Program for the Sixth-Grade Classroom

Hannah Crook

History Day: Adapting the Program for the Sixth-Grade Classroom

By Hannah Crook

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
August 2022

Committee:
Capstone Project Facilitator: Abigail Rombalski
Content Reviewer: Anna Penner
Peer Reviewers: Jacob Klis, Sydney Fransiscus, & Danielle Plumley

To my eighth-graders. My first ever class and the people who challenged me the most. You ultimately showed me that I can do hard things, and I can do them well. You showed me the impact of my work and that's the drive that has kept me going throughout this project and beyond.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I remember the first time I completed a research project. I was in fifth grade, and I researched prairie dogs, which I remember selecting as a topic because I thought they were cute. I remember making notecards for each section of my project and having three books as sources that I found in my school's library. I don't really remember answering any interesting research question, or relating my topic to a "so what" factor that drew any major conclusions other than that yes, prairie dogs were in fact adorable. The deeper, more interesting research projects that I completed didn't really start happening for me until I attended college. When I stumbled upon the Minnesota Historical Society's History Day program as a college student who was volunteering with middle school students, I found myself jealous that I didn't have the opportunity to participate in it when I was in school myself. I saw students diving into fairly complex concepts and completing projects that I didn't really start doing until college. This program was helping sixth-twelfth grade students do REAL research, answering questions they were actually curious about, and drawing conclusions about their topics that connected to real things in their lives today.

This capstone seeks to answer the question: *How can the Minnesota Historical Society's History Day program be differentiated and adapted for sixth-grade students?* This question involves both adapting the project to better fit the sixth-grade level, but also it examines the differentiation opportunities this program has in terms of fitting the needs of all types of learners, which include but are not limited to: English language learners, special education students, and historical underserved groups, such as students

of color. In addition, this question will be explored through a culturally relevant lens to further reach all students. In this chapter, I will discuss the context for this capstone project by first going through my own experiences, both personally and professionally, that brought me to this topic. Next, I will discuss the rationale behind my research question and how my experiences in the classroom led me to want to dig deeper. In this chapter, I will also give a description of the History Day program and how it works for both the students and the teachers that are implementing it. Lastly, I will lay out the rest of the chapters that will follow.

Personal Experience

As a student myself, I always loved going to school, and I especially loved doing projects. I was always the student who would go above and beyond for projects like poster boards, 3D dioramas, and even book reports. I remember many late nights putting on last-minute touches and trying to figure out how I was going to get it to school without ruining it. I always loved the shock factor of showing off my project to my peers and my teachers. I remember one project in particular that I completed for my 6th-grade social studies class; the project involved interviewing my parents and finding out information about my ancestors. I then put together a poster board that included pictures, a family tree, and an old letter that I created from the perspective of my great, great grandmother. I remember taking time to dye the paper with tea and burning the edges to make it look old. These are things that happened over twenty years ago that I still remember to this day because of the impact that they had on me as a young student.

Specifically, I loved my history classes and I loved the projects that we would be required to complete. My passion for history really grew as I began taking high-level

history classes in high school. My teacher, Ms. DW, inspired me to see history as the stories of the past, rather than just words in a textbook. She encouraged learning through projects, not all of them were necessarily structured with a formal research process, but they all had an impact on me and inspired me to continue learning and exploring topics. It was after that, as I was looking into options for majors in college, that I decided to pursue history at the undergraduate level. I understand that not all students have the same experiences with projects and school that I did, which is part of why I ended up going into teaching later on. I wanted to be the "Ms. DW" to other students that might not have had the greatest experiences in the classroom or opportunities to complete these types of projects that were such game changers for me.

I continued to explore my curiosities throughout my time in college, where I was introduced to the History Day program. I was living in Moorhead, Minnesota, where I was attending school, and the middle and high schools in the area were in need of volunteers to judge for their regional History Day competitions. I volunteered as a judge for the competition and I got the chance to look at dozens of different History Day projects on many different topics throughout history, some of which I had never heard of. I got the chance to interview students about their topics and about their experiences creating their projects. It was extremely rewarding to see their passion for their projects and see how they lit up when they started talking about it. Volunteering with History Day became something that I would look forward to participating in every year as something for fun. I still, at this time, wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life. During my undergraduate career, I didn't have becoming a teacher on my radar at that point in my life, but I loved participating in History Day as something I genuinely enjoyed.

Professional Experience

   After around five years of judging for History Day, I decided to become a History Day Mentor. This also came about around the same time as my decision to go back to school for my Masters in the Art of Teaching and my teaching license in secondary social studies. This decision was fueled by the happiness that working with History Day students brought me. As a History Day Mentor, I spent time in the classroom with students as they began creating their History Day projects. I also participated in Hullabaloos, which were one on one sessions with students who needed extra help with their projects. This experience gave me a different perspective of History Day since I was able to work more closely with students, rather than just chatting with them at the end when their projects were done like I did when I was a judge. As a mentor, I was able to get some more insight into the inner workings of History Day and my passion for this program continued to grow.

   My decision to return to school and pursue a career in teaching centered around my involvement in History Day, but there were also other factors as well. The main reason that I didn't go into teaching right after high school mainly revolved around two reasons: I was seventeen years old and had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, and also my older sister, who is fifteen years older than me, went into teaching and I watched her struggle with finding a job. This idea that teachers can't find work stuck with me as I began making decisions about my own life and career and it changed to trajectory of my decisions at this time in my life. This ended up being a blessing in disguise. I began my teaching program at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota during the summer of 2019. I was twenty-five years old and came into the teaching program with a mindset that

was more developed and receptive than the eighteen year old me that went off to college seven years prior.

In the fall of 2021, I completed my student teaching at Edgewood Middle School, a public school in Mounds View, Minnesota. I spent this time in a Minnesota Studies classroom with sixth-graders. After that, I got my first official teaching position at that school as the eighth-grade U.S. History teacher. I started mid-year, and students were in the process of completing their History Day projects. The teacher I took over for had been teaching the History Day curriculum for about two years. Things were a bit crazy due to both of those years being impacted by Covid-19. This year, the school competition was going to be in person, and I was put right in the middle of it. I now was a History Day teacher, which gave me the opportunity to see the inner workings of this program from a third perspective. I had judged, mentored, and now I was a teacher. I felt like I had an advantage since I had a fairly extensive background in History Day, but teaching the curriculum, especially as a brand new teacher, was an entirely different story. After a few conversations with my cooperating teacher from student teaching, who had become my mentor, I began realizing that the History Day concept is great, but the actual implementation of the program needed further support and structure.

My cooperating teacher from student teaching, who teaches sixth-grade, had tried to implement the program with her students in years past and found it extremely difficult for sixth-graders. Having done History Day with eighth-graders and finding that it was a little bit tricky, I found myself wondering if there were ways to differentiate this program to make the implementation a little bit smoother. Not only for brand new teachers like myself, but for veteran teachers who might want to try it for the first time, or for younger

students, like sixth-graders. Also, after working with a largely English language learner population in my own classrooms at Edgewood, I wanted to investigate ways that this program could expand to meet the needs of all students. This brought me to my research question: "How can the Minnesota Historical Society's History Day program be differentiated and adapted for sixth-grade students?"

Context

The Minnesota Historical Society's History Day is a part of the National History Day program that is run throughout the United States. History Day is an interdisciplinary research project that students in grades sixth-twelfth can participate in. Every year, there is a different theme that provides a little bit of structure for students' projects. The 2021-22 school year's theme was "Debate and Diplomacy," previous years have had themes such as: "Breaking Barriers," "Communication in History," "Triumph and Tragedy," and many others. The themes are intended to be vague enough that most topics could be connected to them, but still have a framework for students to create their thesis around. Once students pick their topic, they begin the process of researching and formulating their thesis statement. Students have the option to chose which type of project they would like to create: exhibit board, website, performance, documentary, or paper. Each project type has different guidelines and allows students of different learning styles to pick a project type that would fit their needs. Once they complete their projects, the final step is presenting their work at the school level competition to a panel of judges. Once winners are selected for the school wide competition, there is a tiered system, so students who make it beyond the school level competition would go on to regionals, then state, and finally, nationals. It is important to note that joining the competitions are

completely optional and teachers can decide if they want to implement this project just within their own classroom, or if students would like to compete further they can.

The Minnesota Historical Society's History Day team has put together a teaching curriculum and training program for teachers that are implementing History Day in their classrooms. Teachers do get to have flexibility in how they teach it, but if students want to submit their projects past the school-level competition there are some rigid guidelines and requirements. There is a plethora of resources, timelines, lessons, and various other curriculum materials for teachers. Plus, the Minnesota Historical Society offers specific History Day professional development opportunities for teachers throughout the school year. All of the training and materials are grouped together for sixth-twelfth grade levels.

There is an abundance of material available to teachers wanting to do History Day, which is fantastic, but also can be extremely overwhelming; especially if you want to begin differentiating the material and reaching the needs of all your students. This is where my project comes in. My project is a website for teachers to use that curates materials and information specifically for those interested in implementing History Day in the sixth-grade classroom. This means reaching all types of students with various backgrounds and learning styles. Various studies have shown that social studies is one of the least liked subjects in school (Lason-Billings, 93). This is concerning because it is in the social studies classroom where students begin examining our world and society and can begin the process of questioning the norm; it is where the future of our democracy begins to emerge, and if students aren't investing in this process due to the fact that they're bored or disengaged due to lack of access to the material, the future of our critical thinkers are at stake.

Not only is History Day something that offers a unique opportunity for students, but there have been findings that show how participating in the program can have a positive impact on student learning. A 2011 study found that students that participated in History Day scored higher on standardized tests, had higher passing rates in their English classes, scored higher on writing assessments, and overall felt more prepared for both college and career readiness skills. On top of these findings, students have also shared that History Day experiences have been the highlights of their careers throughout middle and high school.

Summary

Chapter One introduced my research question: *How can the Minnesota Historical Society's History Day program be differentiated and adapted for sixth-grade students?* Both my personal and professional experiences impact the importance of this question, which are both explained throughout this chapter as well. My experiences throughout my own career in middle and high school impacted my interest in this topic. My interest in project-based learning and history from a young age led me to my participation in the History Day program, and later on my employment within the program as a mentor. History Day led me to my passion and now the career of teaching secondary social studies. I've had the opportunity to be a History Day teacher with the 8th graders that make up my first ever class as a licensed teacher. My experience throughout the program and my conversations with other History teachers, have led me to continue exploring this program and how it can be further improved and differentiated.

The next chapters will continue exploring the question of how History Day can be differentiated, specifically, for sixth-grade students, who make up the youngest age group

that is able to participate in the program. Providing sixth-grade teachers interested in implementing History Day with more structure and support could end up benefiting the program in the long run, as students are more prepared for the research process at the start of their middle school careers. Chapter Two will explore a literature review that will take a look at the History Day program from a variety of other perspectives. Chapter Three will give a description of the project and resources that will be gathered and presented for other teachers to use when beginning the process of implementing History Day in their own classrooms. Lastly, Chapter Four will include a section of reflection and conclusion on the answer to my research question and the project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter will review the academic literature regarding both National History

Day and the Minnesota Historical Society's Minnesota History Day programs specifically

in order to help answer the question: *How can the History Day program be differentiated*

for sixth-grade social studies students? After an introduction to the History Day

programs, Chapter Two will then take a deep dive into the benefits of programs such as

History Day and project-based learning in general. This chapter will share the specific

research findings on the benefits of History Day both within the state of Minnesota, but

also all over the United States. Next, the benefits of project-based learning as a whole

will be explored and applied to potential improvements that could be made in the History

Day model. Along with that, the model of culturally relevant pedagogy will be

synthesized with the learning outcomes for the History Day program to examine the role

that it plays in creating equity in the classroom. Lastly, since the research question centers

around sixth-grade specifically, this chapter will also explore the developmental stage of

sixth-grade students and their motivations to adapt lessons and activities accordingly.

Along with this, two aspects of the Minnesota Department of Education's sixth-grade

social studies standards will be examined in relation to History Day: historical thinking

skills and Native American history in Minnesota.

Background of the History Day Program

In order to understand the importance of my research question, it is important to

really understand what the History Day program is and why it can be an important

component of the sixth-grade social studies curriculum. The first part of this section will

discuss the history of the program and how it was developed. The second part of this section will dive into what History Day looks like today, both National History Day and Minnesota History Day specifically. Lastly, this section will take a look at the current research that has been done on the impact that History Day has on students in terms of benefits in reading comprehension, writing abilities, and test scores.

In 1974, 127 middle and high school students gathered at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio to participate in the first-ever History Day competition (National History Day [NHD], 2018). David Van Tassel, a professor at the university, created History Day as an attempt to revitalize the study of history because he wanted to motivate both students and teachers to move beyond just the memorization of dates and names. Van Tassel modeled this competition after the Science Fair model, which he said promoted historical inquiry, rather than just merely memorizing and reciting information. After the first year of the competition, it blew up in popularity, and participation increased by 400% in the next year, spreading to 19 other states by 1980 (NHD, 2018). Looking at Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society, the University of Minnesota and Minitex worked together to bring National History Day to the land of 10,000 lakes in the early 1990s (King et al., 2018). In 2015, a report by the National Assessment for Educational Progress found the state of Minnesota had one of the largest racial achievement gaps in the United States and that the gap continues to widen (King et al., 2018). As a result of this information, the National History Day partnership was highlighted as an attempt to combat the growing gap and disparities, especially within the schools in the Twin Cities area (King et al., 2018). National History Day began with

humble beginnings in Ohio, and has since spread all over the United States as a need for engaging historical research has become a priority for teachers everywhere.

How does History Day work?

The logistics of History Day are divided into three levels: national, state, and school. There are guidelines that are put into place at the national level that are required as the baseline. At the state level, there might be additional requirements or certain things that are done differently by state. Lastly, there is a variation at the school level, where teachers have control over how they would like to implement this project for their students. Essentially, students pick a topic of their choice that relates to History Day's annual theme, they will conduct research on their topic and how it fits within the theme, and then present their findings in one of five ways: exhibit board, website, paper, documentary, or performance (Minnesota Historical Society [MNHS], 2022). Once their projects are complete, students will enter them into the History Day competition, which starts at the school level and then can move on to regionals, state, and nationals (MNHS, 2022). In Minnesota, the National History Day program is implemented as required projects that are assignments for their history class, rather than as an extracurricular activity (King et al., 2018).

What are the benefits of History Day?

As mentioned previously, History Day has been around for over 45 years now, and it is clear that through its popularity and growth every year that the program must be doing something right. Despite this, there have actually been very few studies conducted to actually show the impact that History Day has had on students (Monaco et al., 2009). In 2010, National History Day hired an independent research and consulting firm to

conduct research on the impacts of the program so they could gather empirical data from an outside and independent source to supplement the large and growing amount of personal testimonies giving raving reviews of the impact (Sloan & Rockman, 2010). The study used a combination of performance assessments, past achievement, demographic, and behavioral data, student surveys, teacher surveys, and interview protocols (Sloan & Rockman, 2010). The key findings of this study were divided into four categories: applied skills, academic performance, interest in history and civic engagement, and cumulative and differential impact. Within the applied skills category, the study found that History Day students were conducting college-level research, and were able to think critically and synthesize information significantly better than their non-History Day peers. In the academic performance category, the studies found that students increased their performance within their social studies classes, but they were also improving performance in other classes too. In the interest in history and civic engagement category, the study found that students who competed in History Day had a more mature perspective on current events and had a deeper understanding of why studying history is important (Sloan & Rockman, 2010). In terms of the cumulative and differential impact, the Rockman study found that students who participated in History Day had increased college and career readiness and had a cumulative impact over time.

The research conducted back in 2010 shows an overwhelmingly positive impact on students, which is also reinforced by the results of a study conducted for Minnesota History Day specifically. For the 2018-19 school year, Minnesota History Day, in partnership with the University of Minnesota, released data that they had collected in reference to the impact that the competition had on students. The highlights from the

Minnesota History Day study, which consisted primarily of students and teacher interviews, found some similar results to the National History Day study conducted by Rockman in 2010. The Minnesota study found that 89% of students were more or much more interested in history after completing their projects, and 93% of students worked harder or much harder on their projects than assignments for other classes (Minnesota Historical Society [MNHS], 2019). Another impact of the Minnesota-specific study was that students reported feeling more confident and holding higher expectations for themselves after completing their projects; many found themselves reaching for more challenging texts and readings, and feeling more confident with public speaking. Of these students, 48% of students visited a college due to History Day (MNHS, 2019). The impact that History Day has on students both nationwide and within Minnesota is overwhelmingly positive according to both empirical data and personal testimonies.

Existing History Day Teaching Curriculum

My research question revolves around the idea of differentiating the History Day program to be more accessible for sixth-grade students and easier for sixth-grade teachers to implement. In order to know what to improve upon, it's important to know what the existing curriculum looks like. The History Day program offers a lot of material and support to teachers, so this section will take a deep dive into what is already out there that can support teachers. This section will also act as a way to see where the holes in the existing material are in relation to sixth-graders specifically.

There is an extremely large amount of resources out there for teachers wanting to implement History Day. There are resources at the National History Day level, Minnesota History Day and the Minnesota Historical Society have created an in-depth curriculum,

and this isn't even mentioning all the other states with History Day programs and their resources.

National History Day Curriculum and Teacher Resources

National History Day provides teachers with extensive resources through their website and teacher workshops. They have teacher guides divided into two categories: middle school and high school. The middle school guide has a 44-page document with detailed steps that teachers can take throughout the entire History Day process, which is usually close to six months long (NHD, 2018). The guide is a collaboration of resources from twelve teachers throughout the United States who have found success in implementing the program. The guide includes worksheets, guided notes templates, and a suggested grading system for the implementation of these resources (NHD, 2018). Another aspect of the National History Day resources for teachers includes a video series for new teachers every step of the way. It includes a five-part series where teachers can get guidance for anything from getting started, helping students select topics, and understanding the themes (NHD, 2018). In terms of resources for middle school teachers, this guide is the extent of the resources offered by National History Day.

Minnesota Historical Society Curriculum and Teacher Resources

The Minnesota Historical Society's History Day team has put together many resources for teachers, way more than National History Day. First of all, there is a detailed timeline that provides an overview of exactly when teachers need to start introducing the different components of the History Day process, which also includes links to actual examples that other schools have implemented over the years (MNHS, 2022). Each aspect of the timeline has its own separate section with links, videos, and

resources to supplement how to introduce each step of the process. These detailed steps include how to introduce the project to students, how to communicate with parents, group contracts, and information for forming groups, topic selection resources, information about that year's theme, research tools, note taking, thesis formation, how to find background information and context, project organization, writing project text, how to start an annotated bibliography, how to write a process paper, and extensive project samples and how to utilize them with your students (MNHS, 2022). Each of these steps includes various videos, information for the teacher, and then actual materials, worksheets, and graphic organizers to share and use with the students (MNHS, 2022). The Minnesota Historical Society's resources in combination with the National History Day implementation guide have provided teachers with a plethora of resources which is both fantastic and overwhelming at the same time.

Other States' Curriculum and Teacher Resources

In addition to National History Day and the Minnesota Historical Society, each of the many other states that participate in History Day has extensive resources available for teachers as well. One example is Colorado's History Day program in partnership with the University of Colorado Denver. One of Colorado's History Day primary resources for teachers includes a massive "Teacher Playbook" that is just under 300 pages long (University of Colorado Denver [UC Denver], 2020). Just as the other resources mentioned previously, the University of Colorado's collection of material for teachers involves an introduction to the program and how to begin the competition with students, followed by specific information on how to implement it in the classroom. Something interesting that the University of Colorado's program includes, that wasn't present in the

previous two mentioned, is specific guides for how to involve History Day in Advanced Placement, Honors, and International Baccalaureate courses (UC Denver, 2020). Another component of this "Teacher Playbook" is it has the process of History Day broken down into 11 specific steps. Each of the 11 steps includes tips, vocabulary, and then an appendix of resources and curriculum material to use with students to achieve and cover that step (UC Denver, 2020). The appendix of resources has a variety of options that teachers can pick from to cover each step of the process, although most of the materials appear to be targeting the upper middle school and high school level in terms of how the material is being presented.

Another example of a state that has extensive resources available to teachers is the Wisconsin Historical Society's partnership with National History Day. They have a "Teacher Toolkit" webpage on their website that has a well-organized and interactive collection of resources (Wisconsin Historical Society [WHS], 2021). Their website is different from any of the others in terms of how it is organized. There is almost a dashboard for the resources that makes it extremely easy to navigate and explore the many different teacher resources that are available. There are separate sections for "Introduction" and an inviting "Start Here" section, followed by clearly labeled areas for worksheets, videos, and project development (WHS, 2021). The number of resources that are available is seemingly endless.

Project-Based Learning

History Day is an example of Project-Based Learning, which is a style of pedagogy that helps students to dig deeper into what they are learning in the classroom. This section broadens the scope of my research question by examining History Day's

benefits through an analysis of why Project-Based Learning like History Day is beneficial. In the following part of this chapter, we are broadening the lens and looking at PBL as a whole and examining the benefits. Also, through an analysis of other project-based learning projects, improvements in the differentiation of History Day for sixth-graders can be found.

Definition of Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a common pedagogical approach within the realm of teaching, but it is specifically popular within the discipline of social studies. This teaching method uses projects rather than lecturing to get information to students. PBLWorks, an organization of current and former teachers who fully support and back PBL, provide a concise definition stating that it "is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge" (PBLWorks, 2022). The key concept that PBL revolves around is the idea of thinking critically and building on all those skills that support student inquiry and constant questioning. PBL "moves away from a teacher-centered style of teaching where students sit passively in class and are rarely given the opportunity to put their ideas into action" and rather it "engages students through the act of inquiry" (Laverick, 2018, p. 4). The goal is to find a way to capture students' attention and make the content not only engaging but also applicable to their lives. At its core, PBL allows for student choice with not only what they are learning, but how they are learning, with the teacher as the support rather than the key player (Nelson, 2016).

The idea of PBL and more hands-on learning styles is not a new concept, but rather it has been around since the early days of our world's civilizations. This teaching style has its roots as far back as in the foundational education ideas of Socrates and, later, John Dewey (Nelson, 2016). Even ancient Chinese philosopher and teacher Confucius was well-known for saying:

> Talk to me.... and I will forget
> Show me.... and I will remember
> Involve me.... and I will understand
> Step back.... and I will act (Kolmos, 2007, p. 1).

This, again, is emphasizing the idea that the teacher is stepping back and allowing the student to take the lead in their learning. There have been similar ideas over the years through strategies such as "discovery learning", "learning-by-doing", and "student-centered learning", which have all combined to formulate what we now refer to as project-based learning (Kolmos, 2007). The actual title, project-based learning, was originally created by Don Woods, a professor of chemistry at a university in Canada, but as mentioned previously, this style of pedagogy spread well beyond the discipline of science and became extremely popular in all subject areas. At its origin, PBL was initially intended to be based around small group work, almost mimicking the setup of medical teams (Kolmos, 2007). We know now that PBL can be successfully implemented in either the small-group setting or for individuals working alone.

Benefits of Project-Based Learning

PBL is widely used due to its effective ability to develop critical thinking skills and encourage inquiry in student learning. This section is going to discuss the effectiveness and the benefits of PBL. The Buck Institute for Education's PBL Works

initiative has put together in-depth research material that backs up these benefits of PBL in the classroom and for students. Within their research material, they have broken down the benefits of PBL into five categories: academic achievement, 21st-century competencies, equity, motivation, and teacher satisfaction. Many of these benefits parallel those of the History Day benefits mentioned previously in this chapter.

Academic Achievement. Academic achievement was found to improve across all disciplines when a PBL approach was taken rather than a textbook and lecture-driven pedagogy. Students were found to retain information longer and showed a deeper level of understanding of the material (PBLWorks, 2022). At the high school level, students who were in Advanced Placement (AP) classes that utilized a PBL curriculum were found to score higher on the AP tests than classmates that were in a typical AP course (Duke et al., 2016). At all age levels, high-stakes and standardized test scores were shown to improve after a PBL approach was taken (PBLWorks, 2022). One example of this can be found in Maine, after a middle school decided to implement a PBL approach school-wide; they found that only after one year their scores were three to ten times higher than the state average on the Maine Educational Assessment Battery (Nelson, 2016). Similar to the History Day study that was conducted, academic achievement is an area in which the PBL approach greatly improves scores.

21st Century Competencies. This category is looking specifically at the skills students will need after they finish high school, whether that be career or college readiness. Throughout multiple studies, students who participated in a PBL curriculum proved to be successful in applying their knowledge to real-life situations (PBLWorks, 2022). Another area in which PBL students thrived in over their peers who were taught in

a traditional environment was the ability to work collaboratively with other students and the ability to resolve conflicts when disagreements arise (PBLWorks, 2022). The ability to work with others and collaborate, as well as the know-how to navigate situations where conflicts come up, are important skills that students will need to take with them in both a higher education environment and the workplace.

      Equity. One of the key benefits of PBL is that it creates a classroom environment that is more accessible and engaging to all students. It is a strategy that is known for being more effective in creating lessons that are equitable for all students due to its low-pressure, engaging, and culturally responsive nature (May, 2018). Although there are currently fewer studies for this area specifically, there are extremely promising results that are showing PBL's ability to engage lower-performing students and movement towards closing achievement gaps (PBLWorks, 2022). The National Clearinghouse for School Reform has deemed PBL an effective model for whole-school reform in terms of moving towards more equitable schools (PBLWorks, 2022). One example of an area where PBL works towards a more inclusive and equitable classroom is in the realm of English language learners. The small-group setting that is commonly used for PBL encourages less teacher talking and more time for students to practice their language skills in lower pressure and more realistic environments (Laverick, 2018). Also, PBL is surrounded by the idea of student choice, which is another aspect that promotes differentiation that is helpful for students that are at varying levels of English proficiency (Laverick, 2018). There are many opportunities within the PBL curriculum for differentiation that can encourage an equitable learning environment.

Motivation. One area of education that teachers are constantly striving to achieve is in terms of motivation and student engagement. Educators using PBL have found a large amount of success in this area, and it has proven to be an effective way to engage students and get them motivated to be involved in what they are learning. The studies gathered by PBLWorks have found overall more interest in the content, higher attendance, positive attitudes, and higher degrees of self-reliance than in the traditional learning environment (PBLWorks, 2022). Rather than spending a large amount of time trying to find a hook or getting students to "buy-in" to the material, teachers using PBL engage students by empowering them and giving them more say in the lesson; student choice promotes a feeling of having personal stakes in what happens, which can be motivating in itself (Nelson, 2016). Student motivation is critical for successful learning, and a major benefit of PBL revolves around its ability to engage and create an interesting learning environment for students.

Teacher Satisfaction. In order for PBL to actually work, teachers need to be on board and able to put in the time and effort to ensure that it runs successfully. Although it takes more effort at the beginning, personal testimony and interviews have found overall an increase in job satisfaction from teachers after implementing a PBL curriculum (PBLWorks, 2022). One of the many positive teacher testimonies in relation to implementing PBL mentions Becky Zalesnik, a seventh-grade teacher in Texas, who began teaching a PBL curriculum at their STEM Academy (PBLWorks, 2022). She was nervous at first, but ultimately states "It's been a long time since I've seen kids and teachers so involved and enjoying learning" (PBLWorks, 2022). Teachers are critical to

the success of PBL, and not only does it benefit student learning, but it also promotes a positive teaching experience.

Successful Project-Based Learning Examples

Although History Day is one of the most successful PBL examples, there are many more that are finding success as well. One example of a successfully implemented project can be found in a study implemented by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The study involved 38 fifth-grade classrooms throughout eight different urban schools, which consisted of 764 students, primarily from low-income families (Zhang et al., 2016). The project that was implemented was called the Wolf Reintroduction and Management Unit, which involved the fifth-graders participating in a six-week intervention where the students would decide whether or not a pack of wolves that are alarming a community would get killed or not (Zhang et al., 2016). The project consisted of a combination of large group instruction, small group conversations, and individual reflection (Zhang et al., 2016). This PBL curriculum was modified based on a similar activity that had been done previously in a traditional classroom setting. In the PBL version of this project, students were given the full decision-making power, versus in the traditional classroom setting, where that role was shared with the teacher (Zhang et al., 2016). This project and the research that came with it did reinforce the idea that PBL has benefits over teaching in the traditional classroom. The study found that the students who participated in the PBL version of this lesson formulated more in-depth arguments, explored all sides of the issue, and were able to state their ideas more clearly (PBLWorks, 2022). This project, as well as History Day, shows the positive impact that PBL can have on the classroom.

Equity in History Day

While the foundation for the History Day program, along with the framework for PBL, all point to creating and fostering equity in the classroom, it's important to make those connections explicit. Teachers participating in History Day need to be intentional about the implementation of this project in order to reach all students. By following the ideas of Gloria Ladson-Billings' and her work on culturally relevant pedagogy, History Day can be used as an extremely strong tool to empower students.

Ladson-Billings describes three key components that are required for culturally relevant pedagogy: academic achievement/student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 46). The root of these ideas come from getting students to think more critically, discover things about themselves, and challenge the world around them. History Day projects can be a vehicle to support students and get them to the point where they are able to do those things, but teacher support is definitely necessary.

Academic Achievement/Student Learning

"All students need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 47). Students need to be able to learn important skills and obtain knowledge that they can bring with them, not just to complete a standardized test, but to take with them on this journey of life. Academic performance goes beyond test scores, but rather it shows up through student growth. Academic skills, such as literacy, go beyond the classroom. Gholdy Muhammad, in her book *Cultivating Genius*, points out that literacy is power and connects to "acts of self-empowerment, self-determination, and self-liberation" (2020, p.

22). History Day seeks to foster these learning outcomes for students, and teachers need to provide the environment for them to do so.

Cultural Competence

"Culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 48). Ladson-Billings says that this is an area of culturally relevant pedagogy that is the most misunderstood (p. 71). She points out that achieving cultural competence means that students are secure in the understanding of their own culture and developing an understanding and fluency in one other culture. History Day can assist students through the process of understanding themselves and others, but it needs to be set up in a way to do that. Starting at the beginning of the project, teachers can set up topic selection in an intentional way that lets students explore areas of the past that connect to them. By the end of the project, students will connect their learnings to themselves today and have the chance to reflect on not only the past, but also question the future. This can support both areas of cultural competence; students can pick a topic that connects to their own culture and can give them space to learn even more about themselves, or they can pick a topic that helps them to better understand a culture that is different from theirs.

Critical Consciousness

"If school is about preparing students for active citizenship, what better citizenship tool than the ability to critically analyze society?" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 50). Ladson-Billings describes this section of culturally relevant pedagogy as the most ignored. This is the aspect of teaching, especially in the social studies classroom, that is the most challenging, but the most important. This is the "so what" factor in the

classroom; it is the why to everything we do. Critical thinking is the largest learning outcome that History Day uses as the foundation for the project. If teachers use the critical consciousness framework and apply it to the History Day projects, this can create more meaningful and relevant connections for students. Throughout the History Day project, students commonly ask "why are we doing this" or "why is this important," which are extremely valid and important questions to be asking. A critically conscious response back to them that can connect their projects to real world problems or social issues that they can help address can offer them the drive they are looking for.

6th Grade Development

In order to get an idea of how the History Day program can be differentiated to meet the needs of sixth-grade social studies students, it's important to examine where sixth-grade students are developmentally. The History Day program encompasses sixth-twelfth grade students. A sixth-grader is at a much different level than an eighth-grader, a tenth-grader, and furthest from the academic and developmental level of a twelfth-grader. This is a wide age range, so it's important to take a look at where sixth-graders are both developmentally and academically to see what they need to be successful. It's also important to examine where sixth-grade students are expected to be academically according to the Minnesota Department of Education's social studies standards.

The Sixth Grader

Sixth grade is a time of big changes, both intrinsic and extrinsic, for 11-year-olds. Physically, they are going through changes to their bodies, growing, potentially feeling more tired, but also experiencing an increase in desire for physical activity and social

interactions (GCISD, 2007). There are extreme differences in the rate of development per individual, especially looking at how girls begin the process of physical maturity much sooner than boys do (GCISD, 2007). In terms of social and emotional development, 6th-grade students are changing as well as adjusting to the new setting of being in middle school versus elementary school. sixth-grade students might have a difficult time making decisions for themselves, might experience extreme emotions, and might experiment with different behaviors (GCISD, 2007).

Among all these changes, there are also many things going on in relation to their intellectual development. 11-year-olds are definitely expanding their intellectual interests and becoming more curious (GCISD, 2007). Although their interests are expanding, most of their interests may involve the present with a limited scope of the future; they also assume that what they are thinking is the dominant thing on everyone else's mind as well (GCISD, 2007). It is at this age that students are beginning to de-center themselves and expand their worldview to include various perspectives (GCISD, 2007). This de-centering of their thoughts is something that connects super well with the ideas that History Day promotes, as well as other project-based learning pedagogy.

Adolescent Motivation and Development

In order to understand how to successfully implement anything in the classroom, PBL-related or not, it's important to be aware of where students are developmentally, but also in terms of what is motivating them. There are three major areas where motivation can be fostered by adolescents, specifically middle school students, and those include peer acceptance, a level of autonomy, and positive student-teacher relationships.

To begin with, it's important to define what exactly motivation is in relation to the classroom setting. Motivation can be defined as "a set of interrelated desires, goals, needs, values, and emotions that explain the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of behavior" (Scales et al., 2019, p. 647). It is also important to note that although some students' motivation increases over time, the common trend is that as students leave elementary school, their motivation starts a downward trajectory that continues throughout middle school, high school, and into adulthood (Scales et al., 2019). Understanding the various levels of motivation within the classroom is essential for planning any lesson plan, but is important to keep in mind with PBL as well.

Peer Acceptance

One factor that is commonly talked about in relation to adolescents as they begin their middle school years is the idea of peer acceptance and the desire to fit in. While this is a huge motivator for students, there are also intrinsic goals that students are working towards within themselves and their own intimate social circles (Ryan & Shim, 2008). Validation from peers to gain popularity is a component of adolescent motivation, but studies have found that it is much more complex than that; students are craving nurturance, affiliation, responsibility, intimacy, fun, and companionship (Ryan & Shim, 2008). It is important to not get too fixated on peer approval as the sole source of motivation in middle school students but to remember that there are other factors as well, such as teacher-student relationships and varying levels of control and independence from the student themselves.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Outside of peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, as well as other adult relationships during this period of change, are critical in fostering motivation. Teacher-student relationships are commonly referred to as the primary vehicle for student motivation and are considered an area of primary emphasis when it comes to making changes in the classroom (Scales et al., 2019). The teacher-student relationship is two-fold and includes both the teacher showing warmth and building trust with students, and it also includes the teacher keeping high expectations and challenging students (Scales et al., 2019). Middle school students, especially sixth-graders, are going through a huge transitional period as they move from an extremely supported elementary school environment into a middle school, where they are going to experience a more rigorous and less nurturing environment (Uremovich, 2015). Due to this shift between feeling like a young child, but wanting more independence, the teacher-student relationship becomes really important and the creation of a welcoming and inviting classroom environment plays a huge role in the motivation of sixth-grade students (Uremovich, 2015). When the teacher is able to create a welcoming environment and formulate trusting relationships with students, it creates an atmosphere where student motivation can flourish.

Student Autonomy

An added layer to the idea of strong teacher-student relationships is that students, especially students going into middle school, desire a sense of autonomy and independence. Strong relationships combined with an autonomy-supported teaching style are extremely important; an autonomy-supportive environment fosters student choice in assignments and also provides a rationale to students for why they are doing what they

are doing (Scales et al., 2019). By giving students more responsibility and decision making power in the classroom, more motivation can be fostered; for example, by giving students tasks such as tutoring peers, organizing a class food drive, or trusting them with other tasks around the classroom, an overall sense of autonomy can be developed (Uremovich, 2015). As students begin middle school, they are really beginning the start of their development towards finding themselves and are given the space to start growing as an individual, it is important that teachers provide an environment that can scaffold that journey and support them.

Minnesota 6th-Grade Social Studies Standards

Historical Inquiry

In terms of the grade-level expectations that are put in place through the Minnesota Department of Education's social studies standards, sixth-graders have a focus on Minnesota Studies. Minnesota Studies puts an emphasis on history as the "lead discipline," or primary content area, but is supplemented by geography, economics, and civic understandings (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2011). The standards for sixth-grade students involve a variety of tasks within the umbrella of Minnesota Studies which include but are not limited to: comparing and contrasting, explaining, identifying, posing questions, analyzing, creating timelines, and giving examples (MDE, 2011).

One sixth-grade standard, in particular, encompasses the ideals that History Day is trying to get across. This Minnesota standard is in the category of "Historical Thinking" and it aims to get students to begin the process of inquiry. The standard is in the strand of History and the sub-strand of Historical Thinking. It states that students will understand

that "historical inquiry is a process in which multiple sources and different kinds of historical evidence are analyzed to draw conclusions about what happened in the past, and how and why it happened" (MDE, 2011). Within the standard, the specific benchmark is looking for the students to: "Pose questions about a topic in Minnesota history, gather a variety of primary and secondary sources related to questions, analyze sources for credibility, identify possible answers, use evidence to draw conclusions, and present supported findings" (MDE, 6.4.1.2.1, 2011). This standard and benchmark revolve around the main ideas that History Day is trying to promote. It is important for students to be motivated, while also meeting the standards put in place by the state, which is why PBL, and specifically History Day, is able to meet all of these needs. When implementing History Day for sixth-graders, it is critical to plan it around the standards and ensure that they are hitting benchmarks, while also exploring their own self-inquiry.

Native American History

The sixth-grade Minnesota Studies class provides students with the first formal introduction to the Native American history that is foundational to the state's history. The formation of Mni Sota Makoce and the histories of the Native American peoples in Minnesota are areas that are frequently overlooked or taught in a way that promotes stereotypes or misinformation. In a report created by *Understand Native Minnesota*, an initiative of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, an analysis of the Native American resources used in the classroom was conducted. This report, titled *Restoring Our Place*, not only conducted surveys and studies to find out what resources are actually being used in the classroom, but it also serves to provide ideas on how to improve going forward.

The report uncovered both positive and negative things happening in our school related to the teaching of Native American history in the classroom. First, the findings concluded that "there is an enormous amount of work to be done to ensure that all of the state's teachers and students, non-Native and Native alike, benefit from good curricula, accurate books and online content, and proper training in presenting Native American material" (Wood-Krueger 2022, 4). On the flip side, through the surveys and interviews they conducted, there is an incredible amount of enthusiasm and support from educators who want to commit to making these improvements. In fact, the general public agrees as well; one of the surveys conducted found that 90% of Minnesotans support increasing the teaching of Minnesota's Native American history in the K-12 school system as a whole (Wood-Krueger 2022, 8).

The *Restoring Our Place* report points out that both the erasure and spread of misinformation of Native American history isn't just something of the past, but something of the present, which is why the findings of this report are so important. In a poll conducted in September 2017 by the Reclaiming Native Truth project, they found that 40% of adult Americans were still unaware that Native Americans still existed in the present day (Wood-Krueger 2022, 8). The same poll found that 72% of adult Americans very rarely encounter any information about Native Americans, and any information that is received is usually a stereotype spread through the media. These findings emphasize even further the importance of improving the resources and professional development that is currently available, so that educators can fight against misinformation, stereotyping, and erasure that is extremely harmful to all students.

History Day can be a key tool in implementing the recommendations from the *Restoring Our Place* report and further improve the overall quality and implementation of teaching Native American history in the sixth-grade classroom. One of the key recommendations of the study involve a "Create an Online Repository of Curated Resources" section, which lays out a plan to create a website that teachers can reference for high quality resources and information. This resource, in combination with the History Day project, can be a perfect combination. The focus of the History Day project for sixth-grade students should revolve around the scope of Native American history and can be a key tool in working towards a curriculum that is equitable and represents all students.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two consisted of a literature review that revolves around the question: *How can the History Day program be differentiated for sixth-grade social studies students?* In order to answer this question, a deep dive into many aspects of the History Day program as well as sixth-grade students and curriculum was necessary. The History Day program itself has a rich history of providing middle and high school students with an opportunity to study history in a way they might not have done before. Traditionally, history has been taught in a traditional classroom setting where facts and dates are taught in a lecture format and expected to be memorized for a test. Rather than that approach, History Day takes a Project-Based Learning approach, which as mentioned in this chapter, is a style of pedagogy that promotes student-centered learning and encourages exploration and inquiry. It is also critical to examine the sixth-grader as a student and pinpoint in general what is motivating students of this age group in order to successfully

differentiate a form of curriculum for them. During middle school, sixth-grade students are experiencing a major time of change and transition, which is important to keep in mind for the implementation of lessons. Lastly, two aspects of the Minnesota Department of Education's sixth-grade social studies standards are examined and applied to the History Day program, with an emphasis on the importance of Native American history.

Introduction to Chapter Three

In the following chapter, Chapter Three, the methods used to begin the process of differentiating the History Day curriculum for sixth-graders will be discussed. The project that will be used is a website that will curate resources for sixth-grade teachers that are either just starting History Day for the first time, or are wanting more support in implementing the program for sixth-grade students. Chapter Three will take a look at both how this resource came about and give further information as to how it can be implemented and used successfully by teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

History Day is a program that encompasses grades sixth-twelfth, yet, seemingly,

sixth-grade teachers shy away from implementing the project in their classrooms. A

conversation with a sixth-grade Minnesota Studies teacher in a suburb of St. Paul,

Minnesota expressed that there is a level of difficulty in getting sixth-graders to wrap

their heads around the level of research that is required for the project and that they just

didn't feel like the resources available were meeting the needs of this age group. It was

this conversation that led me to my research question: *How can the History Day program*

be differentiated for sixth-grade social studies students?

This chapter discusses the methods used to create a website that can differentiate

the History Day curriculum to better assist and accommodate sixth-grade social studies

teachers. The website will provide a curated collection of History Day resources that are

all in one organized spot and are age-appropriate for sixth-grade students. There is a wide

variety of resources out there for History Day, from the National History Day website to

each state's own History Day websites, it can be an overwhelming amount of

information. Therefore, the website will provide a one-stop-shop for sixth-grade History

Day teachers to visit during the entire duration of the competition process. Not only will

this website curate History Day resources for teachers to use, but it will also provide a

breakdown of project-based learning and how projects such as History Day can be

essential tools in creating an equitable classroom. Chapter three will discuss the rationale

behind using a website to share this information, the theories behind History Day's

success, examine the setting and target audience for the project, and provide an overview of the timeline for the project.

Positionality

I am a brand new teacher who just completed my teaching program at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I received my teaching license in secondary (5-12) social studies. Prior to that, I attended Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota and received my Bachelor's degree in History and Classical Studies. My first year of teaching experience took place at Edgewood Middle School in Mounds View, Minnesota. While my time at Edgewood was my first year teaching and my first year utilizing History Day as a teacher, I do have a background working with History Day. I spent five years judging History Day in both Minnesota and Wisconsin, and then I was a History Day mentor in Minnesota for two years. I think that my limited experience as a teacher impacts my lens, which I don't necessarily think is a bad thing, but can have its limitations.

Rationale

The rationale behind the creation of this website of resources stems from the conversation I had with a sixth-grade Minnesota Studies teacher, who did not have a great experience trying to implement History Day in her own classroom. She stated that she just couldn't quite get the students to grasp the concept of the research project and felt overwhelmed by the resources available, feeling like they were not catered to the sixth-grade level. This got me wondering if other teachers felt this way, or if this is reflected at all in the participation numbers for History Day in Minnesota. I connected with Sammi Jo Papas, the co-coordinator of National History Day in Minnesota, and wanted to find out a little bit more about participation numbers for sixth-grade students in

the program. She shared with me that sixth-grade is consistently the smallest grade level within the middle school to participate every year. In fact, after looking at the 2020-2021 statistics, sixth-grade students only made up 15% of the participants within grades sixth-eighth according to the annual "At A Glance" report that was put out by National History Day in Minnesota. The report showed that seventh-grade had the largest group of participants with 497 students, followed by eighth-grade with 336 students, and then lastly, sixth-grade with 147 students.

The goal of this website resource is to provide sixth-grade social studies teachers with the material and guidance needed to successfully implement the History Day project for this younger age group and through an equity-based lens. The number of resources that are available can be extremely overwhelming, not only for new teachers but also for veteran teachers who might be wanting to do History Day for the first time. The website will offer curated resources and a timeline to follow to assist in the sixth-grade History Day track.

Project Description

Today, sharing information about anything and everything is instant. Through the use of the internet and technology, people can exchange information instantaneously. While this is amazing, it can also lead to information overload. If you are a teacher who is wanting to implement a History Day curriculum in your classroom, a simple Google search would bring you endless resources to utilize; from the curriculum designed by National History Day and each individual state's curriculum resources to individual teacher recommendations and guidance, it can be both helpful and overwhelming at the

same time. The purpose of my project is to create a website that has curated resources and guidance for History Day at the sixth-grade level specifically.

The website provides a one-stop resource for sixth-grade teachers to utilize throughout the planning and implementation process for History Day. The website is organized into four major sections: introduction, pedagogy, timeline, and project phases.

Introduction

On the homepage, the research question is clearly stated, the purpose of the website is included, and then there is a bulleted list that describes the key points of what is included in the website. The bulleted list is intended to act as a roadmap for the viewer and assist in ensuring easy navigation throughout the website. On the homepage I also included a brief "About Me" section and my contact information. In the "About Me" section I introduce myself and give a background on my teaching and History Day experience. The goal with this section is to give the viewer a sense that they can trust the work I have done and create a sense of approachability so that they can utilize my contact information if needed. Across the top of the website are clearly labeled tabs, which make navigating the website easy.

Pedagogy

The first tab is an "About" section that gives an overview of the History Day program. Next, there is an "Equity in History Day" tab. History Day's main targeted learning outcomes revolve around increasing student engagement, building literacy behaviors, and setting high expectations for all learners (Minnesota Historical Society, 2019). The purpose of this section is to connect the goals of History Day with the teachings and ideas of Gloria Ladson-Billings and her work with equity in the classroom.

Ladson-Billings (1995) work in culturally relevant pedagogy has acted as an eye opening guide for this project. By using her framework, History Day can be more intentional in how it reaches and impacts student learning, student inquiry, and student achievement. Ladson-Billings mentions that "a culturally relevant teacher helps students challenge existing power structures and begin to use culture to make meaning of the curriculum and their own experiences" (Ladson-Billings, 2021). This quote shows the direction and potential that History Day has to reach students on a deeper level if implemented intentionally.

Timeline

The "Timeline" tab includes a suggested timeline that I created. This timeline includes a weekly breakdown for the months of January, February, and March. For each week, there are guidelines for staying on track and suggested resources to use in the classroom to guide each step of the project. Also included on this tab is the National History Day's recommended timeline, as well as a couple of other examples of timelines that other middle schools have used.

Project Phases

There are three separate tabs for the three main "phases" of the project. Phase number one is the main focus and this tab includes a ton of material for teachers to use as they embark on the journey of beginning and introducing the project to their students. There are linked resources such as a suggested journaling activity, slide decks, sample lesson plans, and videos. Phases number two and number three include curated resources to assist teachers in guiding students through the research process and constructing their projects. The website acts as a collection of relevant resources, with the hopes that it will

assist sixth-grade teachers in finding success with History Day while cutting out a lot of the extra time digging and searching through the content to find what they need.

The reasoning behind using a website to share this information revolves around the idea of convenience. Teachers can utilize the website when they need it, and it is always available to them for support. Researchers from both Sanford University and Harvey Mudd College looked into the use of websites as a collection of curated resources for teachers but in relation to Computer Sciences. They found that although in-person professional development has its benefits, there are things to be said about online resources: "PD workshops alone may not provide teachers with everything they need. Online resources are an important mechanism for providing teachers with additional support" (Leske & Lewis, 2017, p. 357). In relation to their study, they found that for Computer Science teachers, there are not always other teachers in the building doing the same thing as them, so it can be hard to collaborate; I think the same can be said for History Day teachers too. A lot of times, there are only one, maybe two teachers doing History Day in one building, so it can be hard to collaborate with colleagues in the same way it would be for a standard curriculum. For this reason, this website resource can act as a form of collaboration for History Day teachers who might not have other teachers in the building to share resources with.

Setting and Audience

The website resource is teacher-facing and will be available to all teachers interested in implementing History Day in their own classrooms. Specifically, this website is trying to reach an audience of sixth-grade teachers and students. One resource that can be helpful in understanding this audience is the data provided by History Day

itself. The schools and students that participated in History Day last year, and follow along with a similar trend of the program as a whole, are outlined in the 2020-21 National History Day in Minnesota "At A Glance" document. In Minnesota, a majority of schools that participate in History Day are public schools (65%), followed by private schools (19%), and then charter schools (11%), and then homeschool and online programs making up the remainder of the participating schools. The schools that participate in History Day come from all over Minnesota, but the majority are within the Twin Cities area and surrounding suburbs.

In terms of the audience, the students that will be on the receiving end of these resources are also outlined in the 2020-21 "At A Glance" document. The make-up of the students that usually participate in Minnesota History Day is highly diverse. Last year's participation, which aligns with the overall program trend, found the following percentages:

47% White
19% Black
16% Asian
11% Hispanic/Latinx
7% Multiple Races
1% Native American

This breakdown of students, although not identical to every circumstance, is the general overview of the participation in History Day in the state of Minnesota.

While the History Day data gives a broad overview of the participation in the program as a whole, it is also important to narrow down the scope and take a look at the specific setting and audience that my actual project is focusing on. The setting for my project takes place in a sixth-grade classroom at a middle school in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota, fifteen minutes north of the city center. This school has 41% of the student

body qualifying for free or reduced lunch. 25% of the student body qualifies for special

services, specifically 15% special education and 10% English language learners. The

diversity of the student population is as follows:

    48% White
    15% Black
    15.8% Hispanic
    11.7% Asian
    9.2% Two or more categories
    .1% Native American
    .1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

In order for my website to be implemented successfully and reach the needs of all

the students listed above, it is critical to be aware of who they are and the backgrounds

they are coming from. Knowing this important information is just the first step towards

creating relationships and a classroom culture that fosters success.

Timeline

After completing extensive background research for the paper portion of the

project, the actual creation of my website took me around three months. In order to

successfully complete the website, I needed to go through the extensive material and

resources that are out there. Throughout that process, I needed to decide if they were

relevant to the sixth-grade level, and if they were too advanced, find alternatives or make

modifications. I also needed to make modifications and adaptations to some of the

resources in order to meet the needs of all my students. Then came the component of the

project that actually required actually building the website itself. I ended up using Google

Sites, which is a platform that I am familiar with and it is fairly simple to create and add

elements to. Not to mention, most of my resources are created through Google Suites,

which means that all my materials are easily accessible and shareable.

The timeline for the implementation of the History Day projects has a level of flexibility in which teachers can modify it to fit with the needs of their students in their own classrooms. For National History Day in Minnesota, their suggested timeline starts in September with project and topic selection and then goes through the school, regional and state competitions that begin in March. Each month has different steps that are required to complete to stay on track. For my project, which is focusing on the sixth-grade classroom, I am suggesting a shortened timeline that begins in January and goes through mid-March, finishing with school and regional competitions. This timeline allows more room for teachers to establish their classroom environment and culture, plus begin laying the foundation for the projects. It will be necessary that students get around four months of content on Native American History in Minnesota so that once they begin their own research projects they have some background information to go off of. Along with my suggested timeline, I also include a couple more examples of modified timelines that other teachers have used in their classrooms to fit the needs of their objectives, school requirements, or time constraints. Regardless of which timeline is used, the layout of the projects all generally follow the same flow of events beginning with an introduction to History Day and topic selection. Next, the research process begins, where students will gather primary and secondary sources to assist them in formulating and supporting a thesis, which will be the bulk of the project and take the most time. Finally, students will write their findings and build their projects, and get them ready for the competitions. For my suggested timeline, all of the work for History Day will be done during class time, but this is another component of the project where the teacher gets to decide what would work best for their students.

Assessment

The projected assessment of the success of the project would come from the teachers themselves. After the next school year, I would like to obtain feedback from the teachers who utilized the website to see if it was helpful and if it took away some of the stress that revolves around implementing the project. Specifically, I'm looking to see if the teachers felt that the 6th-graders were able to understand the project better. I will also be asking for feedback on how to improve the website and find out if there were any major holes in the resources. In addition to teacher feedback, a student survey would also provide critical feedback for the website. At the conclusion of the History Day projects, a short Google Form could be used to collect responses from students themselves in terms of what worked for them, areas of the project that were confusing or unclear, and any other feedback from their perspectives. Both feedback from teachers and students can provide extremely helpful insight into continued improvement.

Summary

This chapter went over the reasoning behind the creation of a website that is looking to answer the question: *How can the History Day program be differentiated for sixth-grade social studies students?* It took a look at the rationale behind the project, the intended setting, and the audience, and then also examined the timeline for both creating and implementing the project. The next chapter will be a conclusion and reflection of the project as a whole. This reflection will include an examination of the key learnings that took place throughout this entire process, the theories and works that made the most impact, and areas of further research.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Introduction

This capstone project explored the research question: *How can the Minnesota Historical Society's History Day program be differentiated and adapted for sixth-grade students?* As someone who very fondly remembers doing many projects throughout my K-12 schooling experience, I wanted to dig deeper into how large scale projects can be implemented in the classroom in a more equitable way. As a white, cisgender, female educator, I understand that my lived experience isn't universal and that my students are all coming from different backgrounds. That being said, I wanted to see how the History Day program can be adapted and expanded to put my student's needs at the center and provide them with skills they can take with them and use in future school projects and beyond.

Throughout my research, I was reminded that social studies is a subject area that is commonly regarded by students as their least favorite. I think that if History Day can be implemented intentionally and if teachers have the tools to do so, it can greatly impact how students are experiencing their social studies classes. Social studies classrooms have the opportunity to provide students with many essential tools and skills, such as how to work in a group, how to think critically and ask questions about the world around them, and how to view information from various perspectives; students need opportunities to learn these skills in an engaging and student-centered way.

In this chapter, I will identify my key findings from my writing process, give an overview of the design of my project, explore areas for future research, go over the

limitations of my project and research, and end with a conclusion about my capstone project as a whole.

Major Learnings

Key Takeaways

My entire literature review process has been a journey of new learnings, connections to things I already knew, and exciting opportunities that I am excited to implement in my own classroom. History Day is a program that I already had an immense passion for, but the process of researching and supplementing the existing process has continued to ignite that fire. One of the key takeaways that I found through this process has been that project-based learning does have a positive impact in the social studies classroom. I came into this capstone project assuming that it did from my own experiences as a learner and from what I have witnessed during my time working with History Day. PBLWorks and their partnership with the Buck Institute was a source that I consulted a lot throughout my research process. They have an extensive collection of research that takes a deep dive into how effective project-based learning is in the classroom, plus a plethora of supplemental resources (Kingston, 2018 & Kingston, deMonsabert, and Wagner, 2022). This isn't to say that all PBL instructions are successful, but their findings show consistent and optimistic results. On top of overall success in the classroom, PBL is also found to have positive results with EL students (Wolpert-Gawron, 2018) and has been utilized successfully as a tool to address educational inequity (Lenz, 2016). Furthermore, my confidence in continued use of PBL in my own classroom through History Day and my website to assist other teachers in utilizing it is something that I took out of this capstone project process.

The Most Important Literature

The work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, specifically her book *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* and her recent article "I'm here for the Hard Re-Set: Post Pandemic Pedagogy to Preserve Our Culture," have been critical works that have guided my research. Not only has Ladson-Billings provided a framework to base my capstone project off of, but her work is a keystone that supports my teaching going forward into my career. I came into this capstone project with History Day as the center, but throughout my literature review, Ladson-Billings' work has allowed me to shift towards equity being at the center, and History Day is a tool to achieve that.

Website Design

My website was designed to be a teacher facing resource that can assist in the implementation of the History Day program in the sixth-grade classroom. The emphasis being on sixth-grade specifically, and executing the program in an equitable way. Sixth-grade is a group that has the least amount of participation in History Day compared to other grade levels, and has a reputation for being difficult for teachers to introduce research projects to. For that reason, my website is structured as a guide for teachers who would like to do History Day in the sixth-grade Minnesota Studies classroom. Understanding that each sixth-grader is different, the materials and resources provided are intended to give all students an opportunity to successfully complete their History Day projects.

Through my website, teachers will see that I have broken the project down into three phases. Phase one, which is the step that I put the most emphasis on, is all about introducing the project. For the sake of my project, I am narrowing down the scope of the

project to be limited to Native American history, which aligns with the sixth-grade standards in Minnesota. It also provides structure for the students to dive into examining other perspectives and narratives. Within this phase, I provide resources such as slide decks, handouts, and lesson notes that teachers can use to get them started with History Day and connect it to the existing Minnesota Studies curriculum.

Phases two and three are more like a curation of resources from the Minnesota Historical Society's History Day website. Something that is both good and bad in relation to History Day is that there are a plethora of resources available. This is great, but can be overwhelming, especially for teachers who have either never done History Day before or who have never done it in the sixth grade classroom. For that reason, phases two and three include resources that I have pulled out and organized to assist in making the process easier. I have also created and included a timeline and checklist that teachers can follow and then supplement with their own lesson plans as needed.

Limitations

Although my website is intended to be utilized in a flexible manner by teachers, there are some limitations that are worth noting. One of the perks of History Day is that teachers get to decide how they want to implement it in their classroom. The timeline that I suggest might not match the needs or requirements that other teachers might be facing. Along with that, there might be some adjusting needed depending on the length of class periods; my project is based on a 45 minute social studies class period, but I also understand that some schools use block periods, which would change the timeline.

Another limitation of my website revolves around the potential need for annual updates. Although my goal is to continually refresh and add more to the website, the

reality is that teaching is a time consuming profession. History Day changes their theme every year and slightly changes their timelines to match each school year, which means these are things that might be out of date going into each school year.

Lastly, while I try to include as many accommodations and modifications for all the resources that I include in my website, I am aware that there is room for even more. There are areas of growth in terms of including materials to best support EL learners and special education students, which is something that I hope to gain feedback on and continue to build on within my website.

Implications and Further Research

The idea here is that students are able to begin a research project where they can participate in inquiry-based learning and critical thinking on a topic of their choice within Minnesota's early history. In my experience, sixth grade Minnesota Studies is a class where many students are learning things about our past that are brand new to them. This can be potentially confusing and shocking, which is why a research project, like History Day, can come in and provide students with some structure and framework to assist them in asking questions and diving deeper into these new and big concepts. Through this process, students will be able to begin learning about multiple perspectives and apply these new concepts to their own life. This project also gives students the opportunity to learn about working in groups, and through this group work it will also add to class community and culture.

In terms of further research, there is a major opportunity here. As I was gathering information for this capstone project, I found very little information about History Day being implemented in an equitable way that wasn't coming from the History Day

program itself. I am a huge proponent of History Day, but I also understand that growth comes from critique and input from outside sources. I feel as though I only began to scratch the surface of all the opportunities that can come from implementing History Day in the classroom.

Even throughout the process of creating my website, I realized that my initial scope was too big for this project specifically. There is tons of room for further development, especially in terms of phases two and three on my website. In the future, I would like to continue adding to my website and creating even more resources and a more indepth timeline for other teachers to utilize. This is especially true for providing more resources and support for special education students, who could really benefit from the History Day program.

Conclusion

This project explored the question: *How can the Minnesota Historical Society's History Day program be differentiated and adapted for sixth-grade students?* The journey towards answering this question and completing my capstone project has opened my eyes beyond the scope that I initially planned. This has been a positive experience and has allowed me to begin the process of implementing and applying the theories and strategies that I have learned during my time at Hamline. The website that I created not only answers my research question, but it also represents my growth as an educator towards viewing my work through a more equitable lens.

When I first started thinking about doing a project that revolved around History Day, I was coming from a limited teaching background. I had just started my master's and teaching program at Hamline, but I had been working with History Day as a judge

and mentor for over five years at that time. After experiencing my first year of teaching, especially coming off of the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of the ideas for my capstone shifted as I experienced the reality being in the classroom. I spoke with teachers who had tried implementing History Day, but struggled with finding success. I also implemented History Day as a teacher for the first time and was able to find areas of difficulty in the process of doing the project in a classroom of my own that I had not thought of previously. I was able to experience firsthand the importance of equity-based materials and lessons in order to reach all of my students where they are at.

The process of completing this capstone project has also shown me the sheer amount of potential that continued work in project-based learning pedagogy, such as History Day, can greatly contribute to success in the social studies classroom. The work I have done in completing my website makes me eager to not only continue finding resources to supplement History Day for teachers participating in the program, but it also makes me excited to continue my own journey as a History Day teacher. I am looking forward to utilizing and finding more resources and strategies that can continue to support my growth as an educator that is committed to creating better opportunities for my students.

References

Buck Institute for Education. (n.d.). *PBLWorks*. https://www.pblworks.org/

Duke, N. K., Halvorsen, A.-L., & Strachan, S. L. (2016). Project-based learning is not just for

STEM anymore: the research is clear that social studies and literacy are fertile ground for

robust project-based learning units. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(1), 14.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A463756240/GPS?u=clic_hamline&sid=bookmark-GPS&

xid=9bd68f10

Gallo, B. (2018). New Jersey History Day: Doing History, Discovering New Jersey. *New Jersey*

Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 4(1), 206–210.

https://doi-org.ezproxy.hamline.edu/10.14713/njs.v4i1.110

"GCISD - Curriculum Guides and Developmental Characteristics." (2002).

Grapevine-Colleyville ISD. 7 Dec. 2007. https://www.buffaloschools.org

King, M., Hoogland, T., Hootman, J., Schoenborn, M. E., & Skupeko, L. (2018). College

Access, Historical Research, and Student Empowerment: The National History Day

Partnership in Minnesota. *The History Teacher*, 52(1), 89–118.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/26646475

Kolmos, Anette. Problem-Based and Project-Based Learning. Sense Publishers, 2007.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). *Culturally relevant pedagogy: Asking a different question*. Teachers

College, Columbia University.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria (2021). I'm Here for the Hard Re-Set: Post Pandemic

Pedagogy to Preserve Our Culture. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 54:1, 68-78, DOI:

10.1080/10665684.2020.1863883

Laverick, Erin Knoche. *Project-Based Learning*. TESOL Press, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hamline/detail.action?docID=6447707.

Leake, M. & Lewis, C. (2017). Recommendations for Designing CS Resource Sharing Sites for All Teachers. *SIGCSE.*

Minnesota Department of Education. (2011). Social Studies Standards. Retrieved from https://education.mn.gov/mde/dse/stds/soc/

Minnesota Historical Society. (2022). About History Day MN. National History Day MN. Retrieved from https://www.mnhs.org/historyday

Minnesota Historical Society & the University of Minnesota. (2019). 2018-2019 At A Glance.

Minnesota Historical Society. (2019). 2019 National History Day Outcomes: History Day in Minnesota.

Minnesota Historical Society. (2019). 2019 National History Day Educators: National History Day in Minnesota.

Minnesota Historical Society. (2022). Why Teach History Day? Retrieved from https://www.mnhs.org/historyday/teachers/why-teach-history-day

Monaco, G., Lu, B., & Wood, M. (2009). Impact of the National History Day in Ohio Program on Students' Performances: Pilot Evaluation Project. *The Journal of Museum Education*, 34(1), 79–96. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40479717

Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic Inc.

National History Day. (2018). NHD Testimonials. NHD: National History Day. Retrieved from https://www.nhd.org/testimonial

National History Day (2018). Teacher Resources. Retrieved from

    https://www.nhd.org/teacher-resources

Nelson. (2016). Student engagement and project-based learning in the social studies classroom.

    Hamline University. https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/4243

Norris-Bauer, N. (2015). History Day Program. *Education Digest*, 81(4), 44–46.

Ryan, & Shim, S. S. (2008). An Exploration of Young Adolescents' Social Achievement Goals

    and Social Adjustment in Middle School. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100(3),

    672–687. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.100.3.672

Scales, P., Van Boekel, M., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A., & Roehlkepartain, E. (2020). Effects of

    developmental relationships with teachers on middle‑school students' motivation and

    performance. *Psychol Schs*, 57, 646–677.

Sloan, K., Rockman, S. (2010). National History Day Works: Findings from the National

    Program Evaluation. Rockman Et Al.

    https://www.nhd.org/sites/default/files/whynhdmatters/NHDReport_Final3.pdf

Steenhuis, Roland, L., & Kulik, B. (2017). *Project-Based Learning : How to Approach, Report,*

    Present, and Learn from Course-Long Projects. Business Expert Press.

University of Colorado Denver (2021). Student and Teacher Resources. Retrieved from

    https://clas.ucdenver.edu/nhdc/student-teacher-resources

Uremovich, N. (2015). How do Mindset Interventions Affect 6th Grade Students' Mindsets.

    School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations. 107.

    https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/107

Wisconsin Historical Society (2021). National History Day - Teachers Toolkit. Retrieved from

    https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15533

Wood-Krueger, Odia. (June 2022). *Restoring Our Place: An analysis of Native American resources used in Minnesota's classrooms*. Prior Lake, Minnesota: Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

Zhang, X., Anderson, R., Morris, J., Miller, B., Nguyen-Jahiel, K., Lin, T., Zhang, J., Jadallah, M., Scott, T., Sun, J., Latawiec, B., Ma, S., Grabow, K., & Yu-Li Hsu, J. (2016). Improving Children's Competence as Decision Makers: Contrasting Effects of Collaborative Interaction and Direct Instruction. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(1), 194–223.