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Early Algona: A digital story

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Early Algona: A digital story

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Abstract

The 1986 classic teen movie, 'Ferris Bueller's Day Off' contains a scene that is all too familiar in today's high school classrooms. The history/economics teacher is addressing a classroom full of seemingly comatose students: In 1930, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, in an effort to alleviate the effects of the ... anyone? anyone? the Great Depression, passed the ... anyone? anyone? the tariff bill? The Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act? Which, anyone? Raised or lowered? ... raised tariffs, in an effort to collect more revenue for the federal government. Did it work? Anyone? Anyone know the effects? It did not work, and the United States sank deeper into the Great Depression. Today we have a similar debate over this. Anyone know what this is? Class? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone seen this before? The Laffer Curve. Anyone know what this says? It says that at this point on the revenue curve, you will get exactly the same amount of revenue as at this point. This is very controversial. Does anyone know what Vice President Bush called this in 1980? Anyone? Something-d-o-o economics. "Voodoo" economics! (Hughes, 1986).

Early Algona: A Digital Story

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Kathy Bottaro
July, 2012

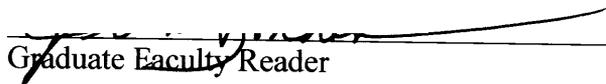
This Project by: Kathleen Bottaro

Titled: Early Algona: A Digital Story

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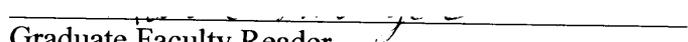
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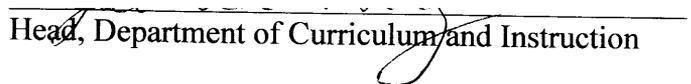

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 1986 classic teen movie, “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off” contains a scene that is all too familiar in today’s high school classrooms. The history/economics teacher is addressing a classroom full of seemingly comatose students:

In 1930, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, in an effort to alleviate the effects of the... anyone? anyone? the Great Depression, passed the... anyone? anyone? the tariff bill? The Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act? Which, anyone? Raised or lowered?... raised tariffs, in an effort to collect more revenue for the federal government. Did it work? Anyone? Anyone know the effects? It did not work, and the United States sank deeper into the Great Depression. Today we have a similar debate over this. Anyone know what this is? Class? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone seen this before? The Laffer Curve. Anyone know what this says? It says that at this point on the revenue curve, you will get exactly the same amount of revenue as at this point. This is very controversial. Does anyone know what Vice President Bush called this in 1980? Anyone? Something-d-o-o economics. "Voodoo" economics! (Hughes, 1986).

Clarke (2004) contends that history is too often preached to students and not experienced by them. He claims that while a teacher may have a genuine interest in history, he/she is often unable to transfer that enthusiasm to the students. In an effort to spark an interest in history, Clarke claims that teachers “can design activities that enable students to use authentic historical resources to pull engaging, meaningful and useful content from the past. One of the best approaches to learning about the usefulness of the past is through the study of local history (p. 83).

Local History

The study of local history is the least developed but most important form of history (Norris, 1985). By studying local history students are able to identify themselves within an historical context and recognize their “shared humanity and common problems” (National Standards, 1996). The study of local history presents the student with immediacy and a familiarity that is not often found in the study of world or national

history. It is history that possesses a context of locality. When a student is armed with knowledge of local history, there is a basis for the understanding of the broader landscape of historical events that played out on the national or world stage during that same time period. Local history must always be interpreted and examined through the context of concurrent national and world events (Norris, 1985). The study of local history, equips students to understand the larger narratives of the past (National Standards, 1996).

History is a source of pleasure, and according to David McCullough (2005) “it is a source of infinite pleasure the way that art and music and literature are and to deny our children that pleasure is to deny them a means of extending and enlarging the experience of being alive.”

Using Technology to Teach History

“This technology is destined to revolutionize our education system and . . .in a few years it will supplant largely, if not entirely the use of textbooks” (Berson et al., 2006, p. vii) or so thought Thomas Edison in 1922 when film was invented. It has not come to pass that film has supplanted textbook. The invention of the Gutenberg press in 1439 made the textbook possible and it revolutionized the acquisition of knowledge of Western civilization (Berson et al., 2006, p. vii). The chalkboard, mimeograph machine, ballpoint pen, public library, overhead projector, radio and television have all impacted the way information is transferred. However Berson argues, “The significance of the Internet as a societal and learning force might be surpassed by the invention of the written language” (p. vii).

McCullough (2005) asserts that “human beings are naturally interested in the past.” Yet in a survey of nearly 1, 500 adults in the United States, the most common complaint about history classes was that they were “boring” (Rosenzweig, 2000, p. 273). Barton (2005) states that history instruction is too often a “march through time” (p. 1)

that never quite connects to the present. History is frequently presented to students as a steady stream of facts, names, dates, and events without context or connection to the present. A teacher may have a passion for history, but that passion is rarely shared when history instruction is delivered in such a manner (Clark & Lee, 2004).

The elementary school student of today inhabits a technological landscape vastly different than the student of even ten years ago. Prensky (2001) refers to today's students as "digital natives" (p. 1). They were born and raised in the digital age. They are fluent in the language of technology; MP3 players, cell phones, video games, computers, and the Internet. These tools are an extension of the digital native's brain.

Conversely, adults, teachers included, are "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). They were not raised in the digital world; it is their second language. Like all second languages, it is not used with the fluency and the fervor that the first language is used. Nonetheless, digital immigrants must acknowledge the change in terrain and do their best learn the new language, no matter their comfort level.

Digital natives "think and process information fundamentally different from their predecessors" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). While studies show that students who use computers to do research projects score higher on standardized tests (National Standards, 1996), teachers are reluctant to abandon the teaching methods of their native, non-digital language. Prensky asserts that the biggest problem in education today is the struggle of the digital immigrant teachers trying to teach a population that speaks another language.

Algona, Iowa

Algona is located in north central Iowa. Algona, with a population of 5741 is the largest town in Kossuth County (2000). Algona also serves as the county seat of Kossuth County.

Algona was founded in 1854 by two brothers, Asa and Ambrose Call. The brothers were Ohio natives. When they were in their earlier twenties, they headed west to Iowa to seek their fortune (Call, 2006).

Cowles (1929) writes that in July of 1854, the brothers found themselves traveling a newly furrowed path that went from Dubuque, Iowa to Iowa City, Iowa. The Call brothers continued west from Iowa City to a recently abandoned fort in Fort Dodge, Iowa. At Fort Dodge, they visited with several surveyors who had recently returned from an area forty miles north of the old fort. The surveyors had “been robbed by Indians in Kossuth county” (p. 9) but they told the Call brothers of “fine groves of timber and splendid land to the north” (p. 9). The brothers decided to take their chances and two days later, July 9, 1854; they reached a site two miles southeast of Algona. They camped and spent the next day exploring the site of present day Algona. On reaching a bluff overlooking the Des Moines River, Asa proclaimed “Ambrose, I believe this is the place for our city. We will build the Court House right here on this high ground” (p. 11). The Call brothers made their dream a reality and within a year had returned with several others to start laying the groundwork for their new town.

History and the Elementary Curriculum

The State of Iowa mandates that social studies be taught in Iowa schools in grades one through six. The mandate further states that social studies instruction “shall encompass geography, history of the United States and Iowa, and cultures of other peoples (Iowa, 2008). Fifth graders in the Algona Community School District in Algona, Iowa study Iowa history, Kossuth County history, as well as Algona history to fulfill the state’s requirement. The Director of Curriculum of the Algona Community School District, Dave Kerkove, in an interview, laments the fact that there are very few resources written for fifth graders on Iowa history. He notes that there are even fewer resources

available on Kossuth County or Algona history. The burden falls on the teachers to piece together some type of unit to teach local history. It is not the optimum situation but it is the best that can be done (D. Kerkove, personal interview, January 23, 2008). Armed with this knowledge, this researcher will address the problem of lack of Algona history resources by creating a web site for fifth graders to be used to support the local history curriculum.

Problem Statement

Local (Algona) history is a component of the fifth grade curriculum in the Algona Community School District. Currently, no resources written on a fifth grade level are available for use by students or teachers.

Research Questions

This researcher will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What information regarding the founding of Algona constitutes appropriate content for the middle elementary audience?
2. Which web design features are best suited for the presentation of historical content for a fifth grade audience?
3. Which facets of the history of Algona best lend themselves to digital presentation?

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to create an information rich local history resource about the founding of Algona, Iowa. This resource, a website, will serve to enhance the fifth grade local history curriculum.

Assumptions

There is a need for a digital local history resource for the fifth grade curriculum of the Algona Community School District. The website will be designed with the fifth grade

student as the targeted user; but the site may appeal to local history enthusiasts of any age. The web site will fill a void created by the lack of accessible local history resources available to the elementary student. It is assumed that there will be enough information available to create a web site of historical value and educational merit.

Limitations

This research project will not produce a complete history of Kossuth County. This web site will focus on the first 50 years of Algona's history with emphasis on the story of the founding families. Resources available to the researcher may affect the scope of the project. A domain name and web hosting site will need to be secured. There will be a nominal monthly cost to keep the site online. The Kossuth County Historical Association will maintain, monitor and update the site.

Significance

Clarke (2004) states that "studying local history combines the benefits of authenticity and active engagement. Local history inquiry also provides fertile ground for improving student's ability to contextualize their historical thinking and, in turn engage in self-reflection" (p.84). Students of the 21st century are attracted to the tools of digital technology (Prensky, 2001). Therefore the creation of a website devoted to the history of Algona can only stand to benefit the young digital natives who will be embarking on their curricular required journey back in time via the Internet.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The fifth grade social studies curriculum in Algona, Iowa includes a unit of study of the history of Algona. The problem lies in the fact that there is very little age-appropriate material written on the subject.

The purpose of this project is to create an age-appropriate resource, a website, for fifth graders and their teachers in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of the history of Algona. Research to support this project lies in three areas: the study of history, the significance of narrative history, and the usability of children's websites.

The Study of History

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), a national organization devoted to supporting social studies educators, believes that the primary goal of public education is to prepare students to be active, engaged, and effective citizens (Creating, para. 2, 2001). The NCSS maintains that to be effective citizens students need to possess knowledge about "people, history, and traditions that shaped our local communities, our nation, and our world" (Creating, para. 2, 2001).

Ravitch and Finn (1987) conducted the first national assessment of seventeen-year-old students' knowledge of history and literature. The test was administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is a "federally funded project that has been testing American students regularly since 1969" (p. 3). Eight thousand high school juniors were tested on their knowledge of history and literature. Ravitch and Finn reported that "on the history portion of the assessment the national average is 54.5 percent correct; on the literature portion; the national average is 51.8 percent correct"

(p. 1). The lack of history education was a primary factor in the poor showing of the seventeen-year-olds. Ravitch and Finn found that most “most elementary school children study history only one year usually in fifth grade, and history in the middle school years has no pattern, no assured place at all” (p. 8). High school students on the average studied one year of American history. World history was rarely required and not always offered.

Ravitch and Finn (1987) interpreted the results as a failure of the system to impart the necessary historical truths required for full participation in a democratic society. They stated that the ignorance of historical matters handicaps this generation as they enter adulthood. Concern about the upcoming generation led Ravitch and Finn to query:

Can they make sense of what they see and hear? Do they have perspective to separate what is important from what is trivial? What is durable from what is ephemeral? Can they interpret the significance of the day’s news? Are they capable of introspection? (p. 202)

Ravitch and Finn (1987) contended that that history cannot be taught well in a hurry. It needed to build one year on the next. They believed that one year out of twelve is not enough for history instruction. Like all other curricular subjects, history, needed to be reinforced from year to year. Ravitch and Finn recommended that history be “taught continuously throughout the formal years of schooling” (p. 206).

The Bradley Commission on History in Schools was formed in 1987 in response to what was viewed as an inadequacy, both in quality and in quantity, of history taught in American schools. The commission stated that:

Unlike many other peoples, Americans are not bound together by a common religion or common ethnicity. Instead our binding heritage is a democratic vision of liberty, equality, and justice. If Americans are to preserve that vision and bring it to daily practice, it is imperative that all citizens understand how it was shaped in the past, what events either helped or obstructed it, and how it has evolved down to the circumstances and political discourse of our time (p. 8)

The Commission's goal was twofold: to explore the conditions which contribute or hinder the effective teaching of history in the elementary and secondary schools, and to make recommendations on the role of history in the curriculum as well as recommendations to improve the teaching of history in the classroom.

The Bradley Commission spent two years researching the state of history as a curricular subject using surveys to gather data from schools across the United States. In 1989, the Bradley Commission published its findings. They discovered that while other social science classes such as health and driver's education had increased within secondary curriculums, the number of required history courses had declined. In addition, the Commission found that 15% of students do not take any American history course while in high school and nearly 50% of students do not take a World history course.

The Commission proposed nine recommendations to support history as a curricular subject. First and foremost, the commission stated that "the knowledge and habits of mind to be gained from the study of history are indispensable to the educations of citizens in a democracy" and so the study of history should be required of all students (p. 12). Among the further recommendations, the commission asserted that "the kindergarten through sixth grade social studies curriculum be history-centered" (p. 12). In addition, the Commission recommended that the curricular time devoted to the study of history be increased and that a full four years of history be required between the seventh and twelfth grades. The Commission asserted that "American history tells us who we are and who we are becoming" (p. 12) and thus the necessary time must be devoted to the study of the historical realities of our nation.

The Bradley Commission (1989) contended that "the knowledge and habits of mind to be gained from the study of history are indispensable to the education of citizens

in a democracy“ (p. 12). It is not enough for students to take one year of American history throughout the course of twelve years of formal education—democracy as we know it is in peril.

Wineburg (2000) conducted a longitudinal study of fifteen eleventh graders. The students attended three different high schools; a private prep school, a private Christian school and a public school. Wineburg’s goal was to find out how teens’ historical understandings are shaped. Wineburg spent over a year with the students. He conducted over 150 interviews, audited 130 hours of history classes, taped lectures, and catalogued over 2000 pages of tests and assignments. In an attempt to discover how the teenagers understood their own pasts, Wineburg conducted family interviews. One of the male subjects and his parents were asked to look at pictures from the Vietnam War era. They listened to several songs from that era and were asked for their responses. The parents became very emotional and related personal experiences from that time period. Their teenage son was unemotional and made several comments about the war. Neither of his comments was taken from class lecture or readings. One of the comments was historically incorrect. When pressed to disclose his source for his comments, the boy referenced the movie, *Forrest Gump*. An additional comment that the boy made about the benefits of war was gleaned from Steven Spielberg’s movie, *Schindler’s List*.

Although small in scope, Wineburg (2000) found a similar trend in his subjects. Not only are teens historical understandings shaped by teachers and parents, they are also formed by movies and other pop culture sources. Educators face the challenge of presenting history in an inviting and engaging manner to counteract the always engaging world of movies. Wineburg suggested that educators “try and understand how these forces shape historical consciousness and how they might be used, rather than spurned or simply ignored, to advance students’ historical understanding” (p. 323).

Epstein (1993) writes, “History speaks to our individual and collective humanity. It keeps us connected to our ancestors and enables us to understand and appreciate the minds, mores, and the experiences of others ... And in its lessons about the ordinary, the extraordinary, and the extreme, history divulges the depth and breadth of human experience” (p. 5). The fostering of such understanding is imperative in the interdependent world landscape of the 21st century.

Digital History in the Social Studies Classroom

According to historian John K. Lee (2003) “Digital history is the study of the past using a variety of electronically reproduced primary source text, images, and artifacts as well as the constructed historical narratives, accounts or presentations that result from digital historical inquiry” (p. 2191). John Lee maintains that “despite similarities, digital historical resources are different from non-digital materials in at least four ways: 1) digital historical sources are more accessible, 2) they are easier to manipulate, 3) they are searchable, and 4) the flexibility of the web allows for a dynamic organizational strategy” (p. 2192).

Over the past twenty years Lee has conducted a number of studies analyzing the practice of digital history in social studies instruction. Lee (2003) maintained that the Internet has dramatically affected teaching and learning in the history/social studies classroom. He noted that “students and teachers now have access to materials in places and at times that were previously unimaginable” (p. 2191). In addition, Lee contended that as students navigate their way through previously difficult to access resources and use current technology tools to interpret and analyze these resources, “teachers will no longer be able to present history *prima facia*” thus changing the face of history instruction forever. (p. 2191). Lee stated that students, who have the same access to resources as historians, will be able to construct their own narratives in the same manner as historians.

Technology has forever changed the course of social studies instruction according to Lee, and teachers and students are the better for it (p. 2194).

In 2003 Lee conducted a study in which he surveyed 73 high school social studies teachers from a large southern urban/suburban school district in an effort to find “the extent to which teachers are using digital historical resources and the ways in which they are using them” (p. 2191). The four-part, 84 question surveys addressed a multitude of topics: participant’s background, philosophy of social studies instruction, the use of primary sources, and comfort with technology and the use of digital resources/tools.

Lee found that a majority of the participating teachers used primary sources in their history instruction. The frequency of use varied with 42% of teachers indicating that they used primary sources weekly while 32% said they used primary sources several times a year. Ninety –five percent of the respondents indicated that they used primary resources made available in textbooks while 86% of the teachers said that they accessed primary historical resources from the Internet. Time and computer access were the limiting factors in the use of digital historical resources. The participants indicated that they were not entirely comfortable using technologies beyond e-mail and word processing applications, yet they understood the promise that digital resources offered students. Participants agreed that “teaching with web-based materials was different than teaching with traditional historical materials” and that the Internet was a valuable vehicle for accessing “previously unattainable resources” (p. 2194). Participants agreed that their teaching styles changed when they were using digital resources. They also acknowledged that the Internet allowed the students a more active role in analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating historical questions.

Historian Scott Scheuerell’s study of ten National History Day participants yielded results similar to Lee’s regarding the impact of technology on student

engagement in historical research. Scheuerell (2007) conducted a qualitative study of participants competing in the documentary portion of the 2005 National History Day competition. Concerned with the NAEP's 2005 findings that 57% of high school students were not proficient in their knowledge of our nation's history, Scheuerell hypothesized that the traditional approach to history instruction: lecturing, memorization and reading from textbooks was the culprit.

The National History Day competition requires students to research a question, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize their research and produce a presentation of their findings. In the documentary portion of the competition, the students showcase their results in a video documentary that they produce using the digital tools of their choosing. Scheuerell wondered if this hands-on constructivist approach to history instruction might be a viable alternative to traditional history instruction.

Scheuerell conducted 60-90 minutes interviews with 10 National History Day participants. He viewed the documentaries produced by the students, examined the judges' evaluations, and reviewed the bibliographies of each documentary. The students conducted a majority of their research on the Internet. Scheuerell noted that the 10 students used 385 primary sources and 283 secondary resources in their research process. Like Lee, Scheuerell indicated that access to digital resources contributed to the quality of research done by the students. He commented that by taking advantage of ready access to digital historical documents "the students became real historians by using primary and secondary sources, considering multiple perspectives, analyzing what happened, and developing their own interpretations" (p. 419).

In his findings Scheuerell noted "that the documentaries the students had produced, their insights revealed in the interview, and the evaluations written by the judges, taken together prove to me the students were becoming student historians and

student experts” (p. 424). The interviews revealed the students’ excitement regarding their use of the Internet to conduct research and the opportunity to produce a digital product showcasing their findings. Scheuerell concluded that in order to develop digital historians, students must have the opportunity to use technology. He maintained that the Internet levels the playing field and provides students access to documents and perspectives that allow them to be active participants interpreting history. Finally, Scheuerell asserted that the students overwhelming enthusiasm for using digital tools in researching and creating their final project should cause teachers to re-evaluate their traditional methods of social studies instruction.

The Usability of Children’s Websites

In order to design a website for children there are many factors to consider: ease of navigation, size and appearance of text, graphic design, page layout, and accessibility. Several studies have been conducted analyzing websites for children and maximizing their efficacy.

Nielsen (2002) conducted usability studies with 55 students between the ages of 6 and 12. Thirty-nine of the students were from the United States, while the remaining sixteen were from Israel. The children were observed navigating 24 websites designated as children’s websites. The children were also allowed to use three sites designed for adults: Yahoo!, Amazon, and Weather.com. Nielsen found that excessive text was a hindrance to the younger students. Boys were particularly annoyed with too much text – 40% complained about it compared to only 8% of the girls. Despite that difference, Nielsen suggested that most usability issues do not relate to gender differences.

Nielsen found that children cannot readily distinguish between advertising and content. They consider ads one more source of content. Nielsen observed that the students rarely scrolled through a page; rather they perused the content on the screen and

then clicked to another screen. He found students were very conscious of content for a different age level. They were critical of pages that contained material which they considered to be “for babies” (para. 13). Nielsen concluded that children were looking for website that is “entertaining, funny, colorful, and uses multimedia” (para. 21). He surmised that content should be easy to access or children will click away to somewhere else.

Arsenault (2003) conducted a usability study of 24 commercial websites designed for children. The participants in the study were eight students from a private school in Montreal. The children ranged in age from 6 to 12. Arsenault’s findings were extensive and multi-faceted. Students were impatient with pages that downloaded slowly. They easily located hyperlinks while they avoided long lists of bulleted items. Too many frames were a drawback and appeared to confuse the children. Arsenault suggests that illustrations and photos should be distributed throughout the site and not concentrated on one page. Pop-ups should be kept to a minimum.

Like Nielsen, Arsenault (2003) noted the impatience of children with overly long web pages. The students were annoyed with sites that required passwords, and quickly navigated away from them. Arsenault noted that the children tended to use the web browser’s back button rather than the navigational tools within the site. Colorful fonts and graphics appealed to both genders although girls tended to prefer lovable characters. However, logos were not important to the children. Arsenault noted that authorship of the site did not concern the children unless they were looking for information for a school assignment.

Naidu (2005) examined the usability of three children’s websites: Factmonster.com, Enchantedlearning.com and Infoplease.com’s Homework Center. The sites were similar in content but differed in user interface. The participants in the study

were 30 elementary-aged children with the mean age of 8.5. There were 17 females and 13 males in the group. Each of the students had at least one year of computer and Internet experience. Each participant was assigned one of the websites. Participants were given a set of seven questions for which they needed to find the answer. The students were given approximately 30 minutes to complete the task. They were then asked to rate their experience with the website.

While the children rated their experiences as positive, they had difficulty finding the answers that they needed. The children working on Factmonster.com experienced a 67.5% success rate while the students working with Homework Center only had a 43% completion rate. As Naidu noted, these results “are not good odds for a child attempting to complete a homework assignment” (para. 9).

Naidu concluded that the web pages were often too lengthy and the children did not scroll past the first screen. This was detrimental when the help button was at the bottom of the page. The Homework Center had too many links on each page while Factmonster.com had fewer category links and was easier for the children to find keywords. Simple terminology was also a key to success. Enchantedlearning.com and Factmonster.com used easier and more descriptive phrases to identify topics than the Homework Center.

Like Nielsen, Naidu noticed that the children tended to lose track of the back button, and they tended to be distracted by animated advertisements. Pop-ups also posed a problem when the children couldn't close out of them, and sometimes inadvertently closed out of the entire web page. Naidu concluded that “terminology, number and organization of links location of information above the fold and length of individual pages all influenced performances on the tasks” (para. 20). Naidu stressed the importance

of considering usability studies when designing websites for children in order to provide for ease of use.

Summary

In an effort to create a vibrant learning experience, a website will be created detailing the settlement of Algona, IA. The site will include journal entries, audio, video, photographs, stories, and connections to the present community. It will also feature descriptions, analyses, and evaluation of primary documents. Facets of the website will be interactive. As suggested by Ravitch and Finn (1987), the human dimension of the early settlers will be emphasized. Consideration will be given to the usability research cited and the website will be designed with features conducive to the navigating patterns of the elementary school student.

“History as a tale well told is both an honorable tradition and a powerful teaching tool” (Ravitch, 1987, p. 211). In the 21st century the tale of the history of Algona, IA can be well told using current technologies.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

The fifth grade social studies curriculum in Algona, Iowa includes a unit of study of the history of Algona. While the area enjoys a rich historical tradition and the presence of an active local historical society, there are very few age-appropriate historical materials available for children. Fifth grade teachers are left to cobble together their own Algona history unit (Kerkove, 2008).

Description of the Project

The purpose of this project was to create an age-appropriate resource, a website for fifth graders and their teachers to facilitate the teaching and learning of the history of Algona. Currently all materials used in this history unit are print sources. A digital presentation of information allows for access to primary documents previously not accessible to the students. The presence of multimedia artifacts and resources offered a new dimension to the presentation of materials previously only offered in print. The website will serve as a supplementary resource for the study of the history of Algona. It is not meant to replace the current resources used in the unit of study.

The primary audience for this website was fifth graders in the Algona Community School District. However, the site was constructed in such a manner to appeal to all those interested in learning about early Algona.

Procedure

Initially the researcher gathered all information available concerning the years surrounding the founding of Algona. The researcher began with cursory searches at the Kossuth County Historical Society, the Algona Public Library and the Algona Upper Des Moines. Local librarians and museum volunteers were invaluable with their assistance and direction.

The researchers discovered several books that had been written by the early settlers: *Early Algona: The Story of Our Pioneers* by Florence Call Cowles, *Ten Years on the Iowa Frontier: Pioneer Experiences of Wm. H. Ingham in the Fifties* by William Ingham, and *The History of Kossuth County* by B. F. Reed. The researcher also found an original copy of *Old Indian Days* which was a collection of settlers' stories that had appeared in the local newspaper. These volumes were invaluable not only providing facts and dates but also provided a narrative component that the researcher had hoped to find.

Photographs, maps, letters, and other print artifacts were digitized for use on the website. Local historical sites in and around Algona were visited and photographed. The necessary permissions were secured prior to publishing artifacts on the website.

The researcher sifted through historical artifacts to determine the best information for the site. In keeping with David McCullough's (2005) directive that to get children interested in history, one should tell a story, the researcher focused on facts that lent themselves to narrative. Emphasis was placed on the early settlers, their lives, their decisions and the footprint that they left on the Algona. The researcher chose themes and categories best suited to the narrative format. The depth and breadth of appropriate information uncovered determined the depth and breadth of the website. The website design was also dependent on available information and themes chosen to best deliver content.

Once sufficient information was gathered and sorted, the researcher focused on the construction of the website. A subscription to a website hosting service, Weebly.com, was purchased by the researcher. While Weebly.com offered a free website hosting service, the free service did not allow for the uploading of videos and other features that the researcher deemed necessary for a rich interactive website. Weebly.com offered a user-friendly, click and drag, website construction experience. The ease of use was

critical in the decision to create the site on Weebly as the researcher will pass maintenance of the site to Kossuth County Historical Association in the near future.

Construction of the site began once the site licensing was secured. Findings from the studies of usability of children's websites offered the roadmap for the construction of the site. Nielsen (2002) found that children do not like to scroll on a website page; they will advance to another screen rather than scroll. Much like a newspaper that prints its most important news above the fold, this researcher tried to keep the content "above the fold" or on one screen to minimize the need for scrolling. Mindful that the children in the Nielsen study also responded favorably to colorful sites that offered multimedia experiences (para. 21), the researcher chose bright colors for the site. However, there was an effort though to stay within a certain color scheme and not have color for color's sake. Most artifacts that were digitized and uploaded to the site were black and white or sepia tones, so the researcher used red and gold tones in site construction in an effort to increase student engagement and enhance the nature of the digitized artifacts.

Arsenault's (2003) study of usability of children's websites found that children preferred to have illustrations and graphics distributed throughout the site rather than concentrated in one area, therefore, the researcher was mindful of the placement of graphics. The researcher designed the web pages to have graphics in the upper left and lower right corners of the pages. To maintain consistency, the header was uniform throughout the site

Children respond to and expect interactivity in their web browsing (Nielsen, 2002) so the researcher included multimedia components on the website. Links to videos that would explain abstract concepts i.e. milling and cooking in a fireplace were included. Several related interactive games that would advance student learning were also linked to

the site. The researcher chose not to include lower level think games (such as matching games) on the site. The researcher included spoken word files.

Cognizant of children's distaste for too much text on a webpage, (Naidu, 2005) the researcher tried to keep the text at one or two paragraphs per page. Text was measured against the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Scale to ensure that word and sentence length score within the range of the reading level of an average eleven-year-old. The researcher found that the text often scored above the fifth grade level. The researcher made an effort to adjust the text accordingly. It was decided that perhaps some of the words being used would be unfamiliar to today's fifth grade student thereby elevating the reading level and frustrating the student. The researcher decided to add a glossary for unusual terms to facilitate comprehension.

Font size, and number, location and organization of links were scrutinized by the researcher. The number of links on the navigation bar was kept to six, so the researcher decided to run the navigation bar along the top of the webpage. Additionally, buttons were used as hyperlinks rather than text and always placed in the lower left corner of the webpage. The number of hyperlinks per page was capped at three.

The researcher examined notable websites for children and measured their design against the criterion garnered from the website usability studies. The researcher studied these sites to find common characteristics that may be applicable to the Early Algona site. The America Library Association (2012) also offered guidelines for creating effective websites for children. The ALA maintained that design elements on children's sites should be streamlined. Sites for children should be uncluttered and easy to navigate. The text should be a standard font without extreme variations. The ALA guidelines fully aligned with the findings of the usability studies.

The researcher decided how to best present the information in a clear and concise manner with an emphasis on the narrative. Themes emerged as the information was gathered. A concerted effort was made to keep the webpages streamlined and uncluttered. During the construction of the site, the researcher relied on resident historians to ensure that the information presented was accurate. The site was published once the researcher was convinced that a balance has been struck between information rich content and effective content delivery.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT

Early Algona: a Digital Story can be accessed at <http://www.earlyalgona.weebly.com>



The target audience for this website is students in grades fifth through eighth. The researcher designed the site to reflect the findings in the website usability studies noted earlier. The header is the same on all of the pages preserving a sense of uniformity throughout the site. Graphics were placed in the upper left and lower right corners of the pages. A standard font and font size was chosen for the text so as not to distract the student reader. The page features bold colors but not too many colors so as not to distract the student. The prominent red color featured in the site was chosen to accent the many black and white and sepia tone photograph used on the site. Both expository and narrative texts were used on the site to deliver content. The amount of text per page was limited to two or three paragraphs.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The fifth grade social studies curriculum in Algona, Iowa includes a unit of study of the history of Algona. The problem lies in the fact that there is very little age-appropriate material written on the subject.

The purpose of this project was to create an age-appropriate resource, a website, for fifth graders and their teachers in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of the history of Algona. Research to support this project was found in three areas: the study of history, the significance of narrative history, and the usability of children's websites.

Conclusions

The researcher was surprised to find a plethora of information written by or about the early settlers of Algona, Iowa. The founders of the town, Ambrose and Asa Call, were college educated men who spent an inordinate amount of time reading and writing. The brothers started a newspaper shortly after founding Algona. (The newspaper tradition ran deep in the Call family as Ambrose Call's son-in-law, Gardner Cowles, founded the Des Moines Register.) There were a number of reading and writing circles that were established in the 1850's in Algona. Some of the writings from members of those circles were published in the local paper and survive today. Several books were published that detailed the lives of the settlers: *Early Algona: the Story of Our Pioneers* by Florence Call Cowles, *Ten Years on the Iowa Frontier: Pioneer Experiences of William H. Ingham in the Fifties* by William Ingham and *The History of Kossuth County* by B. F. Reed. The researcher was able to purchase copies of two of those books and was able to check out an original copy of the third book from the Algona Public Library. These books along

with an essay compilation entitled *Old Indian Days* supplied over 90% of the information used on the website.

Because so much was written about the first 50 years of Algona, the town currently entertains a robust interest in re-telling the stories of the early settlers. There is an active group of Algona citizens that are involved with the Kossuth County Historical Association. For the last few years, Algona has hosted a weekend-long Founder's Day celebration in July. This celebration is dedicated to keeping the town's history alive. The researcher was able to visit with local residents that both maintain the Kossuth County Historical Museum and organize the Founder's Day festivities. Their guidance was invaluable.

One stumbling block for the researcher was the disdain of the settlers for the native Sioux tribes. There were countless negative references to the habits and temperaments of the native people. Given today's climate, it was shocking to read some of the adjectives used to describe the Sioux.

In the forward of her book, *Early Algona: The Story of Our Pioneers*, Florence Call Cowles, daughter of Ambrose Call, wrote, "I was never conscious of any racial or religious prejudice in my youth. Of course, slavery was never a problem in Algona as we had only one Negro family in the community." (Call, 1929, p. iv). Cowles goes on to relay comments made by settlers similar to the ones made by Mrs. Maxwell after an incident with Chief Inkpadutah at her cabin in 1855, "I have said the people of our settlement did not fully realize the terrible danger they had passed through. They did not know what blood-thirsty, villainous murderers these Indians were." (Call, 1929, p. 56).

The researcher struggled mightily trying to portray the encounters between the settlers and Sioux in a fair and balanced light. The winners write the history books. What has survived from this tumultuous time are writings and memories of fearful white

settlers. In 1851, the Sioux tribe had signed a treaty with the United States government giving up claim to their ancestral lands which were then settled by Asa and Ambrose Call three years later. The researcher has to believe that there was anger and fear among the Sioux as well. However, writings do not exist supporting that supposition.

The researcher took a more even-handed approach to the portrayal of the Sioux. One incident which is central to local history in north central Iowa is the “Spirit Lake Massacre.” In March of 1857, Chief Inpadutah and fifteen Sioux killed 35-40 settlers in Spirit Lake, IA. On the *Early Algona* website, this researcher refers to the event as the Spirit Lake Incident. A horrible event indeed but the researcher felt that the word “massacre” was too inflammatory for fifth graders and made the decision to change the verbiage.

Weebly.com was an effective and efficient web design platform to use. The researcher was able to easily upload video, audio, documents and photos to the Early Algona website.

Recommendations

During the information gathering stage of the website creation process, it became evident to the researcher that the site should be turned over to the Kossuth County Historical Association, the organization that maintains the historical museum. They work diligently to keep local history alive in the Algona community. The researcher had entertained the thought of turning maintenance of the site over to the Algona Community School District. After discussing the project with the members of the historical association, it became clear that they have the will and desire to keep the site updated.

Members of the historical society visit the fifth grade classrooms every year to tell the story of Asa and Ambrose Call and the founding of Algona. The website will be an informational and instructional tool that they will use with the students. It will also

provide a tool to extend teaching and learning beyond the limited amount of time that they have with each class.

Work needs to be done to understand the mindset of the Dakota Sioux in the 1850's. Their portrayal in the history of north central Iowa needs a more empathetic, even-handed approach. The researcher will continue to investigate and will update the website as new information is uncovered.

It is the hope of the researcher that the site may someday offer an interactive game along the line of the old computer game, *The Oregon Trail*. Children would have the opportunity to travel (virtually) from New York, Ohio, Indiana, etc. making decisions along the way: what to do if the wagon gets stuck in the mud, what to take to the new home, how to choose a site for a new home, etc. It is beyond the researcher's abilities to create such a game. But it is not beyond the abilities of the researcher to find someone who could create such a game.

Early Algona: a Digital Story will never be complete. There will always be additions and deletions. That is the promise (and headache) of creating a website. It is living digital tool that can respond to the ever-changing needs of the young people who are interested in learning about those who came before them.

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