

***Cultures of Independence:  
Perspectives on Independence Hall and the Meaning of Freedom***

**Evaluation of 2015 Teacher Workshops**

*This experience was one of the best that I have had in my 37 year teaching career. To be able to dialogue with historians, practitioners, and teachers about the history of our topics, teaching history was invaluable. (Response from NEH survey)*

The six partnering organizations of Cultures of Independence were devoted to evaluating the teacher workshop - from logistics to pedagogy to impact. Co-director Beth Twiss Houting, who also is an independent evaluation consultant, was put in charge of the process. The work began with the application process and continued through February 2016. Applications essays were used as a pre-test to later compare to the curriculum projects submitted by participants. A Survey Monkey questionnaire was sent to teachers within one week of their completing their workshop as well as one mid-academic school year 2015-2016. The results of the first summer survey were studied by the consortium members along with the results of NEH's online survey at a September post-workshop meeting during which partners considered whether to apply for a future Landmark grant. Based upon the overwhelming positive response from the participants as well as the fulfillment felt by the partners, the group unanimously decided to apply to repeat the workshop in the summer 2017, taking into account the learnings from the evaluation.

Overall, all of the teacher responses were very positive, though, as might be expected, there were some people who took divergent views. The NEH survey had a 50% response rate (36/70), while the HSP summer survey had a 74% return (52/70) and the mid-year one a 20% return (14/70). The main impression one gets in the summer surveys is that the teachers were especially grateful to be able to tour Independence Hall, to hear scholars, to be treated as researchers, and to meet each other. The most gratifying results were the fact that over half of the NEH respondents in the summer as well as 100% of mid-year respondents discussed how the workshop experience influenced their teaching, either about the founding of the country or local landmarks.

The impact of the workshop on the participants' knowledge of U.S. history, skill to integrate primary sources into their curriculum, and ability to teach with landmarks was positively and strongly indicated through the various evaluation elements. Participant responses were compared to the educational goals within the grant application:

- To broaden teacher knowledge of Independence Hall and its role in the entire spectrum of American history.
- To help teachers enrich their teaching about the nation's founding and the resonance of the founding principles over time.
- To illustrate to teachers how to reach beyond the specifics of a single landmark to provide a foundation for teaching about the broad contours of the nation's history by using the public buildings, monuments, and public spaces in their own communities.

- To help teachers open student eyes to the many layers of history that often are overlaid in one place.

Two participants summarized on the NEH evaluation what many indicated about increased content mastery:

*Overall I learned valuable new information about Independence Hall that I didn't know before. It also made me consider perspectives that I hadn't thought about. An example would be all the different freedoms that these landmarks represent. I had always thought about "freedom" as a general topic. These new perspectives are what I can share with my students.*

*I had no idea how important Philadelphia and Independence Hall are to our history beyond 1776 and 1787! Its history extends way beyond those events and I know that I will use these icons to teach the importance of icons in our history and how we view our history as American citizens.*

Another showed how this new information would be conveyed in the classroom: *"My students will have an enhanced experience of learning about the important symbols of America."* (NEH evaluation)

Many teachers commented on pedagogy – particularly on how to use primary sources in teaching.

*What I took away from the experience was a better understanding of how I can incorporate a wide range of primary sources and landmarks into my lesson plans. I felt that I learned how to dig deeper into primary sources to uncover a bigger story. I am now much more comfortable knowing how to get great information available to me at our area historical societies.* (NEH survey)

*I have a deeper focus on using primary sources in my content and having studies engage in inquiry base learning.* (Mid-year survey)

Particularly heartening was to see how many teachers had their eyes opened to the ways in which using landmarks as a teaching tool and source could be effective. A teacher commented in the NEH evaluation that s/he discovered

*A holistic approach to learning history. A great template from which any historic landmark can be studied. I can incorporate what I created into my classroom. Brings together local and national history.*

Later, mid-year, a participant shared that *"I was able to use local landmarks effectively in my teaching and also to coach fellow teachers in professional development about additional understanding from the conference, like who is it is it, who is being left out, etc."*

Another teacher in the NEH survey reiterated this last point, referring to many sessions where historiography was discussed:

*While this was not my first exposure to considering historical memory, I think this greater focus on the use of landmarks in teaching history and their connection to historical memory, will*

*impact my teaching as we consider what we choose to remember and what we choose to forget as a society. I will challenge my students to consider who is left out of the story of our history, as well as why we choose to remember certain events or people in a certain way.*

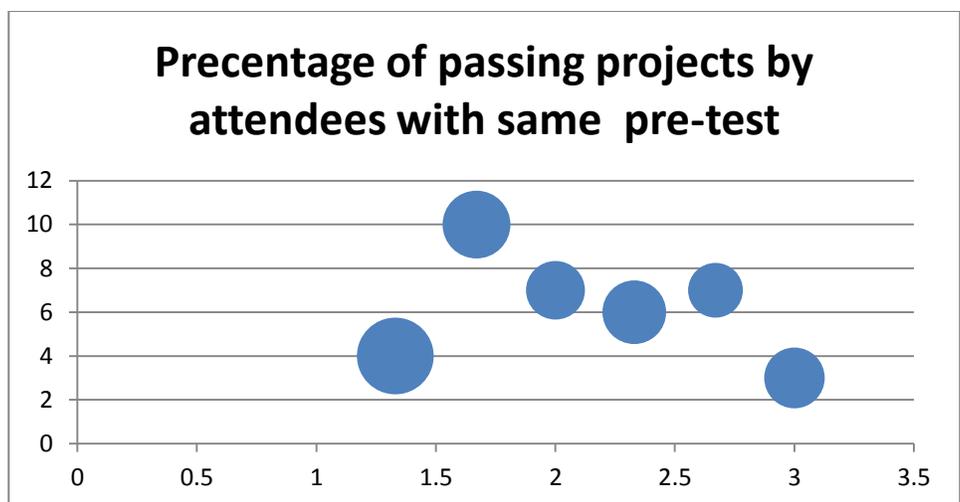
Another way to judge long-term impact is to consider how the workshop may have refined the ways in which teachers create curriculum. The thirty-seven lesson plan projects that now are published on HSP's website indicate how participants think about teaching history with landmarks. To try to determine the influence of the workshop on this lesson planning, Twiss Houting compared teachers' application essays to their projects. Teachers were to not only show understanding of the following but also indicate how they would use them in teaching: landmarks for local and national history lesson, ideas about collective memory and historiography, and use primary sources in teaching.

The "pre-test" portion of this evaluation process was done through evaluation of the applications to workshop against a rubric. This study was possible by requesting applicants include in their essays a response to the following prompt:

Describe a landmark in your community. How does it function as an icon? Tell us if you discuss this landmark in your curriculum now or, if not, how you wish to integrate it into your curriculum. How do you envision transferring what you learn in *Cultures of Independence* into your teaching?

Taken as a whole, Twiss Houting looked at the scores the selection committee gave applicants and the number of lesson plan projects that "passed" the rubric to be uploaded onto the website. What she found was that teachers who scored the highest on their applications and were chosen to attend *Cultures of Independence* did not end up accepting our invitation. For the teachers who came to the workshop and had scored in the upper half of the evaluation range (2.0-3.0 out of 4.0), those who turned in projects maintained their relative scores. What was most interesting and fulfilling, however, was that a greater proportion of those who came to the workshop who had the lowest entrance scores (below 2.0) ended up with passing projects. One conclusion may be that the workshops were most effective at improving knowledge and/or teaching skills for those teachers who needed it the most.

To read the following table: The x-axis is the score on the application essay. The y-axis relates to the number of projects that passed. The bubble represents the percentage of teachers within that score who had passing projects. In other words, while there were only 5 applicants who had pre-scores of 1.33 in the workshops, 80% of them had passing projects. This stands against the 17 teachers with pre-scores of 2.67 for whom only 41% of them had passing projects.



Though the evaluation process showed that the workshop were overwhelming successful, there, of course, is room for improvement. Criticism centered around four items: the tight focus of the course, the lecture format, the reading list, and the inability to tour other historic sites in Philadelphia. As the planning partners discussed these evaluations, we were somewhat surprised by some of the comments of a few of the participants who felt that the program was too history-focused and academic because we believed NEH was interested in sharing current history scholarship with teachers of all levels and fields. We also realized that schedule was quite full and that we purposely did not allow for time to tour sites not immediately relevant to the content (such as Betsy Ross’s house). Perhaps the promotion for these workshops should indicate that the workshops are highly focused learning experiences to help teachers integrate history into their classrooms by providing them with the scholarship fodder they need to create meaningful lessons.

We, however, took seriously the need to find a way to make the program more interactive.

*“Many discussions and activities were overly long, and could have been shorter, denser, and then followed by more interactive participation and discussion of how teachers in different places and grade levels might teach what we were learning.” (NEH evaluation)*

*“It would have been helpful for each presentation to offer more specific lessons that could be used as an instruction tool.” (Mid-year survey)*

For 2017, therefore, we have restructured the schedule to provide more time for sustained discussion in two ways: by leaving more time after each presentation and by structuring the time with the Master Teacher to be focused on practical applications as well as the reading

We had been concerned about the housing as center city Philadelphia does not allow for affordable group housing. About 50% of the participants did stay in the workshop hotel. While we received some

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complaints about price on both surveys, 87% of those who stayed in the hotel praised the proximity of the hotel to the workshop venues and overall gave the hotel a “very good” rating. Again, we can see where pre-registration explanations from us would be helpful. We also realized that, in future workshops, we could do more to help people find roommates.