

Assessing the Effect of Historic Site-Based Professional Development on History Teaching and Learning

I've read and read about the sticky seeds that make it so hard to clean the cotton. Now I get it.

– Teacher, Teaching American History Workshop,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution¹

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AT A NATIONAL MUSEUM of American History (NMAH) workshop in 2012, Virginia teachers participating in a Teaching American History (TAH) grant removed seeds from raw cotton by hand. They felt the softness of the cotton boll and the stickiness of the seeds as well as the challenge of separating the two. One teacher commented that this “made the experience so much more real” and another noted a new appreciation for the ways in which “even simple objects can provide a spark of interest and engagement.”² The tactile experience of touching a cotton boll, as recorded through TAH evaluation data, shaped the teachers’ understanding of slave life and work, making history more than words on a page.

The cotton boll activity exemplifies key elements of effective historic site-based learning, including the power of objects and hands-on activities to engage visitors. The experience motivated teachers to try new approaches in the classroom and to share the activity with colleagues. Several teachers designed related classroom

activities, using cotton bolls purchased through the grant to help students understand the significance of cotton in Virginia and nationally. Students in one classroom competed to extract seeds from cotton bolls, remaining intensely engaged throughout the activity. In a follow-up discussion, these students talked about the impact of the cotton gin on the economy, the challenges of harvesting cotton, and the lives of antebellum slaves, integrating their sensory experiences into a broader historical understanding. With teacher guidance, students made connections between the cotton gin and the growing demand for labor to harvest cotton.³

From 2001 through 2014, the U.S. Department of Education provided federal funds through the TAH program to support professional learning for American history teachers aimed at raising student achievement. For more than a decade, the program offered opportunities for school districts, museums, historic sites, and universities to work together to improve history education.⁴ TAH programs studied impact on teachers and students broadly, but evaluations typically included historic site-based professional development as one component within a larger whole. Reexamining TAH evaluation data with a focus specifically on historic site-based professional development offers an opportunity to ask new questions and shed light on specific aspects of professional development programming.

In 2014, Professors Christine Baron and Brenda Trofananko organized a research conference at Boston University with funding from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) to investigate both the effectiveness of historic sites as centers for history teacher professional development and the need for tools and research protocols for discerning and documenting teacher learning at historic sites.⁵ The authors of this article—a classroom teacher, a historian, a museum educator, and two educational researchers—met through collaboration on several TAH grants.⁶ Participation in this 2014 AERA research conference offered the authors an opportunity to review and analyze TAH data from multiple grants that related to teacher professional development at historic sites. We discovered that by tracing the path of a cotton boll from a museum workshop for teachers into the hands of fourth-grade students, we could begin to investigate the ways in which historic site-based teacher professional development impacts teaching and learning in the history classroom.

Date	Site Visited	Teachers	Grant
2011	National Building Museum	23	D.C.
2011	George Washington's Mount Vernon	23	D.C.
2011	U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum	23	N. VA
2012	National Museum of African American History and Culture (at National Museum of American History)	21	N. VA
2012	Monticello	14	N. VA
2013	National Mall	24	N. VA

Figure 1: Professional development workshops at historic sites.

Data

We started with the following question: What can we learn from existing TAH evaluation data about the impact of historic site-based professional development on teachers' knowledge and practice and on student learning? The evidence discussed in this article comes primarily from a TAH grant in northern Virginia, with additional examples from a grant based in Washington, D.C. Site-based data reflect visits by more than 100 teachers to six historical sites: National Building Museum, George Washington's Mount Vernon, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History/National Museum of African American History and Culture, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, and the National Mall (**Figure 1**). With the goal of making visible the experiences of participating teachers and the transfer of those experiences to the classroom, these sites were selected because of the multiple sources of evidence available for analysis (videos, site visit surveys, follow-up surveys, teacher-created primary source activities, reflective case studies, and classroom observations). The multiple data points offered a view of the immediate and long-term impact of historic site-based professional development on teachers' knowledge and pedagogy and on student learning.

Data was collected to provide evidence of teachers' experiences (video of site visits), teachers' perceptions (site visit and follow-up surveys), changes in practice (primary source activities, case studies,

classroom observations), and impact on student learning (classroom observations and case studies). Each data source captured a specific moment in the professional development cycle. Video of workshops at historic sites, for example, served as evidence of the professional development structure, content, strategies, and discussions in real time. Site visit surveys collected teachers' immediate responses to the professional development experience, while follow-up surveys captured teacher perceptions months and, in some cases, years later. Primary source activities developed by participating teachers, along with classroom observations and descriptive case studies of these activities, provided information on teacher retention of content knowledge as well as on classroom applications and student learning. Follow-up surveys offered insight into teacher perception of lasting historical understanding and skills.

We began by analyzing video from all six site visits. We had access to teacher site visit surveys from four of the sites: Monticello, National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the National Mall, as well as teacher interviews conducted after three workshops (Mount Vernon, NMAAHC, and National Building Museum). We were able to conduct follow-up surveys with teachers who visited three sites: Monticello, NMAAHC, and U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Our review of primary source activities, case studies, and classroom observations identified four classroom observations and one case study that related directly to workshops held at Monticello, NMAAHC, and the National Mall.

Video was recorded for TAH project websites and for the history education website *Teachinghistory.org* in an effort to understand and share best practices.⁷ Video footage documents the professional development experience, including teacher interactions with museum staff, exhibits, project historians, and fellow teachers. The research team reviewed video evidence from workshops at historic sites to assess the impact of professional development visits on teacher learning, identifying key moments of meaningful interaction as well as acquisition and processing of knowledge. These included self-reported learning of new information or skills during on-site teacher interviews.

The site visit surveys, conducted on the day of each site visit, asked teachers what they found most beneficial about the visit,

whether and how the site visit increased their understanding of the topics addressed, and whether and how the site visit influenced their thinking about teaching content addressed during the visit. The follow-up surveys, conducted in December 2013, asked teachers to identify: 1) the most memorable aspect of the site visit; 2) the ways in which the experience benefited their knowledge and/or teaching; 3) something they learned during the site visit; 4) whether or not the experience changed the way they teach and, if so, in what ways; 5) what they recalled about the site visit guide; and 6) whether they used resources from the site.

During each grant, participating teachers created primary source activities to integrate content and strategies learned during workshops, including historic site visits, into the classroom and to share new knowledge and skills with colleagues. Each primary source activity included historical background, objectives, primary sources, materials, procedures, assessments, and references. Teachers received feedback at multiple points in the development process from historians, project staff, and fellow teachers and revised their activities accordingly. TAH project staff observed each participant teaching at least one activity. Teachers wrote case studies for each unobserved primary source activity, reflecting on implementation, student learning outcomes, and future revisions. Evaluators analyzed primary source activities as well as observation data and case studies to assess the integration of content and historical thinking skills and degree of transfer to the classroom. Classroom observation, primary source activity, and case study data were coded by evidence of connection to site visit content, pedagogy, and student learning. Participating teachers could draw upon any of the grant experiences in creating their primary source activities, so the inclusion of content from historic site-based professional development is notable. Once possible connections were identified, the grant coordinator then contacted teachers to verify the connection between the site visit and the activity.

It can be difficult to measure conceptual understanding derived from historic site visits, especially the notion of transfer learning, in which teachers learn an idea or concept that they can effectively translate into useful materials and experiences in the classroom.⁸ This is especially powerful if teachers can apply a concept—for example, translating statistics into people—across multiple topics

or points in history. Effective site-based professional development prepares teachers to encounter specific subject matter as well as new topics in the classroom. As researchers, we investigated strategies for connecting individual learning experiences and classroom performance. We suggest here that the rich data available in this case—the combination of videos, site visit surveys, follow-up surveys, classroom materials, and classroom observations—provide a window into this transfer of learning.

Thematic coding showed that data coalesce around six features of historical site-based professional development that demonstrate potential to advance teachers' history knowledge and pedagogy as well as student learning: exhibits, place, individual stories, ideas, multiple perspectives, and bridging teachers' experiences. Additionally, patterns in methods and practices relating to bridging teachers' experiences at historical sites to promote transfer of learning to the classroom were coded as situating learning, maximizing expertise, integrating reflection, maximizing sensory experiences, and providing iterative support.

Findings

This section explores two related, but distinct questions: 1) Does historic site-based teacher professional development impact teacher learning and understanding of history? 2) Does historic site-based teacher professional development impact student learning?

The Teacher Experience

The data suggest that well-designed professional development visits to museums, memorials, and other historical sites reinforce for teachers the importance of viewing history as a constructed narrative that goes beyond a traditional “textbook” understanding of the past. Site-based professional development has the potential to actively involve teachers in examining the ways in which history is told and taught.

During a 2011 visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, National Outreach Coordinator Christina Chavarria emphasized the impact of individual stories when teaching and learning about the Holocaust (**Figure 2**). She encouraged teachers

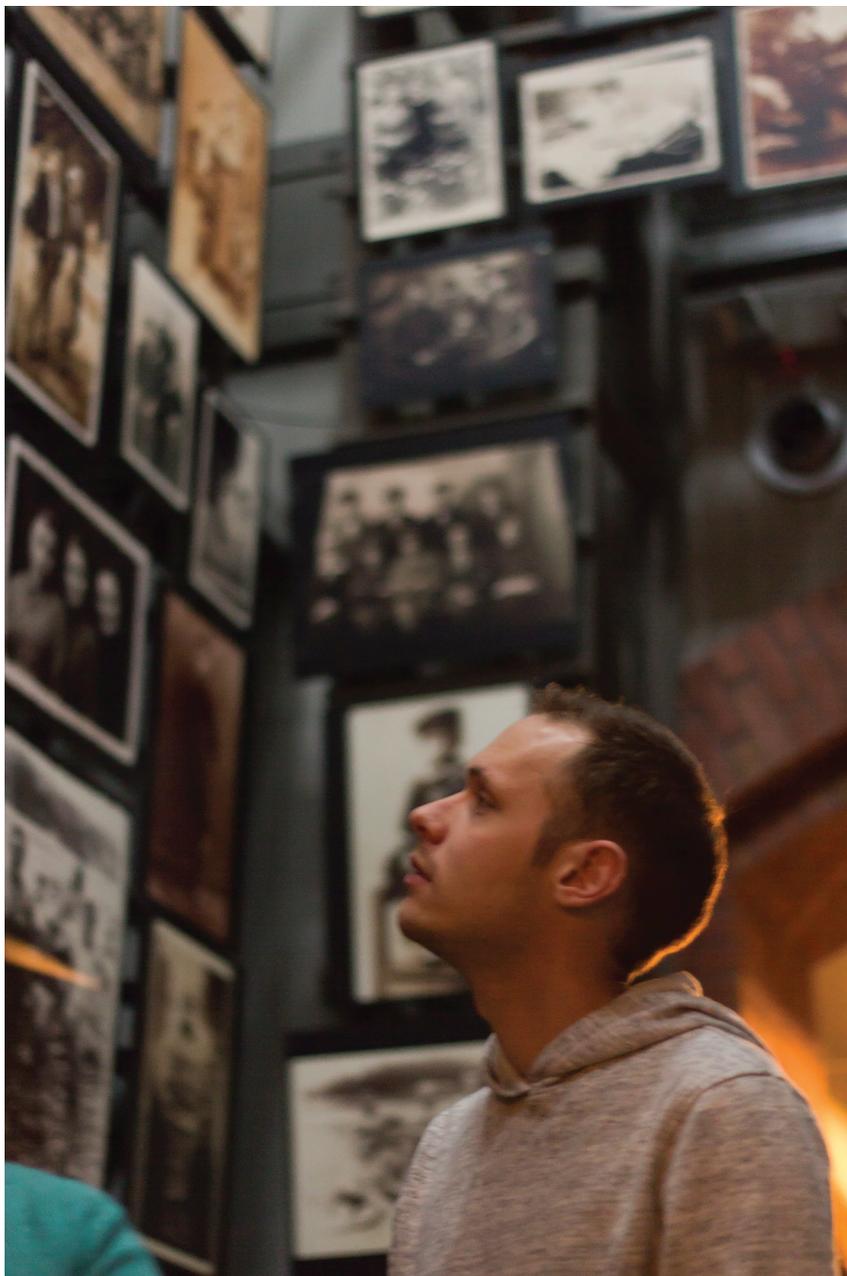


Figure 2: The power of individual stories at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum engages teachers in the exhibition. Photograph by Chris Preperato.

to “translate statistics into people,” explaining that “instead of focusing solely on the millions of victims or the thousands who may have died in one place, you take those individual stories and you pull them out using primary resources.”⁹ This approach was echoed throughout the day, providing teachers with opportunities to consider not only the concept, but its application in multiple contexts as well. During the full-day workshop, a Holocaust survivor spoke with participating teachers about his experiences. Combined with Chavarria’s talk and the museum’s focus on individual stories, this made a powerful impression on the teachers, as evidenced in their site visit surveys. Participating teachers referred to the survivor’s talk as the most memorable and beneficial part of the visit. As one teacher noted, “The testimonials at the end put all the exhibits into perspective.” Another wrote, “It is a reminder that when teaching history, it is so important to teach about the humanity.” Teachers also benefited from the background information Chavarria provided about the exhibits and artifacts, balanced with time to explore the museum on their own.¹⁰

The historic site-based professional development referenced in this article typically included attention to the ways in which museum exhibits, historic sites, or memorials construct “arguments” about the past, including insight into the structure of specific exhibits, debates behind object or source selection, and strategies that museums employ to tell particular stories. Twenty teachers toured Mount Vernon in 2011 with Esther White, Director of Archaeology, who addressed this issue explicitly: “Every single thing that’s there, it’s all there for a reason. Someone has thought about even the direction that it will be placed...and what is next to it and why it’s there.” She emphasized that objects are carefully selected to work together with the goal of presenting “a whole story.” Later, White shared with the teachers an internal memo detailing the items in the exhibit they visited and explained the curatorial decision-making process. During the workshop, a teacher reflected on this experience and its impact on her thinking and teaching: “It’s really not enough to just say this is what history was.” She noted that she had learned to appreciate, on a new level, the importance of asking students “to really think” about the past, to “draw their own conclusions and make their own interpretations.” The process of “evaluating different sources and different places really leads them to a much deeper, richer

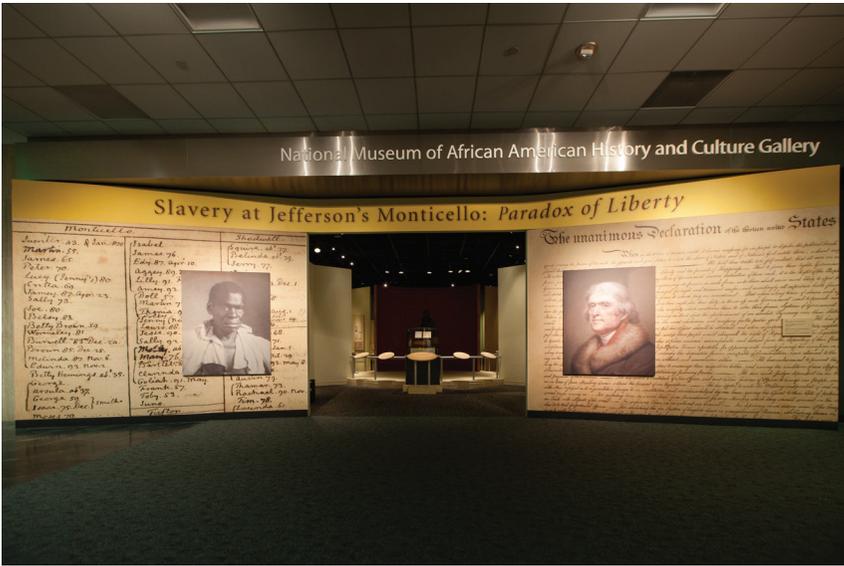


Figure 3: The entrance to the *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty* exhibit sets the stage for the rest of the exhibition. NMAH/NMAAHC. Photograph by Will Martinez.

understanding of history,” she reflected, that “stays with you and gives you things that you can actually work with in everyday life.”¹¹

Similarly, in 2012, Dr. Rex Ellis, Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs of NMAAHC, offered teachers a behind-the-scenes tour of the exhibit *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty*, co-curated by the NMAAHC and Monticello and housed at NMAH. Ellis started with an explanation of the curatorial process, emphasizing the decision to present the stories of individual slaves who worked at Monticello alongside materials about Jefferson's role in shaping America's founding ideals. By doing so, the curators worked to place both in a broader historical context. Ellis used the exhibit entrance (**Figure 3**) to illustrate the concept that history is complex: “What you see on the outside here are two visions that in some way suggest this whole paradox that we're talking about. Here is Thomas Jefferson and he's behind the Declaration of Independence. And here is Isaac Jefferson. He was a Granger, but he changed his name to Jefferson after he was freed. He is behind a farm book that Jefferson kept from 1770 all the way up until

the beginning of the nineteenth century.” After the tour, teachers reflected on the visual impact of the entrance, recalling the contrast between Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence on one side and slavery, as embodied by the farm book overlaid with an image of Isaac Jefferson, an individual slave, on the other.¹²

Later in the tour, Ellis discussed the curator’s goal of portraying Jefferson as a man who lived in a particular historical context and “grappled” with the issue of slavery “more than most.”¹³ The nuanced complexity of this concept resonated with teachers. One noted in a follow-up interview that Ellis’s point “summarized the entire exhibit...that intellectually Jefferson was ahead of his time, but philosophically he was a product of his time.” Another noted that Ellis “did a good job at not giving you the answer for how we should judge him [Thomas Jefferson].”¹⁴ One teacher wrote in a site visit survey that she had struggled to explain Jefferson’s ownership of slaves to her students before visiting the exhibit. Integrating the exhibit’s approach of using “specific names and places” of individual slaves, she noted, “really puts it into perspective.” Another teacher wrote that the experience “will help me explain the complexity of Jefferson’s position on slavery more effectively.” Inspired by the day, a third commented in the site visit survey, “I would like to spend more time [in my classroom] discussing the multiple perspectives of the founders.”¹⁵

Teachers continued the conversation during a follow-up workshop the next day, as documented by video footage.¹⁶ Dr. Christopher Hamner, lead historian for the grant, modeled the ways in which museum practice can be transferred to the classroom by asking the group how they would convey one person’s life, in all of its complexity, with a limited number of images and words. He continued, asking what a visitor might learn about Thomas Jefferson in the *Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello* exhibit, for example, compared with a visit to the Jefferson Memorial.¹⁷

Teachers participating in these historic site-based professional development workshops regularly discussed their growing awareness of the power of place. This includes, for example, the feeling a teacher experiences when overlooking the Potomac River from George Washington’s vantage point or seeing, close up, the nail rod used by a slave named James Hubbard at Monticello. It includes the tactile feeling, mentioned above, of physically touching a cotton



Figure 4: Teachers at the National Building Museum learn how a sketching activity encourages careful analysis. Photograph by Jennifer Rosenfeld.

boll. One teacher visiting Mount Vernon commented that seeing the plantation in person changed her thinking about how to teach with historic places: “when you walk through the mansion or the slave quarters, you see that most of the places are defined by the people.” She reflected on her growing awareness of this concept—“how you can learn about people through studying those places and how people define those places as well”—and her commitment to communicate this to students.¹⁸

Teachers at a National Building Museum workshop in 2011 investigated the power of place by examining objects. Mary Hendrickse, School and Youth Groups Coordinator at the museum, asked teachers from Washington, D.C. to practice their visual literacy skills by analyzing a Coca Cola bottle. Teachers then explored the museum building itself and sketched building details to help focus and process their thoughts (**Figure 4**). During the course of the workshop, one teacher commented, “I’ve been writing down how [Mary] has been teaching us, because that’s something that she’s

modeling for us.” Another teacher reflected, during a video interview, that she might be able to “actually do a field study to a site” with her students, “starting by analyzing the buildings that we’re in. So many D.C. schools have this history and if we just take the time to look at what’s around us, the buildings themselves tell an important story.”¹⁹

The video evidence and survey data from these historic site-based professional development experiences indicate several key approaches and practices that are effective in creating a positive impact on teacher learning. These include tours guided by experts who shared “insider” information about exhibits and artifacts as well as strategies for teaching history, time for teachers to explore sites on their own, and explicit conversations with teachers about connecting what they learned and saw with strategies for sharing that information with students using artifacts, objects, and primary sources.²⁰ What do these data, however, tell us about the impact on classroom practice and student learning? The next section examines ways in which the authors used data collected for a small sample of TAH projects to explore these questions.

Capturing the Student Experience

Video of teacher workshops and site visit surveys provided data on the immediate impact on teachers and their historical understanding. A next—and perhaps more challenging—step involved tracing this back to individual classrooms. Through the Loudoun County Public Schools TAH grant, the project team and evaluators collected evidence that allowed for an exploration of this connection for teachers who participated in site-based professional development workshops held at the *Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello* exhibit; at Jefferson’s home in Charlottesville, Virginia; and during a monuments tour on the National Mall. Data include primary source activities and reflective case studies created by participating teachers as well as classroom observations by TAH program staff. The following examples demonstrate models for exploring the ways in which teacher participants translated historic site-based professional development into classroom instruction. Specific examples emphasize the role of the individual in history, the importance of examining multiple perspectives, the power of objects and of place, and the potential of hands-on activities.

We observed the impact of the professional development experiences on teacher instruction during the 2012-2013 school year. Classroom data indicate that teachers who visited the *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello* exhibit in 2012 learned to incorporate multiple perspectives when creating primary source activities for classroom use. The primary source activity and classroom observation of one sixth-grade U.S. history teacher, for example, demonstrate her ability to integrate what she learned about teaching individuals in history.²¹ The activity asked students to compare and reflect on the treatment of slaves and indentured servants in colonial America through a close reading of two documents based on individual experiences: 1) an account by Olaudah Equiano of his capture in Africa and enslavement in the Americas; and 2) an account by Gottlieb Mittelberger of his journey to Pennsylvania and his life as an indentured servant in the 1750s.²²

The teacher began the activity with a refresher on primary sources and their role in the study of history. After explaining that students would investigate sources related to slavery and indentured servitude, the teacher reviewed questions for reading and analyzing each source, drawing on student historical thinking skills developed during the year. Working in small groups, students compared the sources and investigated the living and working conditions of each without information on the author's identity. After receiving the source information, students completed Venn diagrams comparing the experiences of slaves and indentured servants. They were struck by the differences between the narrative in their history textbook and these two accounts. This formative assessment helped students understand the challenging circumstances faced by slaves and indentured servants in colonial America and the importance of legal status for each man. The activity also helped students understand shifting conceptualizations of race in early American society. The teacher credited her time at the *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello* exhibit for the activity idea, especially the focus on multiple perspectives and on teaching about slavery through individual experiences.²³

Site visits included in this study also emphasized the power of objects in teaching history. In 2012, teachers visited Monticello to learn about life at Thomas Jefferson's plantation home with the goal of connecting that experience to lessons on Virginia and the Southeast more broadly. Monticello staff modeled an interactive activity that

engaged teachers in investigating four separate “pockets” containing everyday objects used by groups or individuals at Monticello during Jefferson’s lifetime. Teachers analyzed the objects and developed hypotheses about the owner of each pocket, including Jefferson’s eldest daughter, a plantation slave, and one of Jefferson’s grandchildren.²⁴ Dr. Elizabeth Chew, curator of the exhibit, *To Try All Things*, then led a guided tour highlighting strategies for using objects in classroom instruction to provide a window into the everyday lives of both famous and ordinary people.

Several participating teachers designed classroom activities that used objects in similar ways to engage students in learning about the past. One teacher designed a “pocket” activity for fourth-grade special education students. Pockets reflected the daily lives of a free man, woman, and child, and an enslaved adult living in Virginia in the colonial era. Students started by discussing what a person would carry in his or her pockets today (e.g., keys, cell phone, tissues, money). The teacher then provided each group with a pocket, asking students to analyze the objects and determine who would have used each item in colonial-era Virginia as well as how and why.

The activity built on a language arts unit in which students read historical fiction about life in colonial Virginia. Based on a case study by the participating teacher, students were able to make clear connections between tobacco notes found in one pocket and the importance of tobacco as a cash crop and currency in colonial times. They identified the skills that a colonial woman would have possessed based on the presence of a drop spindle, raw wool, a needle, and a darning egg in another pocket. Students were actively engaged in the investigation. The teacher reflected after the activity that it helped students visualize and conceptualize life in colonial Virginia in new ways.²⁵

Another major theme in the TAH data reviewed for this study is the power of place in helping teachers and their students make meaningful connections between personal narratives and ideas in American history. During these professional development opportunities, museums and historic sites provided teachers with opportunities to analyze place, including buildings and their surroundings, as they would any primary source.

In 2013, teachers visited the Lincoln Memorial and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial in Washington, D.C. Prior to the visit,

project historian Christopher Hamner provided background context for each memorial and encouraged teachers to examine memorials as evidence of the ways in which subsequent generations of Americans perceived and represented historical figures and events. Historian Wendi Manuel-Scott spoke to the group about the origins of the civil rights movement, using the Lincoln Memorial as a focal point. Manuel-Scott introduced primary sources related to the memorial's dedication ceremony in 1922, the Marian Anderson concert in 1939, and the March on Washington in 1963 to demonstrate how teachers could use the memorial itself to trace the evolution of the civil rights movement in the twentieth century. These presentations provided context for the site visit and enriched the experience for teachers, several of whom expressed interest, through site visit surveys, in using the concept of "place" in the classroom.

A primary source activity created by a participating teacher demonstrated integration of knowledge about U.S. memorials and strategies modeled during these site visits to a high school government class.²⁶ The activity guided students through an exploration of core principles of democracy by having them connect those principles to memorials on the National Mall. Students chose from the Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial. Students analyzed the memorials as primary sources, much as the teacher and her colleagues had done during the professional development visit.

After discussing these concepts, including individual freedom, majority rule, minority rights, equality of opportunity, individual worth, and compromise, students linked them to photographs of the memorials. Working in small groups, the teacher assigned a memorial to each group. Students researched their memorial and answered questions on the source and context of each, much as they would for any primary source. Each group presented their findings on their memorial to the class and explained the connections between the site and the principles of democracy. Students then shared their presentations with exchange students from Singapore and visited the memorials together. Both groups of students participated in a discussion on fundamental principles of democracy including how and to what extent those principles are practiced in Singapore and the United States today. Based on observation evidence and

the reflective case study, the activity provided students from both countries with the opportunity to examine democratic values locally and globally in a meaningful way.²⁷

These findings show that historic site-based professional development, including interactions with curators and the opportunity to analyze exhibits, artifacts, and other primary sources, can impact both teacher practice in the classroom and student outcomes. Teachers incorporated new ideas into the classroom, encouraging students to view history as a constructed narrative and to investigate multiple perspectives. Data indicate that structured TAH activities and assignments following the site visits, including feedback on draft primary source activities, classroom observations, case studies, and ongoing conversations, supported teacher integration of new content and strategies learned during professional development.

Conclusions

While additional research focused specifically on the effectiveness of teacher professional development at historic sites is needed, the evidence evaluated for this study indicates that historic site-based professional development has the potential to impact teacher learning and classroom practice as well as student learning. Our data suggest that combining content, expert knowledge, multisensory experiences, and bridging opportunities enhanced the transfer of learning. Furthermore, the data show that several methods positively influenced outcomes when teachers visited historical sites: 1) Conducting pre-site visit orientations or workshops to help teachers prepare their thinking and situate learning; 2) Orchestrating the site visit to maximize the expertise of curators/guides/museum educators and balance structured time with free exploration; 3) Integrating time during the visit for teacher questions and discussions and linking to pedagogies/strategies utilized or highlighted at the site (e.g., mystery pockets, use of artifacts, variety of primary sources); 4) Maximizing sensory experiences during site visits—seeing, hearing, touching—to elicit emotional as well as intellectual responses; 5) Providing ongoing follow-up after site visits to probe content more deeply and support transfer of learned content, concepts, skills, and resources to classroom teaching; and 6) Providing opportunities for school-based

professional learning communities, allowing teachers to share the value of the site-based professional development with colleagues.

Additionally, our data show that engaging in hands-on activities, exploring the past through place and through objects, and learning to analyze museum exhibits or historic sites as arguments about the past influenced teacher understanding and classroom practice. We found evidence that a well-crafted field experience, combined with time for preparation and follow-up discussion or reflection, structured opportunities to integrate new ideas into the classroom, and classroom observations and feedback on those opportunities can lead to an increase in teachers' historical knowledge and teaching skills as well as the likelihood of incorporating these new skills or knowledge into their practice.

Ultimately, evidence of effectiveness is found not only in teachers' transfer of learning to classroom practice, but is measured by positive changes in student learning outcomes. The data we analyzed demonstrated that post-visit follow-up, including workshops, teacher reflections, and structured integration of site visit skills and learning into the classroom, had the highest likelihood of impacting student learning. Post-visit workshops that provided teachers an opportunity to discuss what they learned and reflect on ways to translate that learning into their instruction had an impact on teacher thinking and transfer of learning. Requiring teachers to integrate new ideas into the classroom in a structured way with iterative development of activities, feedback, and classroom observations similarly impacted student learning. While a small sample, classroom observation data, including student engagement and student use of primary sources, supports that students were highly engaged during teacher-created primary source activities based on site visit experiences. With teacher guidance, students were able to apply historical thinking skills to analyze primary sources. The data strongly demonstrated that scaffolding the development of teaching activities and providing feedback at multiple points created a supportive bridge between site visits and classroom learning.

We identified two strategies that appear to promote the long-term goal of influencing classroom practice and student learning. One is to directly connect the professional development experience with content that teachers are currently teaching. While teachers may find a site visit compelling, that immediate connection enhances the

likelihood of making changes in their practice. This was particularly evident in follow-up surveys. However, with large professional development programs, participating teachers may not all teach the same content. A second strategy is to focus on conceptual knowledge, such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's emphasis on the power of the individual. This allows teachers to make connections to their own teaching.

The concepts and strategies described in this article can be applied broadly to many historical topics and eras, such as the pocket activity shared with teachers at Monticello. When teachers, curators, museum educators, and historians discussed these applications explicitly during the site visit, teachers demonstrated their ability—through video interviews, site visit surveys, follow-up surveys, development of classroom materials, case studies, and classroom observations—to transfer conceptual learning, such as the power of place or the constructed nature of historical narrative, into classroom practice.

We have noted several limitations of this work: the data we analyzed were collected as part of TAH program evaluations designed for specific grant-related purposes; the pool of data is small; and we did not have complete data sets for all grant site visits. Despite these limitations, collecting and analyzing multiple types of data—videos, surveys, teacher-created activities, and classroom observations—proved valuable in investigating the impact of historic site visits on teacher learning and practice. Future research dedicated to identifying the impact of historic site visits on teacher learning and practice will inform instructional methodologies and provide measurable learning outcomes in support of quality site-based history education.

Notes

The authors of this article are grateful to Christine Baron and Brenda Trofanenko for inviting us to participate in the AERA-funded Research Conference, “What Are History Teachers Learning at Historic Sites?” The conference and subsequent conversations provided the opportunity to examine this data in depth and to ask questions specifically about teacher professional development at historic sites.

1. Kathleen A. Steeves, "Summary Report of American Revolution Summer Institute" (unpublished report, Loudoun County Public Schools Teaching American History Project, 2012).

2. Ibid.

3. Kevin Briscoe, "Observation of Cotton Lesson" (unpublished observation, Loudoun County Public Schools Teaching American History Project, 2012).

4. Rachel G. Ragland and Kelly Woestman, eds., *The Teaching American History Project: Lessons for History Educators and Historians* (New York: Routledge, 2009). See also Rachel Ragland, "Sustaining Changes in History Teachers' Core Instructional Practices: Impact of *Teaching American History* Ten Years Later" for a study of the long-term impact of TAH grants. Rachel Ragland, "Sustaining Changes in History Teachers' Core Instructional Practices: Impact of *Teaching American History* Ten Years Later," *The History Teacher* 48, no. 4 (August 2015): 609-640.

5. "What Are History Teachers Learning at Historic Sites?" Conference funded by *AERA Research Conference Grant*, organized by Christine Baron and Brenda Trofanenko; Christine Baron and Brenda Trofanenko, "What Should History Teachers Learn at Historic Sites? A Research Agenda" (panel at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, New York City, January 2-5, 2015).

6. See Gordon Andrews, Wilson J. Warren, and Sarah Drake Brown, "Crossing the Educational Rubicon without the TAH: Collaboration among University and Secondary-Level History Educators," *The History Teacher* 46, no. 2 (February 2013).

7. "TAH Grants: Project Spotlight," Teachinghistory.org, <<http://teachinghistory.org/tah-grants/project-spotlight>>.

8. In evaluating teacher learning and transfer of learning resulting from historic site visits, consideration was given to what is known about how people learn, transfer of learning, effective teacher professional development, and effective evaluation. The work of the National Research Council influenced the framing of the evaluation design, measures, and data analysis, including the importance of activating prior knowledge and increasing knowledge of factual information and concepts unique to a discipline, as well as developing strategies to assess learning as it occurs. The TAH program evaluation designs that produced the data included in this study centered on measuring teachers' prior knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as changes resulting from professional development experiences. The designs also examined whether, and the extent to which, teachers transferred new knowledge and practices to their work in classrooms. The evaluations applied Desimone's framework for studying the effects of teacher professional development. Desimone's framework is a positivistic progression from teacher professional development, to teacher learning, to instructional change, to student achievement. National Research Council, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School (Expanded edition)* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2000); National Research Council, *How Students Learn: History, Mathematics, and Science in the Classroom* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2005); Laura M. Desimone, "Improving Impact

Studies of Professional Development: Toward Better Conceptualizations and Measures,” *Educational Researcher* 38, no. 3 (April 2009): 38.

9. *U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum: Personalizing History*, Online video, 2011, Teachinghistory.org, <<http://teachinghistory.org/tah-grants/project-spotlight/25713>>.

10. Kathleen A. Steeves, “Summary Report of Elementary Teachers’ Visit to the Holocaust Museum” (unpublished report, Loudoun County Public Schools Teaching American History Project, 2011).

11. *Slave Life at Mount Vernon*, Online video, 2011, Teachinghistory.org, <<http://teachinghistory.org/tah-grants/project-spotlight/25732>>.

12. *Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello: Paradox of Liberty*, Online video, 2013, Teachinghistory.org, <<http://teachinghistory.org/tah-grants/project-spotlight/25714>>.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Kathleen A. Steeves, “Summary Report of American Revolution Summer Institute” (unpublished report, Loudoun County Public Schools Teaching American History Project, 2012).

16. *Slavery at Jefferson’s Monticello*.

17. Ibid.

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