

TEACHER'S CORNER: A STUDENT-DIRECTED TEACHING MUSEUM

Introduction

The Monroe High School Archaeology Museum, located in Jamesburg, New Jersey, began in 1974 as an experiment to incorporate concepts and methods of archaeology into a high school social studies curriculum. Initially, archaeological surveys had enabled me to take students into the field. Local farmers allowed my classes to survey recently plowed fields where students mapped sites and collected cultural materials from the surface. Then the students catalogued and photographed all the specimens with the professional assistance of the Trenton State Museum and Rutgers University. Having little expertise but much interest, and relying frequently on university and museum professionals, my students and I proceeded cautiously. In the classroom we studied archaeological methods and Native American cultures. The students grew deeply interested in the archeology, demonstrating a respect for both human cultural remains and for a new way of looking at the past.

A Museum Develops

The field expeditions were quite successful, and after a few years much cultural material had been collected. Some of the farmers gave us collections their families had been accumulating for years, even for generations. These collections were also catalogued, photographed, and registered with the Archaeology Department of The Trenton State Museum. We began to think about exhibits, and even more ambitiously, a school-based museum. A whole new avenue of activity and learning opened up. Over the next few years, my students and I renovated a classroom, built exhibits, developed teaching strategies and audio-visual materials, made reproductions of Native American tools, and much more. Teacher and

students began to work together in new ways, truly sharing and learning together.

Students as Teachers

Both the school administration and the Board of Education demonstrated support. During the regular summer school program, an archaeology elective was offered and received favorably. A small classroom was designated by the school as a museum, and exhibits and materials were completed over the summer and part of the next school year. At first, a few classes of elementary school students from our school district were bussed to the high school to see our museum. This provided the first opportunity for our high



THE PLEISTOCENE EPOCH IN NEW JERSEY

school students to act as curators and teachers. Soon thereafter new presentations were developed and invitations were sent to schools throughout central New Jersey.

During the 1986-87 school year, 1553 elementary students and 267 teachers and other adults visited the Monroe High School Archaeology Museum. This year the museum is expanding into other areas. An evening lecture series will be ready by spring 1988 focusing on Native American cultures of New Jersey. The public, including local historical societies and senior citizen groups, will be invited. In this series, students will present slide lectures on New Jersey's flora, fauna, and human population during the Pleistocene Epoch and will demonstrate the exhibits.

The Museum Program

On a pre-scheduled day, 40 to 60 elementary students arrive at the school's front door where the student teachers meet them, take them to the cafeteria for lunch, and then bring them to the museum. Divided into two groups, some of the elementary students watch a slide program developed by the high school students. The slide program reinforces concepts taught in the museum and focuses on New Jersey prehistory and Native American cultures. Meanwhile, the other group participates in hands-on activities, also led by student teachers, in the five major activity areas of the museum: sandbox archaeology, fire starting and flintknapping, face painting, food production, and Woodland village scene. During the school year, each of these five areas of the museum is staffed by high school students from the elective course "Anthropology/ Archaeology" who teach the concepts associated with each exhibit.

This entire program, including slides and the museum visit, takes two hours. The program runs during the

regular school day during the time that the high school students are scheduled for two elective courses, back to back, "Anthropology/Archaeology." This scheduling allows high school students to learn by doing and reinforces all the classroom learning they do during the first part of the course. The basic idea of the program is quite simple. It involves teaching basic content, in this case anthropology and archaeology, to high school students, while at the same time establishing a structure, in this case a museum, in which high school students must teach this information to elementary school students.

As a result of the program, which brings together high school and elementary school students, the high school students must utilize and demonstrate the concepts learned in their academic coursework, and must help bring those concepts and facts to life. The program has indeed demonstrated that anthropology offers both teachers and students, at all levels of the precollege curriculum, new and exciting ways of learning.

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1988-89

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