

The Clio Club: An Extracurricular Model for Elementary Social Studies Enrichment

Students traveled to the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial and learned what Abraham Lincoln's life was like when he was their age. Students visited the Lincoln living history farm, the site of the Lincoln cabin and the Nancy Hanks Lincoln burial site. When they entered the cabin they felt the heat from the fire and smelled the smoke. They realized their room at home might be the same size as the whole Lincoln home that housed eight people. Students climbed the pegs in the wall to peer into the loft. Rangers demonstrated spinning and cooking, and the students examined the crops and the animals on the farm. Students tried pounding corn into corn meal and smelled the cottage cheese curds hanging from the tree to drain the whey before making cheese. The National Park Service ranger identified the tools the Lincoln family used on the farm and let the students try their hand with the wedge and a maul to split the logs into rails. Students used a *frow* to split a wood shingle, the *river* to break out the shingle, and the *shaving horse* with a *drawknife* to smooth it.

Each year about seventy fourth and fifth grade students from an elementary school in an Indiana urban area participate in an extracurricular social studies enrichment program called the Clio Club. *Clio* is derived from the Greek muse of history, and the club offers a variety of activities to help students discover and interpret social studies beyond the traditional school hours. They meet after school and on weekends both at their public school and off site on field trips to learn additional content and skills that are not possible during the regular school day. The members of the club engage in learning that compliments their school studies by allowing them to go into greater depth and to engage topics the classroom would never cover in a regular curriculum.¹ The students who elect to join this group are interested in learning more about a particular topic as well as furthering their educational experiences.

Types of Activities

In Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model describes three types of experiences.² Type I activity to teach content knowledge, Type II activities to teach needed skills, and Type III activities for students to create new products for a real audience.

The essence of the Clio Club's activities focuses upon four types of experiences: study travel, reenactment, field experiences, and sharing information. Students learn content knowledge through investigations that they conduct based upon their study travel experiences. They learn skills necessary for gathering, interpreting, evaluating, and presenting knowledge from field experiences. They gather information from lived experiences through reenactments in which they take on roles of people from a particular historical period. They then share their knowledge through programs such as a family program or a newspaper. The other program parts are interchangeable; experiences gained in one part impact the experiences and understandings students have in the other parts.

Study Travel Experiences

A study travel experience allows students to journey to a historical site where they explore, meet with experts, tour, question, and share ideas with their peers as they collect information and participate in new experiences or experience new-to-them aspects of life from the past. Students can visit historic or contemporary structures, sites, or unique events to learn about social studies content. The study travel experiences may remain the favorite activity among students, and they find direct active experiences the greatest advantage when they visit the site.³

Once the personnel at the sites learn about the club, they may actually start inviting the group to visit their facility. Before including a site for a trip, however, the sponsor must visit the

site in person to determine what content, skills, and experiences the students will gain there. Of course, the disadvantages of travel experiences include frustrations with the variability of transportation and weather. There is always the potential problem of having to wait for the bus to arrive, being stopped in traffic, or becoming stranded, and the whims of rain, ice, snow, cold, and heat have all plagued the trips, but rarely has inclement weather actually stopped them.

As an example of a field trip students traveled to Historic New Harmony where they discovered two different communal utopian societies from the early 1800's and thought about what it would take to make a perfect world. The neighbors named the first celibate millennialistic community the Harmony Society or Rappites after their founder George Rapp; the second group was called Owenites after their leader, the Scottish social reformer, Robert Owen. Students determined why these groups came here, what their successes were, who they were, what problems they encountered, and why they left. The students followed docents, saw models, viewed audiovisual presentations, walked the original streets, entered historic buildings, and viewed static exhibits. They also encountered modern architecture and landscape at the Athenaeum Visitor Center, the Roofless Church, and Tillich Park.

The students thought about how they would benefit from living in these communities and what they would have to give up to live there. Gifted students raise their own questions from following their interests. They take power over their learning to learn about ideas they would not normally learn about until middle or high school. They follow their curiosity to investigate the world around them.

Field Experiences

During a field experience, students learn techniques used to gather, research, and study social studies, while developing the skills needed to save, record, and interpret events. Students acquire skills that they need to conduct independent research. Workshops after school and excursions into the surrounding community provide students opportunities to explore many topics and share the results of their efforts. In field experiences, students apply research skills in realistic settings while meeting and working with people in the local community. Students work with a greater variety of resources than those found in the school library.

Saving and recording local history with the aid of technology provides important learning opportunities. The sponsor needs to work hard at the beginning of the field experience to help students become interested in such activities. But once students are involved, their enthusiasm grows. They enjoy using cameras, computers, audio recorders, copy machines, and projectors to archive the past. The only drawback to the field experience is that large numbers of students do not fit into many research facilities; it is difficult to get even three students around a microfilm reader. Similarly, interviewing equipment limits the number of students who can directly participate at any one time.

In one field experience, the members of the Clio Club learned about the governance structures and the business conducted in both the courthouse and the town hall of a typical, local small town. To determine how the town was arranged and what the community valued and celebrated they found the town square with its public memorials and markers. Then, they walked into one of the old residential districts, where they learned to read the landscape in order to build a social-historical understanding of this community. They found brick sidewalks and streets, limestone curbs, Italianate and Queen Ann style homes, wrought iron fences, hitching posts, gas street lights, cast iron Victorian urns used for flowers, and a historic marker. They

used data retrieval sheets to speculate about the people who lived here--why they came here, and what they were trying to accomplish in this neighborhood. Students learned about construction techniques, fashion and culture, Victorian residential living, architectural styles, how the neighborhood changed, and how it has been purposefully preserved. Residents, who were proud of their neighborhood, worked together to maintain the contextual fabric of the landscape. The students contrasted this with the main street of the small town with its Victorian commercial spaces juxtaposed with modern convenience stores. This town was slowly being restored and preserved also, but it is in the early stage compared to the residences.

Next the students learned about the town from the local burying ground where they also gathered primary contextual data to interpret. They looked for veterans' groups, fraternal groups, occupations, tombstone art, foreign languages, and religious iconography. They also looked at shapes and tombstone materials to see how they had changed over time, and they took notes by doing monument rubbings. They searched for indications of social status, for various diseases that caused death, and for the average age of death. They discovered the graves of famous people and talked about these individuals. They learned about sociology from comparing family plots, and they learned about geography when they created a map of the cemetery.

Students learned about the history of the community when they found public art, memorials, historic markers, and artifacts in the cemetery. Gifted students pursued their own interests in the context of community and social history. The challenging ideas they raised propelled them to work with mentors to reach the goal and then easily channeled this knowledge to national and world events.

Reenactment

A reenactment allows students to live briefly as people from another time who lived in a forest grove or in a recreated historical village.⁴ Clio Club members use reenactment to examine the perspectives of others. Guests use a first person format to make a presentation in a reenactment, while students dress in the historic clothing of the people to create a unique learning environment.⁵ Through role-playing, folk music, first person historic presentation, and folk craft, students come to an understanding of what the daily life was like at another time or place. Students use the tools and technology of the past to learn the work, skills, and leisure activities that the common people experienced daily, such as cooking over an open fire, shaping arrows, working with leather for clothing, grinding grain, planting a garden, making music, flint knapping, and collecting berries all of which adds to the richness of student learning. Furthermore, the variability of weather illustrates the difficulties of living without modern conveniences. It is a unique learning opportunity to huddle around a fire and realize that although it is burning brightly the room is still cold. Through all of these experiences students realize that there are details the books leave out, and their direct empirical sensations tell a story about what life in another place or time was really like.

The benefits of reenactments include making the student experiences authentic to life in a different time period and focusing on the affective as well as the cogent domain by developing an appreciation of ways of life. Student interest in these types of programs develop because they engage in making choices, forming values, and constructing opinions about life in a particular time.⁶ The advantage of the historical reenactment is that students encounter the attitudes and values held by the people of that time and place. This is ultimately an active experience; rather than looking at an artifact in a case at a museum or reading about social relations in a book, students try on roles and directly experience what it was like to live that way. Because these

experiences are not remote, but become both personal real, Clio Club members develop empathic responses to history.

In the Eastern Woodlands students lived for a day as if they were Native American living in a Miami village of 1800. Students learned about daily life, customary food, the work performed by people their age, art designs, and styles of clothing. They learned how to adapt natural resources into tools, gather food, and farm. They spent most of their time in food gathering and preparation, making venison stew, smoked meat for jerky, pemmican, roasted ears of corn, roasted meat with vegetables on skewers, parched corn, roasted meat on a spit, popped corn, made hominy, and corn cakes. In their extra time they scraped hides and worked leather to form clothing such as moccasins. They also cut saplings to make tools, knapped flint into cutting edges, and compared natural material to items secured through trade. The students learned some Native American dance steps and made coil pottery. They also talked with the leadership from a local tribal group advocating Native American rights, concerns, and interests.

Gifted students personalized content when they learned about individuals and groups of people. They took on roles to examine different points of view and made empathic links to historic people. They used both differing points of view and empathic link as evidence rather than relying on abstractions.

Sharing Information

Before disseminating their findings to a real audience, students compile the information that they gather from their study travel, fieldwork, and reenactment. Just as experts do in the social sciences, the students produce products that present information in a new form. Students become the experts at sharing information with a variety of audiences which requires them to reinterpret information, draw conclusions, test hypotheses, and finally to enhance their writing

and presentation skills. Presentations may consist of a PowerPoint presentation, newspapers, booklets, or a DVD for an audience of historical societies, church groups, nursing homes, service organizations, libraries, teachers, parents, or classmates.

Presenting this information to others also serves as a way of preserving vanishing ways of life. For example, a local farmer, who raised draft horses, was known to hitch his team of horses to a mechanical corn picker as a means of both exercising his horses and producing food for them. Early in the morning with the sun burning off the fog and frost, he led the horses down the rows of his corn field and the harvester cut, gathered and bound the stalks of corn so he could return and shock them. The shock had to be large enough or the wind would blow it over, but it could not be too large or the corn would not dry and therefore rot. In an area where these skills, animals, tools, and landscapes are quickly disappearing, the students documented a vanishing way of life. They learned about this harvesting process, interviewed the farmer, and recorded the activity by taking pictures with cameras. They organized the information, turned it into a script, and told the story through written historical narrative. They turned this information and their photos into a PowerPoint program and then manufactured a narrative. They shared the program with their school, their peers, and with local service clubs.

The Muse

The student newspaper, *The Muse*, is the quarterly publication in which the Clio Club members who share the results of their research, writing, and editing. It contains student photography, reports of field experience, oral history interviews, results of field experiences, and the life experiences of living in a historical reenactment. After having study travel experiences, the students return to school and write articles about the events that they experience, emphasizing what they saw and learned. Publishing their experiences allows students to share

their writing with a real audience of their parents, teachers, and peers. As the students gain more experience with writing, they learn to record their perspectives, draw conclusions, and interpret them to others. *The Muse* is a member-created product that documents the students' growth as researchers and writers while also recording their experiences as they learn about social studies. Gifted students produce articles significantly above the expected mean for their age level, which in turn demonstrates their social competency. They work with advanced content and produce clever writing.

Family Programs

The schools are not just a place where children go to be taught; they are places where families and communities go to learn as well. Family programs help the entire family and school community learn more about a particular topic. The entire family engages in pleasurable learning, and the school can serve as a forum for community education.

The students find intergenerational learning enjoyable because their parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents model the importance of continuing to learn while they spend time with the child. One example of this is a Native American dance group that came to the school to talk about their songs, dances, traditional cultural dress, and how their culture continues to span both past and present. They invited the families of the students to join them on some dances.

Gifted students developed interest through these events. In a non-competitive format they self selected to further develop their interests. The students connected the knowledge produced through this program to national and world events.

Establishing the Clio Club

The format of the Clio Club adapts easily for grades three through six. The first thing potential members need in order to set up an elementary social studies club is an energetic manager with a passion for social studies. Next, the manager needs to create a plan or calendar of events to share with the principal and an informational flier stating the purpose and the procedures of the group. Quality programming is always difficult to insure; it is important to keep the goals of the club in mind when planning the program. Once the principal grants permission to form the group, the manager may pass out membership information in all age-appropriate classes.

The membership information consists of the calendar of events, the informational flier, a permission form for the parents to sign, and a nominal membership fee at the beginning of the year, which will cover the costs of T-shirts, photography, correspondence, and long distance calls. The parents and members thus have an outline of the scope of the program. Members may nominate themselves by writing a letter asking to join the organization. Students determine their interests and exhibit task commitment by writing a letter outlining why they should join the group and explaining the qualities they exhibit that would make them excellent members. Students join in the fall and remain a member for one year. In the spring they can renew their membership for the following year.

Activities are scheduled approximately twice each month. Therefore, the manager will send out informational flyers before each trip with the parental permission slips and will also remind the members via public address system announcements and signs around the school. The manager can follow up by determining transportation, food, and lodging needs. He or she needs to make sure to work with the school bookkeeper to handle receipts. Parents and teachers

volunteer to carry out the programs. Each activity done by the club members needs a good staff that works well with people and also has the flexibility and willingness to work with groups that are serious about learning. At the end of the year the manager needs to work with the students to plan the next year and then work one year ahead in scheduling the events.

The same model could be used in different regions of the country although the activities would remain essentially the same. In urban Los Angeles students may do a history project researching their street and produce a three-fold flier. In rural Nebraska students may produce a booklet on threshing rings. In suburban St. Louis students could determine the former locations of Middle Mississippian earth works destroyed by urban growth.

Conclusions

Each activity in which the students engage represents at least one -- and often more -- of the National Council for the Social Studies Standards. The standards influence the planning of the Clio Club's activities which helps students to become citizens who can think, reason, and solve problems through learning knowledge, practicing thinking skills, and using resources to solve civic problems.⁷ The Clio Club is important to nine-, ten-, and eleven-year old students because they are curious about the interesting stuff of school social studies.⁸ Social studies is about people and the world around them and students find this enticing because it is real. The Clio Club allows talented students to explore content they would not necessarily discover until middle or high school. They benefit from this program when they get to follow their interests to develop concentrations of information through in-depth study. They get to select the questions that spark their curiosity, which gives them the power to explore topics or to undertake enrichment activities.⁹ They get to select what to research and then make decisions about how to explore the content.

Through this program students work in an active environment, engage with interesting content, and discover challenging ideas. The activities allow students to meet and work with experts in several disciplinary fields; they work beside adults in a mentor-like arrangement in order to reach common goals.¹⁰ In planning experiences, students pursue their interests and form questions to explore. By asking questions and exploring the interesting stories of common people, which are not usually explained in survey textbooks, students learn more about social studies in the context of their community. By working with mentors in an active environment, students construct social history from the lives of everyday people and thus see how those people relate to the larger context of national and world events.

For teachers the Clio Club offers an opportunity to let students explore and take more ownership over their learning. While doing this, the Clio Club also offers a platform for talent development. Teachers can take additional time to help talented students raise questions from field trips, study how people lived through direct experience, learn methods of recording and documenting data, and produce products that communicate that data. Teachers use these experiences and go into depth to study a topic, or they can provide enrichment activities.¹¹

The Clio Club is important to the field of gifted education because talented students, who are forced into high stakes review and test cycles of minimal achievement standards, do not get the freedom to control their learning and investigate their questions that interest them. Time from significant content and skills gets stolen from intellectually rich subject matter to feed the test preparation cycle. When curriculum is reduced to English grammar, arithmetic computation, and reading comprehension only to be measured by selecting A, B, C, or D, students lose powerful opportunities to think and explore. Talented students do not get the education they need to become flexible and creative problem solvers. Those who miss the experiences for in-

depth learning and enrichment because of high stakes test preparation can find such opportunities through extracurricular social studies programs such as the Clio Club.

NOTES

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