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Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to our partner, Vermilionville, along with education coordinator, Melanie Harrington, for your continued support and partnership. We would also like to say thank you to our university students for rising to the unique and challenging nature of this project during an unprecedented time.

A Local Historic Village Goes Online: Transforming English and Social Studies Methods Courses for a Virtual Setting

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When teachers began to prepare for the return to school in Fall 2020, they knew this would be unlike anything they had planned for before. As pre-service teacher educators (PST educators), we were no exception—wondering how to best prepare future English Language Arts (ELA) and social studies teachers during a global pandemic. The Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership (VEEP) is an academic service learning collaboration between Vermilionville—a Louisiana living history museum and folklife village, one school district, and our university’s College of Education. Vermilionville’s mission is to increase appreciation for the history, culture, and natural resources of the Native Americans, Acadians, Creoles, and peoples of African descent in the Attakapas region through the end of the 1800s (see bayouvermiliondistrict.org/vermilionville/). Through this collaboration the museum is able to provide educational outreach opportunities and maintain collaborative partnerships. VEEP is a hallmark of the secondary English and social studies education programs at our institution. We knew, however, we needed to re-imagine this project in light of COVID-19.

What is VEEP anyway?

Prior to the pandemic, English and social studies pre-service teachers (PSTs) worked collaboratively to design cross-curricular

lessons inspired by local cultures and then implement lessons on-site with area students. Because of safety guidelines, we knew we would need to adapt the rich in-person experience to a virtual setting, which led to the first virtual iteration of VEEP. Ultimately, it was critical that changes were practical, while maintaining the high quality of the project to ensure students produced meaningful work aligned to course learning objectives.

We identified key elements, such as cross-curricular collaboration and development of engaging learning experiences, that could be implemented virtually. It was also critical for students to be familiar with Vermilionville’s mission and history. To introduce the project, nearly 30 secondary education majors, the museum’s education coordinator, and we, the university professors, gathered over Zoom at the start of Fall 2020. We explained that the PSTs would not deliver lessons at Vermilionville as usual, but they would still be creating engaging, authentic products for a real-world audience.

Project Adaptation and Implementation

The most significant change that occurred when VEEP shifted online was the final product. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students created lesson plans and then implemented these lessons at Vermilionville for “VEEP Day” with area

students. In Fall 2020, the final product changed to a digital lesson that was designed to be accessed asynchronously by area eighth-grade students. To achieve this final product, we adapted the project in many ways. First, Vermilionville staff created a video providing a brief, virtual tour to familiarize our students with the site. Additionally, the museum's curator organized a Google Drive folder for the PSTs to explore artifacts within the village. Artifacts included a meat smoker, sugar cane tools, and cast iron pot (see Figure 1 for additional examples). Although students did not visit the historic village, these modifications provided them opportunities to be immersed in the time period and culture interpreted by Vermilionville.



Fig. 1. From left to right: "Loom, Button Maker, Sewing Machine," Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership, Vermilionville collections

Once broken into pairs or triads, our students were tasked with designing a digital, asynchronous lesson centered around their artifact. They were provided the same planning template used in past years, since we believed a familiar template would aid the PSTs as they composed rigorous learning outcomes and designed clear procedures. To further aid in lesson development, the TeachRock website (see teachrock.org/lesson-plan-collections/) was shared with students.

During whole-class workshops, the breakout room feature in Zoom was utilized so students could work in small groups while we "visited" different rooms to listen to ideas, answer questions, and offer suggestions. For instance, the museum

coordinator discussed different resources and shared various primary and secondary sources with students that they could incorporate into their lessons. As university professors, we largely provided students with pedagogical feedback, such as alignment between educational standards and instruction, and engaged in discussion regarding lesson creation and how this would "look" when implemented in an asynchronous format. Some groups had additional virtual meetings where they utilized screen-sharing features to collectively work on tasks. Others worked through Google Docs and Google Slides, and many communicated through email, text message, and other platforms, such as Group Me. These approaches to communication suggested connecting remotely was vital as students collaboratively designed instruction without being in the same physical space.

After refining lesson plans, groups turned their attention to finalizing the digital lessons. At the end of the semester, students submitted their projects and presented an overview during a synchronous Zoom class. With Vermilionville's education coordinator in attendance, the PSTs shared innovative approaches for bringing their lessons to life in engaging ways that students could connect with and learn from, all while in an asynchronous digital format. Examples included varied formats such as videos and websites, the inclusion of hands-on tasks where students created visual products as part of the lesson, and also made personal or community connections to the lesson to make it relevant and interesting for the secondary students. (Table 1 provides an overview of ways the project was modified and adapted.)

Table 1
VEEP: Now and Then Comparison

Implementation in Past Years	Fall 2020 Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-site tour of Vermilionville • On-site exploration of museum artifacts for PSTs to explore and select for lesson focus • Small groups (4-5) of ELA and social studies PSTs collaborated in-person • PSTs created lessons that were implemented at Vermilionville for “VEEP Day” with area students as their final product, and selected lessons were posted on Vermilionville’s website • PSTs had multiple opportunities to implement their lessons on VEEP Day as middle/secondary students rotated throughout the village to participate in PST-created lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual video tour of Vermilionville • Creation of a shared Google Drive Folder with 30 pre-selected artifacts for PSTs to explore and select for lesson focus • Pairs or triads of ELA and social studies students collaborated virtually • PSTs created asynchronous lessons designed to be delivered virtually and presented to peers via Zoom as their final product • PST lesson plans and digital asynchronous lessons were shared with Vermilionville to be made available to middle school students, but PSTs did not implement lessons with students during the semester

they recorded themselves delivering content so students could participate “with the teacher.” Some groups even chose to create websites to house their lessons. Samples from two groups are shared below.

Regina Music Box: Music, Created from Our Darkest Days of History, Connecting People

One group worked with a Regina Music Box to create the lesson, “Music, Created from our Darkest Days of History, Connecting People.” In their lesson plan, the group posed essential questions, described cross-curricular connections, and provided a lesson overview (see Table 2). In one portion of the lesson, the front page of a newspaper and accompanying article about Hurricane Katrina was shared along with lyrics to “Tie My Hands” by Lil Wayne. Students were tasked with answering guiding questions, annotating texts, and drawing connections between the newspaper and song while making personal connections. Through this lesson, the PSTs used the artifact as a focal point to examine ways music has been used as a coping method throughout history. Students who participate in this lesson are able to learn the history of the music box, analyze primary resources, reflect on their own experiences, and recognize these connections through the creation of a culminating task—a poem addressing effects of music on themselves and the world.

Authentic and Asynchronous: PST-Created Lessons

At the conclusion of this iteration of the project, 10 digital lessons were created, each centered around a primary source artifact from Vermilionville, designed to highlight connections between ELA and social studies. Some groups delivered their lesson through PowerPoint with embedded audio or video. Others created video lessons in which

Table 2

Introduction of Lesson Plan for Regina Music Box Artifact

Essential Questions	How do we deal with tragedy in our lives? How does music bring people together? How can music reflect a period of time?
Cross-Curricular Connections	This lesson requires students to analyze artifacts and primary sources from the history of the Regina Music Box, Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, and the COVID-19 pandemic to examine the effects of music born from these tragic periods. While analyzing each document, the students will annotate, answer questions, and reflect on the reading. The culminating assignment will require students to create a poem as an evaluation of their retention of the lesson.
Lesson Overview	Students will be using historical artifacts and primary sources to evaluate the importance of music as a coping method. The purpose of the lesson is for students to compare how they connect with music to how others have connected with music by analyzing songs written during specific historical periods. The students will end the lesson by creating a poem that emphasizes the importance and connection of music in our lives and throughout history.

Button maker: Social Justice Symbols Then vs. Now

A pair of PSTs whose artifact was a button maker from the early 1920s created a lesson in which students were to examine symbols of social justice over time. Their digital resources included an image of the button maker, an image of a button that read “Votes for Women,” and other resources related to the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. The university students made a connection between the Women’s Suffrage Movement and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement by describing both movements and how various symbols (including buttons) have been used to express support for said movements. The lesson began with images from BLM protests within the local community. Students were prompted to compose a journal response reflecting on what they knew about the movement, including symbols or signs they might have seen, along with their beliefs about the goals of the movement. By showing local images of the BLM movement and asking students to share their ideas, the PSTs were encouraging students to begin thinking about symbols within social justice movements before the artifact was even introduced.

Next, lesson-creators introduced the button maker, shared information on the Women’s Suffragist movement and 19th Amendment, and explained how buttons were used as a symbol to express support for and during this movement. A connection to symbols associated with modern movements was shared, along with ways in which social justice symbols are often expressed (e.g., flags, stickers, art, and now masks). After learning about both movements, the culminating task was for students to create their own symbol to express a movement or cause important to them (see Figure 2). The PSTs took a single artifact and used this as

inspiration to address important movements in history, past and present.

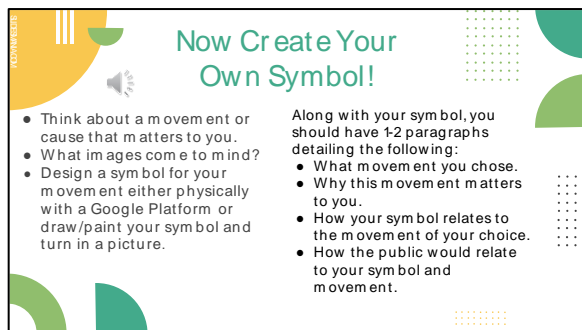


Fig. 2. Culminating Task for Lesson Influenced by Button Maker Artifact

Lessons Learned and Looking Ahead

Teachers know to be successful they need to be flexible, and the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated this in an extreme way. The biggest lesson learned from this project was that site-based learning initiatives can still take place in virtual spheres. It is also critical that PSTs are provided with experiences to design and implement authentic instruction in a virtual setting as they will likely be tasked with this as practicing professionals. One challenge of this project was not physically visiting Vermilionville; however, the guided video tour was great for helping students feel connected to the museum. When lesson planning, an initial challenge for our students was not providing sufficient details for an asynchronous audience. Verbal and written feedback was provided throughout the project to address this so they could strengthen lesson design. This provided an opportunity for PST growth since they were required to consider every detail of the lesson plan and digital lesson, since they would not be implementing this in-person. As such, they had to ensure each aspect of this assignment was clear to an audience who would access these lessons at a later date. This was essential because the PST-created lessons have the potential to reach much larger audiences than in past years

since teachers will have access to the lesson plans and the digital, asynchronous lessons. While the lessons were not implemented with students right away, they will be housed on the Vermilionville website for teachers and students to access. Previously, lesson plans were housed on the website, but now, the pre-made digital lessons will be available as well. Additionally, the PSTs were given more autonomy when creating the digital lessons compared to in-person, resulting in further opportunities for exploration, creativity, and deep critical thinking.

As we continue to work within the parameters of COVID-19 safety guidelines, we are excited for the next virtual iteration of VEEP. This semester (Spring 2021), students also created asynchronous lessons, but worked with an in-service educator so they could implement their lesson with secondary students and then reflect on their lesson. Moving forward, we plan to give students choice to work independently, and choice on designing their lesson around a specific artifact or exploring a larger topic related to Vermilionville. When given these choices, we are curious to see what students choose and to consider how these different options might influence the lesson creation and implementation, whether delivered in-person or through virtual means. Although different from previous years, the Fall 2020 re-imagining of VEEP encouraged secondary English and social studies education majors to collaborate with others, design cross-curricular lessons, and explore new approaches for delivering instruction within a virtual setting. As educators continue to adjust to teaching during a pandemic, our focus as teacher-educators is to model lessons learned for our students so they can, in turn, implement this within their own future classrooms.

Resources for Further Exploration

“Lessons.” *TeachRock*,

<https://teachrock.org/lesson-plan-collections/>. Accessed 21 December 2020.

Vermilionville. *Bayou Vermilion District*.

<https://bayouvermiliondistrict.org/vermilionville/>. Accessed 21 December 2020.