

Winter 2003

Off the Shelf and Into the Classroom: Working with K-12 Teachers to Integrate Digitized Collections into Classroom Instruction

Tara Zachary Laver

Louisiana State University, tzachar@lsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>

 Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#), [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Library and Information Science Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Laver, Tara Zachary (2003) "Off the Shelf and Into the Classroom: Working with K-12 Teachers to Integrate Digitized Collections into Classroom Instruction," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 50 : Iss. 4 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol50/iss4/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Off the Shelf and Into the Classroom: Working with K-12 Teachers to Integrate Digitized Collections into Classroom Instruction

Tara Zachary Laver

Tara Zachary Laver is Assistant Curator for Manuscripts, Louisiana State University Special Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge. She can be reached at tzachar@lsu.edu.

In April 2003, the United States will celebrate the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase, the \$15 million land acquisition between Thomas Jefferson and Napoleon Bonaparte that doubled the size of the young American republic, and added a vast region that extended from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. At Louisiana State University, the Special Collections Department of the LSU Libraries and the LSU Digital Library have been preparing for this historic event since October 2000 with a grant funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Entitled "The Louisiana Purchase: A Heritage Explored," the project's goal is to digitize, catalog, and make available via the World Wide Web selected documents and publications from the era of the Louisiana Purchase that are held at the LSU Special Collection and the New Orleans City Archives at the New Orleans Public Library.

The Louisiana Purchase was the most significant event in the westward expansion of the United States. It added territory that was eventually divided into the thirteen states of Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Kansas, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Louisiana. Additionally, it amounted to what grant author and director Faye Phillips called "an experiment to incorporate a substantially different culture....[into] the predominantly Anglo-Saxon Protestant, adolescent United States of America....an encounter with diversity."¹ Within the borders of what would become the state of Louisiana, Creoles of French and Spanish descent, Germans upriver

¹ Faye Phillips, "The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial: A Heritage Explored" (grant application to the Institute of Library Services, 2000).

from New Orleans, English settlers, exiled Acadians, free people of color, slaves, and Native Americans interacted with Americans from neighboring regions. These groups competed for position, power, and predominance of their respective views on government, law, and race.² Given the historical significance of the Louisiana Purchase to both Louisiana and the United States, and the rich but place-bound holdings of the LSU Libraries and the New Orleans City Archives that document the era, a goal of the grant was to enhance K-12 teaching and learning by working with Louisiana teachers to integrate the use of the digital collection into their classroom activities. The digital collection's availability on the web would also give access to any teacher, anywhere, who had an Internet connection.

Background

In October 2000, the Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded Louisiana State University a \$219,000 Leadership Grant to digitize, catalog, and make available on the web through the LSU Digital Library published and unpublished French-, English-, and Spanish-language documents created or published between 1800 and 1815. The materials are drawn from the holdings of the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections (LLMVC) in the LSU Special Collections³ and the New Orleans City Archives in the New Orleans Public

² Ibid.

³The LLMVC is an integrated research center dedicated to documenting all aspects of the history and culture of the state of Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley region, in all formats. It comprises a comprehensive collection of books, periodicals, maps, prints, pamphlets, Louisiana state documents, microfilm of Louisiana newspapers, and over 5000 manuscript groups encompassing over 10 million items. Louisiana State University Special Collections, "Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections," <<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/frames/llmvc.html>>, accessed 16 September 2002.

Library.⁴ Included in the digital collection from the LLMVC are personal and political letters, legal and financial records, political tracts, state and federal government documents, published and unpublished diaries and travel accounts, scientific and religious works, maps, and land surveys. The City Archives contributed Orleans County and New Orleans City Court criminal and civil records, ca. 1804-1812.⁵ Upon completion, the digital collection will include approximately 260 items from LSU and 830 from the City Archives represented in over 28,000 images or digital objects.

Though the Purchase occurred in 1803, documents created or published between 1800 and 1815 are included in the digital collection. During this time span, Louisiana evolved from a colony of Spain and France to a U.S. territory and later, to a state. It was also during that time that the experiment in diversity was most evident, for it was then that the various ethnic, religious, political, and racial groups contended for power as the French colony-cum-U.S. territory reacted to and experienced the

⁴ The Library is the official repository of the records of New Orleans municipal government (1769-present), and the City Archives contains more than 1200 manuscript volumes, over 3500 cubic feet of unbound records, and large collections of maps, architectural drawings, photographs, videotapes, and sound recordings. Included among these holdings are the records of the Orleans Parish civil courts (1804-1926) and criminal courts (1830-1931). New Orleans City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, "NOPL Archival Inventories," <<http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/invlist.htm>>, accessed 16 September 2002.

⁵ The Orleans County and later New Orleans City Courts held jurisdiction in civil matters involving debts of more than fifty dollars or injuries to persons or property of less than one hundred dollars, as well as jurisdiction in all non-capital criminal matters and all criminal cases brought against slaves, including capital ones. These suit records illustrate how justice functioned differently for slaves than for free people. New Orleans City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, "County of Orleans, County Suit Records," <<http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/countycourt/county.htm>>, accessed 16 September 2002.

following events: the Purchase itself in 1803; the creation of the Territory of Orleans in 1804; massive immigration of French, African slaves, and free people of color to New Orleans from Saint Domingue after an 1809 slave revolt; the largest slave revolt in U.S. history in St. Charles and St. John parishes in 1811; statehood in 1812; the Creek War in 1813-1814; and the Battle of New Orleans (1815) at the end of the War of 1812. The battle united the formerly disparate groups in Louisiana in a common cause as Americans, Creoles, Acadians, free men of color, and Choctaws fought together, marking the full entry of Louisiana and her people into the national community of the United States.⁶ Including materials from 1800 to 1815 provides an important context for understanding the Purchase and its effects.

Using the Dublin Core metadata elements, the digital project librarian cataloged these selected materials at the item level. From the catalog record in the LSU Digital Library,⁷ patrons may access an image reference file and a digital table of contents, an HTML document that was created to allow navigation of multi-page items.⁸ In addition, transcriptions and translations are available in .pdf format for most manuscript items from the LSU collections.

[Integrating the digital collection into the K-12 classroom](#)

Digital projects such as the one herein described provide teachers with excellent resources to meet many social studies state curriculum standards. For example, the materials in "The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial: A Heritage Explored" address the following Louisiana Department of Education standards for high school curricula: "analyzing how the physical and human characteristics of places change over time and affect historic events

⁶ Phillips, 1.

⁷ See the LSU Digital Library, "The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial: A Heritage Explored," <<http://www.lsu.edu/diglib/LBI.nsf/Web/LBI>>, accessed 16 September 2002.

⁸The image reference files are .jpg format, which were derived from the archival .tiff files. The .jpg's may be viewed using DejaVu, a free plug-in that allows for zooming and panning to view close-up detail.

[geography].... comparing and evaluating the essential characteristics of various systems of government and identifying historical and contemporary examples of each [civics and government]....analyzing causes and consequences of worldwide economic interdependence [economics]....and interpreting and evaluating historical evidence presented in primary and secondary sources [history].⁹ Matching curriculum standards with digital content is critical to the success of any project that hopes to be useful in K-12 instruction. Such congruence ensures a project's usefulness and appeal to teachers.

But simply making this material available on the web is not enough. If you build it, they do not always come, so to be certain our project reached teachers and achieved its goal of enhancing K-12 teaching and learning we sought the assistance of teachers themselves—who better than they to advise and collaborate with us to ensure the finished product's accessibility, usability, and relevance for teachers? Thus, a four-member advisory panel comprised of the liaison between Louisiana State University and the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board and an elementary, middle school, and high school teacher was formed.

Louisiana State University and the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board are fortunate to have a liaison who oversees a program to train and mentor pre-service education majors at LSU through an experimental school. Utilizing that existing relationship and the liaison's knowledge and familiarity with local teachers, Project Director Faye Phillips asked the liaison to recommend teachers for the panel. The liaison interviewed twelve teachers and provided a list of suggested finalists. From those twelve, she and the project director chose three teachers, based on their interest and experience, to participate on the advisory panel. Additionally, panelists were selected to ensure a balance across kindergarten through twelfth grade. The

⁹ Louisiana Department of Education, *Louisiana Social Studies Content Standards: State Standards for Curriculum Development* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana Department of Education, 1997) [document online] <<http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/assessment/standards/SOCIAL.pdf>>, p. 15, 23, 32, and 42, respectively. [accessed 9 September 2002]

elementary teacher represented pre-kindergarten through fourth grade teachers, the middle school teacher represented grades fifth through eighth, and the high school teacher covered grades ninth through twelfth. In addition to assisting in selecting teachers for the panel, the liaison made sure the other teachers prepared their assignments, held meetings as necessary with other teachers, planned teacher workshops, assisted with the project evaluations, and served as the liaison between the project director, the project panel, and the members of the advisory panel. The teachers collaborated and consulted with LSU Special Collections staff in three ways: developing lesson plans based on the digital collection; making suggestions on the collection's usability, image quality, content, and value-added information that would assist them and other teachers in preparing lesson plans; and helping in training other teachers to use the digital collection to prepare lesson plans and class activities.

Teachers prepared lesson plans, accessing the digital collection via the web as items became accessible through the LSU Digital Library. Each teacher wrote five to six lesson plans, which included the following elements: introduction; content area and grade level for which the exercise is applicable; the curriculum standards the lesson meets; an overview of and procedure for implementing the lesson; the resources needed (with the link to the relevant digital object in the collection); entry level skills and knowledge students need to accomplish the lesson; and the method of evaluating the students' performance. These lesson plans will be made available on the LSU Special Collections website, <www.lib.lsu.edu/special/purchase> for other teachers to use as they are and as models for creating their own plans. The panel produced some especially creative activities, including having the children read explorers' accounts, construct appropriate props, and then role play as explorers; compile trivia books about the Louisiana Purchase and early 19th-century Louisiana from the digital resources; and requiring students to write a constitution for their school based on a comparison of the U.S. Constitution and the Louisiana Constitution of 1812.

The panel's second function addressed the site's usability. Having the advisory panel use

the items in the digital collection as they became available provided feedback about the site's user-friendliness and image quality. Their experience with the collection also revealed what contextual and background information was needed on the site for teachers to use the digital collection effectively. In addition to the informal response given at meetings of the project team and the panel, the project team surveyed the teachers after they had prepared their lesson plans to document systematically their reaction to and experience with the site.

The survey addressed four main areas: the teachers' general thoughts on the materials and content available; what, if any, problems they encountered in using the digital collection and what problems they anticipated other teachers and students would have; the quantity and quality of the information provided about the items in the collection and its organization; and specific concerns associated with teachers and students using the manuscripts included in the collection, such as difficulty reading the manuscripts because of the 19th-century handwriting and the need for contextual or explanatory information. The panel's overarching concern about the materials and content was the availability of appropriate resources for the lower grades. The materials included were primarily textual, and the lack of pictorial and graphic items, they feared, would mean the collection offered little for pre-kindergarten through fourth grade. In regard to the usability of the website and problems they encountered or anticipated other users might have, the teachers reported difficulty searching the collection and identifying relevant items to use. This experience was not unexpected, however, because at the time they were preparing lesson plans, full searching of the digital collection had not been enabled. This hindrance was a result of the design of the LSU Digital Library, which does not allow for searches until all image files and catalog records have been entered. Additionally, the panel expressed concerns unrelated to the site itself, such as teachers' slow or unreliable Internet connections. As an alternative, one suggested making the digital collection available via CD-ROM.

As mentioned above, teachers could not search the digital collection when they prepared their lesson plans. Instead, they had to scroll through a list of digitized items, from which they could

access a document's image file(s) and catalog record. Therefore, the utility of the catalog records for retrieval was not readily apparent, so teachers' comments were restricted to the usefulness of the information provided in the catalog record. In general, they found that this information, which includes date of publication or creation, title, a description of contents and biographical information about the creators of manuscript materials, and subject indexing terms, to be somewhat helpful. However, the related question of what additional value-added information they needed showed the catalog record usually was not sufficient. Consequently, the teachers preferred an exhibit-like presentation of the digitized content. In such a design, project staff would provide introductory topical essays, a list of documents or publications relevant to the subject, and explanative text that details how the item illustrates the chosen theme. One respondent wrote in favor of the exhibit approach: "Background info is provided up-front (students can have this at their fingertips) and documents supporting this information can be linked to directly." According to the respondents, the need for "background info" is especially true for manuscripts. Additionally, they expressed doubt about students' and teachers' ability to decipher handwriting in the manuscripts. To address this concern, project staff prepared transcriptions for most of the manuscripts, as well as translations for non-English original documents.

The third function of the panel was to assist in training other teachers to use the digitized materials in developing lesson plans. Therefore, in addition to providing model lesson plans, panelists participated in a free teachers' workshop on integrating the project's digital resources into classroom instruction. As part of the workshop held in summer 2002, the teacher liaison gave an overview of teacher involvement in the project, and bibliographic instructors from the LSU Libraries' reference department discussed locating and evaluating Internet resources. In addition, the LSU Special Collections' assistant curator of manuscripts introduced attendees to the department's holdings, discussed the concept of primary and secondary sources and published versus unpublished materials, pointed out the benefits of using primary sources in instruction, and

conducted an exercise in analyzing them.¹⁰ Next, the digital project librarian gave an orientation to and demonstration of the digital collection's website, and teachers from the advisory panel presented their lesson plans. Finally, attendees were given time to work on their own lesson plans and to ask questions of available project staff and panel teachers.

The pre-workshop survey revealed that 85.7% of attendees were elementary school teachers, and 14.3% taught middle school. Unfortunately, no high school teachers attended.¹¹ Of the elementary school teachers, all taught social studies, but 57% also taught math and science, and 28.6% also are responsible for language arts. The middle school contingent teaches both reading and Louisiana history. All had Internet access in their classroom, and 71.4% reported using the Internet to plan lessons at least once a month; of those, 60% said they used it at least once week. Further, 71.4% had previously created web-enhanced classroom activities. In the post-workshop survey, 80% reported they were more likely after the workshop to use sources from the LSU site in their lesson plans. The remaining 20% were as likely to do so as before the workshop. All planned to use them in their units on the Louisiana Purchase. Comments on the post-workshop survey indicate that those who attended found the content useful and that it contributed to their excitement and knowledge about integrating project materials in their instruction. Though turnout for this workshop was lower than anticipated, offering stipends and placing press releases in professional newsletters could boost participation in similar workshops given by other institutions.

¹⁰ The exercise employed the document analysis sheets available from the Digital Classroom at the National Archives web site at http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/analysis_worksheets/worksheets.html.

¹¹ The liaison handled getting the word out to Louisiana teachers about the workshop. To advertise, she contacted the social studies supervisor at the Louisiana Department of Education and emailed the curriculum advisors in each parish (county) in the state. She also handed out fliers at local and regional meetings in spring 2002.

Lessons Learned

This grant was an IMLS national leadership grant, and as such, it provides a learning opportunity for other libraries and archives contemplating or beginning similar digital projects. Indeed, the experience of working with K-12 teachers offered many lessons.

As indicated earlier, a primary concern expressed by the teachers and realized by project staff was the lack of materials suitable for use with younger students. Not surprisingly, the holdings and services of most special collections departments, especially those associated with universities, lend themselves more readily to use by scholars, researchers, and graduate students than by pre-kindergarten to fourth grade learners. The LSU Libraries Special Collections are no exception, and, indeed, the original audience for the grant was a scholarly one. Granting agencies are, however (and archivists should be) concerned with wider public applications for such projects, but by the time the teachers became involved in this project, the materials to be digitized had already been chosen. As one teacher suggested, including more pictorial items or resources about topics which naturally interest children would make a digital collection more accessible and applicable to younger students. Two examples teachers gave for this project were materials related to children's lives during the era of the Louisiana Purchase or Native-Americans in the territory. Involving teachers in the early stages of selecting materials for a digital project would also improve its effectiveness and relevance to both teachers and their students.

Another lesson is the need to educate potential users of these digital collections about the unique types of materials held by special collections. The general public, including teachers, often has little knowledge of or experience with primary sources, such as letters and diaries. Not surprisingly, these groups may also lack an understanding of library or archival terminology and practice in relation to these types of documents. For example, one panelist's response to the survey showed a misunderstanding of the word "manuscript." She referred to each item in the digital collection as a manuscript, regardless of whether it was a book, map, or unpublished letter or deed; she associated the term with the item's presence in the digital collection, not its inherent qualities. This confusion led project staff to realize the

need to provide introductory information about the differences between published and unpublished materials and primary versus secondary sources at the teachers' workshop and on the website. Similarly, practices that make sense to librarians or archivists may seem nonsensical to the layperson. For example, the teachers questioned how project staff had designed the presentation of transcripts and translations. Proceeding linearly from the scan of the original document, project staff had provided the transcription of French or Spanish language documents, followed by their English translation, giving the version closest to the original document first. The teachers, however, wanted to immediately access the English translation. They commented that some users, upon seeing the transcription of the foreign-language document, would become discouraged and stop pursuing that resource. To meet both groups' concerns, a hyperlink to the English translation was added at the beginning of the transcription. Taking into account users' expectations and base of knowledge, and making necessary adjustments, will make a digital project more accessible and user-friendly, while at the same time educating them about the holdings of special collections.

A related lesson is the need to provide value-added information such as historical context and explanative labels about the digital objects. Such content is critical to illustrate the materials' pertinence to a topic because users come to these materials with unequal subject knowledge. Consequently, the website for "Louisiana Purchase: A Heritage Explored" will offer both exhibit-like and database approaches. "Topical modules," authored by Special Collections and New Orleans Public Library staff, as well as by scholars, will feature introductory essays interspersed with links to relevant, illustrative documents and publications in the digital collection. Possible topics to be included are land settlement, travels and voyages, commerce, Native Americans, culture and religion, government, the Louisiana Purchase itself, the bature question, the War of 1812, slavery, and agriculture and plantations.

Perhaps the most important conclusion project members reached as a result of working with the K-12 teachers is the advantage and necessity of appropriately timing teacher involvement. As

mentioned earlier, one of the teachers' concerns was the lack of materials appropriate and intellectually accessible for lower grades. Early teacher participation in selection of holdings to be included in a digital collection could alleviate this problem. Similarly, as indicated by the panel's difficulty in locating enough relevant items in the collection because they were using the site as it developed, participating teachers should not be asked to prepare lesson plans until the site is fully functional and complete. Again, this problem was a function of the timing of their involvement. As project staff worked out the bugs of workflow, project management, and technical issues, we were asking the teachers to use the site, which was not yet fully searchable, to make lesson plans. More thoughtful planning by project staff and adjusted expectations of granting agencies would instead make the creation of lesson plans one of the final steps in the project. Feedback from teachers during the "middle phase" of a project—the scanning and cataloging of materials and the creation of the project's web site—could be based on a test sample. At that time, their comments on the site's usability and suggestions on site design and needed value-added information would be most useful and relevant. In conclusion, a phased approach to teacher involvement—input on selection of materials in the beginning, feedback on samples of image files, cataloging information, site design, and contextual content as the project progresses, and creation of lesson plans based on the final product—would offer the most effective use of teachers' expertise.

Conclusion

As these "lessons learned" illustrate, K-12 teachers have something to teach library and archival professionals as well. Making the holdings of special collections libraries accessible to teachers and their students via digitization projects, and working with those teachers to integrate their use into classroom instruction, is a rewarding, though sometimes challenging, undertaking. If it is to be a successful one, archivists and librarians need to consider both what expertise they can offer to teachers and what special knowledge the teachers can offer them. Further, thoughtful planning of teacher involvement can result in more effective use of each participant's assets.

Bibliography

Louisiana Department of Education. *Louisiana Social Studies Content Standards: State Standards for Curriculum Development*. Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana Department of Education, 1997. Document online. <<http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/assessment/standards/SOCIAL.pdf>>. Accessed 9 September 2002.

Louisiana State University Digital Library. "The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial: A Heritage Explored." <<http://www.lsu.edu/diglib/LBI.nsf/Web/LBI>>. Accessed 16 September 2002.

Louisiana State University Special Collections. "Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections." <<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/frames/llmvc.html>>. Accessed 16 September 2002.

New Orleans City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. "County of Orleans, County Suit Records." <<http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/countycourt/county.htm>>. Accessed 16 September 2002.

New Orleans City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. "NOPL Archival Inventories" <<http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/invlist.htm>>. Accessed 16 September 2002.

Phillips, Faye. "The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial: A Heritage Explored." Grant application to the Institute of Library Services, 2000.