Eighteenth Century Colonial Life; An Archeological Dig

**Describe the practice proposed for recognition and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.**

*Eighteenth Century Colonial Life; An Archeological Dig* is designed to help students develop knowledge and appreciation of daily life, economic activities, and available resources in a New England town through their examination of objects commonly found in New England households and stores in the 1750's. This activity is part of a unit which studies the economic, social and cultural life of the Northern, Middle and Southern colonies. Working in groups, the students create presentations on those geographic regions. Then, they assume the role of archeologists as they examine reproductions of dishes, clothing, children's toys, musical instruments, apothecary bottles and even excerpts from a teacher's role book. The objects are placed at six different stations which correspond to locations on a site plan of a dig in one of the former original colonies. As students record information about the size, material and use of the objects, they draw conclusions about what type of building might have existed in that location. They are also asked to determine the social status of any family at the house sites and to determine in which area of the colonies the dig took place. Engaging students in a hands-on exploration of these items animates the 1750's and helps them visualize the activities of the family during a time when children's toys were carved out of sticks, rugs had to have the dust beaten out of them and hand dipped candles were a main source of light. Being able to pick up and play with many of the objects stimulates student curiosity as do the questions raised about some of the objects they examine. Determining why candles are connected leads to discussions about colonial manufacturing. Questions about why they might find a clam shell at the drugstore lead to discussions on colonial medicine. Identification of the different types of metals used: iron, pewter and silver; and the amount of decoration on a woman's hat asks students to become critical thinkers applying the information they have studied about colonial society in order to identify the social status of each household.

Although this activity uses reproductions of eighteenth century household items collected by the educator and borrowed from other sources, it is just as possible to conduct this exercise using items borrowed from a local historical society or museum. Although use of pictures of items may reduce the hands-on nature of the activity, it still requires critical thinking on the part of the students to deduce information about the daily life and customs of that society. Nor is this activity limited to one time period. It is just as possible to engage the students in an exploration of twentieth century life or the customs of a different culture simply by changing the nature of the items found. Educators can easily adapt this to any time period using the appropriate items.

**Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standards.**

The school's philosophy emphasizes hands-on instruction and critical thinking skills. The focus on experimentation, observation and analysis central to the school's scientific theme is mirrored in this social science activity. Students select the school for its science focus and are therefore attuned to discovery based learning. Exercises which actively engage the students facilitate their learning process. The activity addresses the core curriculum content standards in the following ways:

- 6.4.9 Evaluate the views, beliefs, and impact of different social groups on a given historical event or issue. Students must apply what the class has discussed about the Puritans in their analysis of the town's organization and the identification of the meeting house.
- 6.4.10 Evaluate how individuals, groups and institutions influence solutions to society's problems. This standard is addressed through a discussion of the town's layout which was useful for protection, a real concern for early New England settlers.
- 6.5.13 Analyze the mutual influences among different cultures throughout time. Among the items displayed are those which illustrate that the people were engaged in trade pointing to the economic relationship between New England and Europe.
- 6.5.15 Interpret how various cultures have adapted to their environment. This standard is also addressed as the presence of imported items reinforces the fact that the rocky New England soil caused the people to turn to the sea for a living.
- 6.3.16 Analyze how beliefs and principles are transmitted in a culture. The presence of the school reminds the students of the importance of education to the Puritans in transmitting their religious beliefs.
- 6.5.18 Evaluate the mutual influence of technology and culture. The presence of wooden toys, hand dipped candles and rough and polished pewter helps illustrate the state of manufacturing during the colonial period.
- 6.8.17 Explain how physical, social, cultural and economic processes shape the features of places and regions. This standard is addressed through the discussions of the influence of trade and the growth of New England towns generated by this exercise.

This activity also addresses the following Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards:

- Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standard 3; All students will use critical thinking, decision making and problems solving skills. The students are required to analyze information and draw conclusions throughout the exercise.
- Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standard 4 All students will demonstrate self-management skill. Students must work together in groups requiring cooperation and teamwork to accomplish the assigned tasks.

- Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standard 1 All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills. Students are assuming the role of archeologists which does introduce them to some aspects of that career.

**Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.**

To ensure that all students are participating in the observation and measurement of the items at each location, all students are required to record their object descriptions in their journals which are collected and checked. After the students have examined and taken notes on the items at each site, each group is required to present their findings in a written report where they must reference specific artifacts at each site to substantiate their conclusions. Within the report students must list and provide descriptions of each object at all six locations. Then they must write a paragraph analyzing the function of each location. Class time is spent organizing and composing the reports to ensure that each group reaches a consensus about their judgments and to encourage students to be detailed in their supporting arguments. Asking students to produce such a report requires them to analyze and synthesize the information in order to deduce both the location of the dig site and the purpose of each of the excavated buildings. Students are also asked to use the information to predict what the unexcavated site might be.

The report is evaluated based on the detail of their observations, the validity of their conclusions and the degree to which they support those conclusions. Students must apply what they have learned about New England towns and social class structure in order to identify the location of the dig as a New England colony, and determine that the house locations represent differing classes. Identification of the school and the meeting house requires them to apply their knowledge of Puritan culture. While some locations, such as the school, are easily deduced, others are open to differing interpretations. Students do not always associate a fife and musket ball with a munitions storeroom and propose varying explanations as to the connections between the items at that location. The explanation provided to support their deductions at that and other locations is the focal point of the evaluation. Students are encouraged to think both critically and creatively about the time period since they know that the evaluation is based on the explanations which highlight their inductive and deductive reasoning. The feedback they receive as they discuss options and ask questions promotes further investigation. For example, having concluded that one location is a drugstore, they are prompted to search for the common colonial term of apothecary. Finally, providing these detailed supporting explanations illustrates their critical thinking, reasoning and writing skills.