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Mining Our Heritage:

Oral History and Place-Based Learning in the Adirondacks

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Abstract:

Cultural history museums and historic sites recognize the power of storytelling to engage and educate their visitors. Public schools ingrained in a standards-based curriculum often overlook the value of family stories and local history. The emerging discipline of place-based education offers a pedagogical approach that uses the local community as the focal point, providing a unique curriculum that extends beyond the traditional school walls. Oral history is a fundamental methodology for connecting students to regional history and culture, and is an ideal introduction to the broader theoretical perspective of place-based education. This research explores the concept of using oral history to initiate a place-based program of study by using excerpts from interviews archived at the Adirondack Museum. These narratives offer a glimpse into the richly compelling history of the mining industry in the Adirondacks and form the basis for a place-based unit of study.

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Good history requires a good story. In essence, that's what oral history is, a story that helps students in their search for more reality, for direct experience and for first-person testimony
(Whitman 16).

A Peopled Park. A Storied Place.

The Adirondack Park in northeastern New York State is a six million acre amalgam of public and private land, the largest designated wilderness area in the lower forty-eight states. Within this state park there are approximately 130,000 year round residents, many of whom descend from generations of families who settled the region. There are also thousands more seasonal home owners. The Park is a unique paradox of preserved and inhabited wilderness, an unusual hybrid of state-owned public holdings and private property. It is a land of abundant resources where extractive industries once dominated the economy. The Park is a model for wilderness preservation, formed in part in response to destructive practices of the extractive industries. Yet these industries served as a livelihood to inhabitants of this land for decades. Sixty school districts serving nearly fifty thousand students fall within the Park's boundary. These students live within a rich landscape that could provide the K-12 curriculum with community-based experiences.

Stories of Adirondack life are filled with the joy and strife of living with wilderness. The stories recount the wonder of nature, struggles with community members and outsiders, terrifying work incidents, and pride of persevering. These stories have the ability to ignite curiosity and engage students in learning that directly connects them to the distinctive place in which they live. Most good stories include something thrilling, and have

sad parts and scary parts. These are stories we grow up with, heard again and again, to be retold again and again. These stories are part of community history. "Family history leads to community history, and community history leads to national and world history and history includes all other disciplines" (Umphrey, *The Power of Community-Centered Education* 120).

Although stories Adirondackers tell are often unique to this region, they hold a thread to the larger world. The community stories help to establish a connectedness to place.

However, they do not leave a person solely in one place, wearing blinders and not seeing what is beyond. "The point is that history begins at home, inevitably; but it does not end there. With local history as a starting point the student is drawn into a whole host of relationships that lead him into the world at large" (Mumford quoted in Kammen 89). Using community stories as a curricular lens helps students understand that their home, their history and they themselves are all an important part of the global story.

Teachers and students entrenched in traditional classroom teaching and learning often forget the value of family stories and local history. Teachers taxed with covering "required" material overlook a wealth of knowledge available in the community outside the school walls and in the homes of each of their students. Students lethargic from sitting and listening to a history they do not understand or care about can be energized by hearing about their own heritage and culture. Local stories offer the 'reality' Whitman refers to. "By participating in oral history projects students and teachers learn that education is not something you receive and imbibe (or impart and impose), but rather something you

create” (Lanman xiv). Students allowed to help create their own education are more invested in the outcome.

Young people are drawn to adventure. They wake up and join the conversation, excited by the power of the real (Umphrey, *The Power of Community-Centered Education* 5).

Michael Umphrey is the Director of the Montana Heritage Project, which has been described as a “modern version of old barn-raising parties” (Umphrey, “The Power of the Real” 4). Since its inception in 1995, the Montana Heritage Project, in partnership with the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, has been “connecting students with community members in the construction of the history, heritage, and folklore of their particular place on earth” (Umphrey, *The Power of Community-Centered Education* vi). Ethnographic inquiry and documentation of everyday lives is central to their work. If one were to pluck key words from Umphrey’s quote above, *conversation* and *real* jump out. Throughout the texts researched for this writing the words *real*, *relevant*, *authentic*, *meaningful* and *reality-based* appear again and again in reference to the type of learning students should be receiving. Scholars and proponents of both place-based education and oral history use these terms to describe an experience that is educational and engaging for students. Based on the evidence in this scholarly research, students who have the opportunity to interact with and interview people who share their community as part of their course of study are engaged in a real and authentic experience. It is knowledge straight from the proverbial “horse’s mouth.” Like the Library of Congress, regional museums and historic sites hold documentation of everyday lives. These sites engage their

visitors with community stories and authentic artifacts, and offer the power of the real.

School and museum partnerships offer a teamwork approach to providing students with access to authentic experiences, much like old time barn-raising. Years of experience as a Museum Educator at a regional history museum have proven to this author that students are intrigued by what is real. A common question I hear when presenting primary source material and authentic objects to students is, "Are these real?" These experiences, as well as ethnographic research done for program development, formed the basis for this study.

Mining Place

In 2010 the Adirondack Museum was awarded a planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for a new exhibit on the mining industry in the Adirondacks. Dating back to the early 1800s, eleven minerals have been commercially mined throughout the region. Only two minerals continue to be mined in the Park today. As part of the research, staff interviewed many local residents who had ties to the mining industry. Conducting the interviews was a profound learning experience for museum staff. The interviews revealed the dangerous aspects of the extractive work. They also exposed evidence of workplace bullying and deep-seated racism. If students had been present for the interviews they would have gained valuable knowledge about their communities. Would the experience have given them an authentic, real world experience? Would they have felt more connected to their place and more engaged in their education? How might the learning been transferred to the classroom? These essential questions will be explored throughout this writing.

Listening to the interviewees, we discovered a strong attachment to this place among earlier generations of residents. We found that people who lived and worked here wanted to continue to live here regardless of hard times caused by lack of work. Those who had moved away often found their way back to the Adirondacks; the lure of the natural beauty and recreational pursuits underpinned a strong compulsion to return.

I got lonesome for the Adirondacks, and the change of seasons. The mountains out west are beautiful, course I was born in Colorado, but I was ready to come back to New York State. My kids are trying to pry me out of here now, but I'm not ready to go. I've left my footprints on most of the peaks here (A. Rosenquist).

Archie Rosenquist, who lives just outside Port Henry, New York, on the northern border of the Adirondack Park, remarks on his decision to move back to the area. He worked in the mines for Republic Steel in the 1950s and 60s, and left the region in the late sixties when he "saw the writing on the wall" with the layoffs at the mine. For many local residents, the natural beauty of the region is a strong motivation for living here.

Many people who live in the Adirondacks, especially those who would call themselves native – born and raised, several generations in, would not live anywhere else. Not even lack of work would drive them away. They have a deeply engrained *sense of place* and the thought of moving elsewhere for the so called 'better life' does not occur to them. Sense of place is defined as "the subjective and emotional attachment people have to a place" (Cresswell 7). Joan Daby, also of Port Henry, explains that she and her husband did

not consider moving when he was laid off from Republic Steel. Their children were born here. This was their home. They would find a way to make a living here in this place.

Angie Snye: His losing his job for Republic Steel- did not make a decision for you to leave the area?

Joan Daby: Oh no, no. I would never leave the area. Neither one of us wanted to. In 1957 we purchased the house we have now. We just liked it here. Like the quiet. And our friends were here. Our relatives were here. Family...

Christine Campeau: So leaving was never an option?

JD: Never an option (Daby).

Based on these interviews, for many people place goes beyond mere geography; it is about home, family, work, accomplishments and disappointments, strife, triumph, life and death. Yet, place-based education scholar Amy Demarest observes that, "Places are open to interpretation and may mean things to different individuals" (Demarest 9). Gruenewald mentions that the word *place* is synonymous with the word *community*, an elusive term that goes beyond merely living in close proximity. It can refer to a certain locale but also to "a shared social identity, the gay community, black community..." (Perks and Thomson 261). And in the case of this writing, the focus is on the Adirondack community and the mining community. The Oral History Association publication *Using Oral History in Community History Projects* offers this definition:

The term community encompasses nearly every kind of human group conceivable, from family to political, cultural, occupational, or religious organizations whose membership is far-flung. Whatever its size or consistency, a community consists of individuals bound together by a sense of shared identity (Mercier and Buckendorf 1).

The writing of Michael Umphrey and his work with the Montana Heritage Project, as well as the work of other scholars cited here, chiefly David Gruenewald, David Sobel and Gregory Smith, show that community is about shared experiences and memories and shared stories. It is about shared *space* which creates a *place* that is significant. And that significant place and community should be explored as part of a holistic public education.

Place-based Education

The emerging discipline of place-based education (PBE) speaks to this type of teaching, allowing students to take ownership of their schooling, as well as moving the learning outside traditional school walls. PBE uses the community as its text book. Although it grounds students' learning in the community, it does not end it there. Lewis Mumford was an early advocate of learning in place, stating: "Local history is the way to make it real, to make it important" (Mumford quoted in Kammen 85). Here again, the word "real" resonates.

Although its name may suggest otherwise, PBE is not simply and solely about exploring one's own backyard. Rather it suggests that students who have had an immersive education in their own place can be more well-rounded global citizens. David Orr says it best, while bringing Lewis Mumford's ideals in as well:

Critics might argue that the study of place would be inherently parochial and narrowing. If place were the entire focus of education, it certainly could be. But the study of place would be only a part of a larger curriculum which would include the study of relationships between places as well. For Mumford, place was simply the

most immediate of a series of layers leading to the entire region as a system of small places (Orr 94).

David Sobel argues that students who are able to master what is going on in their own communities are better equipped to move on to the greater world. And through the study of 'real' local history, they become engaged in something that connects to their own lives and local history keeps their interest because they can see where they fit in. When students study their local history *in* their community with local residents, rather than in their classroom, "community ceases to be a buzz word in a mission statement and becomes a way of life" (Umphey, *The Power of Community-Centered Education* 136). Getting outside the school walls begins the engagement for students; uncovering thrilling stories of where they live is true education. As Umphey says, young people are drawn to the adventure. When learning is an adventure everyone succeeds.

Education that is place-based sings regional songs, reads local authors, documents ethnic histories, records the stories of community elders, and views local citizens as unique and precious resources (Nachtigal 20).

Place-based education is "rooted in what is local, using the unique history, culture, environment and economy of a place" to teach across disciplines (Bartsch and Sobel 2). This is not a packaged curriculum that comes in a box for teachers to unpack and follow step by step. "By its very nature, place-based education is not something that can be

packaged and disseminated” (Smith 4). This curriculum is unique to the community of each school district. Programs and activities can be modified to fit schools and communities but ultimately it is a unique experience for teachers and students. This is what makes PBE exceptional, as well as confusing and, to some, suspect. PBE scholars admit it is “a term not commonly recognized nor clearly defined. It runs the continuum of outcomes from a traditional focus on content acquisition to a vision of youth empowerment and community renewal” (Demarest 1). PBE does require a greater initial investment of time, creativity and, in some cases, money on the part of the school. Place-based programming requires teachers and administrators to look differently at the delivery of curriculum, to take more risks, to accept not knowing all the answers, to be open to all outcomes. This approach often runs counter to how many teachers were taught to teach. Public school teachers typically follow a known, safe, traditional pedagogical style, and PBE suggests an approach too revolutionary for comfort. Through no true fault of their own teachers are caught in a myriad of factors, including high stakes testing, shrinking budgets, new professional performance review requirements and the latest version of learning standards that cause them to reject progressive educational approaches and stick with the status quo.

Many schools tout “seat time” for students, claiming that is how they will learn and achieve sufficient marks on standardized tests. Proponents of place-based education would argue that just the opposite is true. Giving students real world experiences outside the school walls is what causes the learning to ‘stick’ and leads to increased test scores. But increasing test scores alone is not the goal of PBE: “If we just focus on test scores, we ignore

the deeper mission of schools as laboratories of democracy” (Bartsch and Sobel 1).

According to Sobel, Guenewald and Smith, students who are given a say in their education show improved academic performance that is natural, not forced memorization to be regurgitated at a given time and forgotten soon after. Experiences that lead to this kind of learning should be worth the extra effort.

Placed-based education scholars recognize creating a curriculum that differs greatly from standard mandates is problematic and “takes time, persistence and a heavy dose of creative thinking” (Clark 21). Tips for success include starting small, working with existing programs and school schedules, and identifying existing community partnerships and building on those. PBE success stories are chronicled in texts and there are numerous examples to follow. *Place-based Learning and Civic Engagement Projects from Around the Country* can be found in the text prepared by Delia Clark and The Center for Place-based Learning and Community Engagement and *A Forest For Every Classroom*. Here are two examples that could be adapted for use here in the Adirondacks:

Reclaiming the Land

Mill Creek School in Hemlock, OH is surrounded by reclaimed mining land, including a 250-acre tree farm, and a 2,600-acre wildlife area. Students visited these areas as they examined the history and impact of coal mining in their area and environmentally sound options to reclaiming the land. Students documented their discoveries in journals and public presentations to the school and community.

PLACE: Interdisciplinary Study of Dan Hill

Through a partnership between the University of Vermont, Shelburne Farms and Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, 7th grade students went deep into the study of an abandoned homestead along the Appalachian Trail. They met

with local experts to study the ecology, agricultural history and literature of the valley, and conducted oral histories and interviews about current agricultural and forestry practices. They produced a photo calendar, raising over \$1,000 contribution toward the restoration of the original Community House (Clark 61, 65).

Reclaimed mining land is plentiful in the Adirondacks. Just outside of Newcomb, New York, lies the one of the world's richest veins of iron ore. Iron is no longer mined there, but visitors to the area surrounding the former mine (open to all as part of public Adirondack lands), can pick up a random piece of rock, put a magnet to it and notice the magnetite present in the specimen. The deep gorges created from open pit mining are now filled with water forming pristine lakes. These treasures are right in these students' back yard. People who have worked at both extracting the ore and working on reclamation efforts are available to talk about their experiences. (An outlined project for exploring former mined land is detailed further in this writing.) This experience looks ideal, and when linked to current national learning standards it can become a model project that extends across curriculum combining place-based learning, oral history and authentic engagement. This project can be used as a vehicle for local teachers to meet current standards developed to prepare students for life beyond K-12 education.

Learning Standards and Place

In 2010 New York State adopted the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The CCLS have been a long time coming and are referred to as "evidence-based standards." "These standards serve as a consistent set of expectations for what students should learn and be able to do, so that we can ensure that every student across New York State is on

track for college and career readiness” (New York State Education Department). Indeed college and career readiness is the crux of these standards, and they differ from previous state-based standards in that they stipulate more non-fiction reading for informational understanding and insist on more “curriculum-embedded tasks that are intended to engage students in applying their knowledge and skills in an authentic and relevant context” (McTighe). Place-based education scholars, McTighe among them, maintain that what makes it authentic is a true, meaningful connection, a feeling that students and teachers are doing something useful. What better way for students to make cultural connections personal than in the place they live and the stories of people who live there? For example, countless curriculum connections can be linked to climbing Mount Marcy, the highest Adirondack peak and tallest mountain in New York State - math, history, environmental education, ecology, even music. Unfortunately it is a hard sell to teachers to argue that test preparation can happen as easily on the ascent of Mount Marcy as in a seat in the classroom. Again, the ‘seat time’ – time spent in the classroom listening to rhetoric-- is thought of as the best way to prepare students for the tests that teacher achievement scores are hinged upon. Still teachers bemoan this lost opportunity.

Why are we using text books that focus on land forms in AZ when we have such amazing resources in our backyard? Yet most students have never hiked a mountain and the curriculum ignores this great local teaching resource (Sobel 4).

This quote is from a teacher in Gorham, New Hampshire, but could easily be voiced by a teacher in the Adirondacks. Our schools use generic textbooks to teach landforms and geography when glorious mountains are a short trip away. Archie Rosenquist refers to

leaving his footprints on all these mountains. There are many Adirondack students who do not have the opportunity to climb even one. Perhaps if they learned more about the high peaks in school instead of generic landforms they would be more enthused to reach an Adirondack summit. Or if they talked to a 46er - someone who has climbed all 46 high peaks in the Adirondacks--they could hear the thrill of it in the raconteur's voice and be spurred on.

Place-based education stands on the shoulders of environmental education (EE). However, many educators are ready to move beyond environmental education, feeling the term is too narrow and carries too much baggage (Sobel 8). Sobel remarks that "folks parading under the banner of environmentalism are greeted with suspicion" and explains further that "cultural heritage has less baggage than environmental education" and "teaching in the environment rather than about the environment" is more effective (Sobel, 60-61, 90). Demarest echoes Sobel's stance that the term 'environmental' education is a heavily weighted phrase, adding, "too many see our field as a way to preach their own agenda rather than as an accountable educational process that can educate and empower" (Demarest 21). EE all too often ignores the social and economic realities by its sole emphasis on the environment and ecological issues. Sobel wisely suggests treading lightly when carrying a green stick so as not to raise the hackles of those who might detect an environmentalist agenda that runs counter to their beliefs. This is certainly true of many people in Adirondack communities. Environmental education in the Adirondacks may lead to misunderstanding, confusion and sometimes anger.

The Adirondack Museum education department offers a program called *Adirondack Advocates*. It introduces students to people influential to the creation of the Adirondack Park and explores differing points of view held over time. The program culminates with a debate about a current land use controversy – the removal of defunct fire towers on Adirondack mountains, installing wind turbines or cell phone towers, paddling through waters that pass through private land. The program has evolved and evaluation has made it stronger. In its early incarnation students were assigned to three representative groups that characterize the basic positions that emerge in land use issues in the Adirondacks - the State of New York, upholding a preservationist point of view; a local lumber company, characterizing a conservationist ideology, and resort owners pushing the development ideal. In the interest of time, students were randomly assigned to each group. They were asked to set their personal feelings aside and come up with arguments to support the group they were representing. They were given materials to help them develop their arguments. During one presentation with a class of sixth graders, a student adamantly refused to have any part of representing the State of New York. Even with coaxing and explaining that this does not indicate his personal feeling, he refused to participate. On his sweatshirt was the logo of a local logging company. It was clear where this student's loyalties lay, and even in a hypothetical situation he was not going to side with the "enviros." The boy may have presented the conservation point of view quite well, for it seemed to be what he was familiar with. This was eye opening in the evaluation of the program. As a result, it is now structured differently, with students choosing which side they wish to represent even if it creates unbalanced teams. This is, after all, how it works in real life.

In the text, *Place-Based Education in the Global Age*, Matt Dubel, Sustainable Project Coordinator for Shelburne Farms in Vermont, writes about his experience as an intern in a sixth grade classroom at Guilford Central School in Vermont. The work of slate quarrying is a strong part of Guilford's cultural history. Dubel used this history to help make "a study of geology come alive." He explains that this place-based approach is ideal because "so much of what passes as geology study is bookishly abstract, mystifyingly disconnected from the earth beneath the students' feet" (336). The unit of study included using census records from the Town Office and compiling lists of residents who worked in the slate quarries in 1860 and 1870. They put their math skills to work and tabulated data from the reports. Students also visited the largest slate quarry in Guilford, accompanied by a geologist, as well as a working slate quarry with a local quarry owner. Students then simulated a Town Meeting engaging in a dialogue on "land use, environmental impact, trail access, community heritage, quality of life, economic development the survival of small business, and the town budget" (Smith 341). Dubel's geology unit grounded learning in place and the students "saw the intersection between people and the land in full spectrum, an in the process honed skills that cut across the lines of subject areas and disciplines" (Smith 338).

Dubel's unit on geology and the Museum's *Adirondack Advocates* program are fine examples of place-based education in action, and the activities and exercises used support the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The CCLS for English Language Arts state:

To become college and career ready, students must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations...must be able to contribute appropriately to these conversations...listen attentively to others so that they build

on others' meritorious ideas while expressing their own clearly and persuasively (New York State Education Department).

These programs accomplish this. However, it can be argued that they could be all the more effective if they began with an oral history project. If students participating in Adirondack Advocates could interview and ask questions of people in their own communities that hold these points of view might their debate be all the more lively? The geologist and local quarry owner may add depth to the geology unit and further inform the "Town Meeting" for Dubel's unit. Verbal testimony from community members allows students to see "the role of common people in history" making the study of history "much more relevant and interesting" (Lanman xiv).

*"What could be more natural than the pairing of old people who need to reflect on life with young people who need the meat of reality-based stories?" (Umphey, *The Power of Community-Centered Education* 52).*

Oral History and Place

There are countless books written about successful oral history projects. It has been found to be a richly rewarding way to connect with community and meet standards. Indeed, local stories offer the "meat" for an educational experience relevant to students' own lives. An examination of the following programs is outlined below: The Oral History

Project in Pennsylvania, Glenn Whitman's American Century Project and the widely acclaimed Foxfire project. These three examples are highlighted as they illustrate respectively: the inclusion of objects of material culture; a traditional interview approach that can be integrated into existing curricula; and a ground breaking, progressive program that has inspired teachers and generated similar projects.

The Oral History Project was a collaborative effort of educators in Pennsylvania initiated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in 1998. Described by the authors as "an authentic experience," the project had students interview a member of the community, do research and create a triptych, a three panel display piece for presentation. An interesting part of this project is the inclusion of artifacts from the interviewees. From quilts to war memorabilia, these objects are used to trigger memories and provoke stories from the interviewees. In this way, "artifacts are the vehicles that help people tell their stories" (Heyler et al. 37). The addition of artifacts of material culture adds texture to a well executed project. These important pieces from the lives of the interviewees are captured in photographs and added to the students' triptychs as they recognize their importance in giving the students' "greater depth of understanding the person's story" (42). Donald Graves remarks in the forward of the book chronicling the success of The Oral History Project in Pennsylvania that "interviewing, the ability to gather information from others...is a lifelong skill that has application on any job the student may acquire" (Graves in Heyler et al. ix). This ties directly to the college and career readiness goal of the CCLS. Many Pennsylvania school districts used the Oral History Project model and have seen "significant

increases in their students' reading and writing scores on the state assessments" (Heyler et al. 3).

Incorporating objects into oral history projects opens the door to possible partnerships with museums and historic sites. "Museums are especially well positioned to act as a meeting ground and resource for doing place-based history and support combining place-based education with social history through the practice of oral history" (Gruenewald, Koppelman, and Elam 236, 239). Teachers can look to local sources, museums, libraries and historic sites as texts for curricular requirements. These resources hold examples of material culture, written primary documents and ephemera, as well as first person testimony in 'ready-made' form (Whitman 15). Existing narratives can help students and teachers ease into an oral history project. Delia Clark suggests taking small steps when beginning a place-based curriculum; using local sources and existing material is the first small step. The next step is for students to go into the community and conduct their own interviews, calling on untapped resources. "Written documents are fixed, they exist whether we are aware of them or not, and do not change once we have found them. Oral testimony is only a potential resource until the researcher call it into existence" (Perks and Thomson 39). In classrooms across the country the "emphasis is on covering, rather than uncovering, material" (Whitman 1). Conducting interviews with community members, people whom they know, provides students with tangible connections. Michael Umphrey observes:

Howard Gardner wondered what would happen if instead of enrolling students in school, we enrolled them in a museum. Not a museum where docents give guided tours and offer reformulated scraps of learning, and not a museum designed as a tourist attraction, but a museum as a place where the local world could be studied and interpreted, a museum as a work center where young and old together could decide what needs to be remembered, what needs to be learned, and what stories need to be told (Umphey, *The Power of Community-Centered Education* 113).

Gardner's vision is partly attainable if teachers recognize the rich resources they have available to them and start using them.

Glenn Whitman documents the success of the American Century Project in his text *Dialogue with the Past*. He provides valuable tips for executing a project, including many examples of in classroom activities. Whitman outlines how oral history is "flexible enough to integrate into existing curriculum in a variety of ways," and the projects "create a unique opportunity for collaboration between schools and state and local museums and libraries" (3). He maintains that "in no way can oral history stand alone; in fact, oral history complements the more traditional, written sources and allows students to gain a broader perspective..." (15). This is where teachers may get confused and frustrated. Oral history does not replace and add to the curriculum, it is a tool to help meet the curricular requirements. Teachers ignore it as a valid teaching tool because they perceive it as adding more work to their already overloaded curriculum. Oral history does not replace, it enhances. True, there is a certain degree of extra work involved in setting up an oral history project, but the rewards validate the initial time investment.

Whitman's text has an entire chapter with step by step instructions on conducting interviews, including how to work with tape recorders. In the nine years since he published his book there have been stunning technical advances in recording equipment. Apple products alone, especially the iTouch and iPad, have revolutionized how we communicate. These products are also deemed 'cool' by young adults. To get their hands on one to do school work is enough to pique their interest in a project. The CCLS recognize new technology as an integral part of the learning atmosphere and include this language as part of the Speaking and Listening standards for all grades K-12:

New technologies have broadened and expanded the role that speaking and listening play in acquiring and sharing knowledge and have tightened their link to other forms of communication. The Internet has accelerated the speed at which connections between speaking, listening, reading, and writing can be made, requiring that students be ready to use these modalities nearly simultaneously. Technology itself is changing quickly, creating a new urgency for students to be adaptable in response to change.

All students, but especially rural students who have limited opportunities, should have access to the latest technologies at school. Typically money for technology stays in school budgets even as programming gets slashed because staying current is vital. An oral history project is an ideal way to get students involved in recording, transcribing and editing using the latest technology.

In rural Georgia in the late 1960s an English teacher was struggling to get his students interested in their learning. He decided to let them choose for themselves how

they would learn the material. The students chose to create a magazine that would contain interviews and stories gathered from people living in their Southern Appalachian communities. This one teacher's initiative to get to know the community he was working in and motivate his students became the success known as Foxfire. The magazine has been in publication for more than 37 years and has evolved into Foxfire Press with numerous publications, teaching units and a product line. Foxfire is the epitome of the power of oral history. The Foxfire method has been inspiring teachers for decades "to personalize history, to motivate students, and to engage students in the rigors of historical investigation, analysis, interpretation" (Lanman 5). These are the very words that make up the language of the CCLS. The name Foxfire comes from the phosphorescent glow of the fungi by the same name that is commonly found in the Appalachian forests. The attraction to this "faerie fire" is akin to the attraction of a good story.

These and other oral history success stories prove that these projects can be done anywhere and that their value is immense. Umphrey notes several factors students have said are important, including they "believe they are preserving history that will be otherwise lost" (Umphrey, "Leading Students into Engagement"). Typically it is the oldest members of communities who are interviewed. These wise elders are the keepers of precious knowledge that could vanish if not captured. Drew Saylor, a student working on the American Century Project, remarks: "Oral historians are constantly working a race against time to get the stories people harbor before they disappear." Saylor also notes that the interview process teaches students respect and responsibility that come with "historical

knowledge.” “History is no longer this large and daunting entity that had nothing to do with me and which I read in a large, boring textbook; it was living and I was part of its preservation”(Whitman). Being a part of something is a valuable learning experience in itself.

Passive vs. Active Oral History

According to Lanman and Weldling there are two pedagogical approaches to involving students in an oral history project. The first is *passive* oral history which is simply integrating existing sources into curricula - ‘ready-made’ resources. This method is often used first to introduce students to the discipline and can offer content for a unit of study (Lanman xix). This method is also a small step towards an in-depth project. When students read intriguing verbal testimony about their local place it makes them hungry for more. If told they could be the ones to go out to collect these stories, the excitement builds. These ready-made clips are used to whet the appetite; field trips to local sites engage the students further and help them to determine what more they would like to know. To advance the unit of study, the students then move to an active level of inquiry. Passive oral history can be approached by simply giving students testimonials to read or, even more compelling, students can listen to the original recordings so they can hear tone and inflection in the voices. “The tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing” (Portelli 47).

Prominent oral historian Alessandro Portelli contends that a basic oral history technique is the art of listening to what your interviewee is saying as well as how he or she

is saying it. “Many narrators switch from one type of rhythm to another within the same interview, as their attitude toward the subjects under discussion changes. Of course, this can only be perceived by listening, not by reading” (48). Portelli contends the original recorded voice is the true document; a transcript amounts to an interpretation no matter how carefully it may be executed. Most oral historians work from transcripts and occasionally the original recording is destroyed, an act Portelli equates with “the destruction of the spoken word” (46). Although reading primary sources does have value, the real world experience comes from being present when the sources are created.

The second approach is *active* oral history in which students conduct interviews and develop narratives (xix). Sharing transcripts and oral clips of interviews with students can aid learning and certainly arouse their interest. However, “there is only one way to learn oral history and that is by doing it” (Kyvig and Marty 130). Ayers concurs: “Oral history projects engage students because they are involved in the creation of historical information, documents, and narratives perhaps otherwise unavailable. By conducting oral histories students are not passively reading history, but rather are writing history” (36). By writing their own history, students are involved in authentic, real world learning.

Students should realize that “ordinary people make history and are historically important” (Gruenewald, Koppelman, and Elam 1). History is not only about Presidents and Generals, heroes and villains; in other words, history is not just about the dead white men in text books. The History Channel will tell you in their clever marketing campaign “history is made every day.” Indeed it is. By nurses, car mechanics and teachers, by the guy next

door and the kid you sit next to in English class, by people who work in offices, forests, mine shafts and Wal-Marts, by moms and dads and aunts and uncles.

If students do not see themselves in their history, then they may ask, why bother learning it? Listening to individuals who may not be exactly like them but who share similar life situations can make history more compelling for the bored student. “Many theories of oral history are, in fact, theories of social history as a whole” (Portelli 47). Simply put, “social history is the history of the everyday experiences and beliefs of ordinary people” (Ayers 40). John Dewey writes in his *Pedagogic Creed* that the “only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations he finds himself in” (Dewey 427). Dewey was committed to the social life of the learner and felt school should be an extension of community life. Dewey’s progressive vision heralds the basic tenets of PBE. David Sobel tells us that, “John Dewey had this figured out almost a hundred years ago” (18). Grounding learning in the learner’s familiar world adds personal meaning to their education.

Working

People’s work often defines place for them, producing compelling stories that reveal common experiences and create group identity. Foremost oral historian Studs Terkel, hailed as the “microphone of America’s workforce,” (Lanman 19) proved this with his seminal book *Working*. The verbal testimony he collected from hundreds of common working people has served as a reference for over thirty years, read and studied by students across the country, analyzed by scholars, adapted for the stage and heralded as an

influential text of American life. Terkel interviewed all classes of people in the work force from paper boys to stone masons. He also includes the narratives of those who worked in the mining industry. Many of Studs' subjects discuss general, mundane employment, although some recount arduous toil like work in the extractive industries. In the Adirondacks work is often hard; physical labor defines communities. Linda Shapes remarks on the many interviews she has conducted, saying "if there is a single theme running through the interviews, it is the importance of 'hard work' in the shaping of a person's life and identity" (Shapes quoted in Perks and Thomson 266). This social history produces enthralling stories that make students want to come to the table to listen.

Allessandro Portelli recorded the testimonies of miners both in his native Italy and in the coal mining country of Harlan, Kentucky. Portelli claims most of his education came from listening to steel workers and coal miners. Why is this subject compelling? Is it the danger? The long world-wide history? Yes, and this work has a long history in the Adirondacks comprising stories and oral testimonies that can hold rapt the most angst ridden student. Mining also has relevance in today's society, in ways most students would not realize. What follows is an in-depth look at the history of mining in the Adirondacks, infused with oral history excerpts that bring color and life to the history.

Case Study: Mining the Adirondacks

"I have a story about when we lived in Lyon Mountain," Maybelle Coburn Gregory offers during an interview at the Iron Center in Port Henry, New York. Maybelle and fellow

resident Esther Waldron are telling us about growing up in a mining town and their fathers' work in the iron mines that define the region. Lyon Mountain, on the northern border of the Adirondack Park, also has a rich history in iron mining. Maybelle's father worked there and one other mine before settling his family in Port Henry on the eastern edge of the Park along Lake Champlain. "There was an accident," Maybelle continues, "and the rumor was my father had been killed. And everybody was coming with food to my mother's house. And they came and told her (here Maybelle refers to a company official) that they thought it was my father, and he walked through the door. Can you imagine that? Her sisters were there, everyone was there and he walked in. And he said, I came to my own wake" (Colburn Gregory, Maybelle and Waldron, Esther).

Can you imagine that? Certainly Maybelle's family knew her father worked at a dangerous job. Statistically mining ranks still today as one of the world's deadliest occupations. But to be told by a high ranking manager that your father is dead only to have him return home safe moments later? It is a story that raises the hair on your arms and gets you thinking about your own family, and their work and what it would be like to go through an experience like this. Used in the classroom, this oral history excerpt could entice students to discuss the dangerous history of work in their community, work that perhaps their parents and relatives do; a lesson could begin with the dangers of working as a policeman or fireman and evolve from there. Oral history offers a spark that ignites conversation and investigation into community history.

For nearly two centuries mining spurred settlement and employed thousands of men throughout the Northern New York region. By 1840 practically thirty towns had been established by mining companies that built churches, schools, hospitals, homes, stores and transportation routes. The work brought many immigrant groups to these towns. “Their struggles to survive and assimilate and the traditions they brought with them are an Adirondack, and American story” (Rice, 10).

Valerie Rosenquist, herself the daughter, granddaughter and niece of miners, wrote her doctoral dissertation on the mining community of Moriah, New York. Rosenquist conducted over sixty interviews with immigrant workers and their descendants, who in most cases also worked in the mines. She reports on life in a company town, where everything was provided by and maintained by the mine owners.

Rosenquist gained entry to the homes of the former miners because of her connection to the town. Her name was familiar and she had graduated from Moriah Central School. “I learned to ask to turn off the television, almost always on. Once settled in, after a few preliminary comments, we would move swiftly to the heart of their stories.” The heart of their stories was their labor in the mines.

Their pride in their work and their history was evident. Most of the mineworkers enjoyed their life’s work, enjoyed talking about their particular roles in wresting the rock from the earth (V. Rosenquist 4).

Proud as they were of the work they performed, Adirondack miners had many oppressors. Rosenquist tell us that the immigrant groups who came to work in the mines

around Moriah “shared a position of powerlessness before the recognized authorities of the town: the iron companies – Witherbee, Sherman and then Republic Steel, and the Catholic Church” (V. Rosenquist iii).

Alice Paden Green recalls years after these first immigrants arrival in Mineville the heavy hand of the Catholic Church persisted. Her family endured a double stigma of being Presbyterian and African American.

The whole town was Catholic. That was the other problem we had, very few people of color and everybody was Catholic. You grew up believing that if you weren't Catholic something was wrong with you, and you grew up believing if you weren't white something was wrong with you.

There was also the back-breaking work. Mining was and remains a dangerous occupation. Miners faced risks caused by blasting, collapsing tunnels, lack of air supply and long term health effects from breathing dust and mineral particles. We need look no further than the news to hear stories of mining accidents and deaths around the world. In 2010 we heard the tragic story of West Virginia miners trapped by a massive cave in. Later that same year, we were held rapt as Chilean miners were finally hoisted above ground after 69 days trapped below. The summer of 2012 brought reports from South Africa of workplace strikes that turned deadly. Kids hear of these terrible events, watch them on TV, discuss them at home and perhaps among friends. How can this ongoing discussion be brought into the classroom? How can students be shown that this national and international news is not so far removed from their local history?

On October 13, 2010, retired geologists Severn Brown and Don Grout from the Balmat zinc mine in western edge of the Park in St. Lawrence County were interviewed at the Adirondack Museum. This interview took place on the day the Chilean miners were rescued.

Don Grout: You mention Mexico, this is a rather appropriate day to be talking about mining when they finally started rescuing these guys in Chile.

Christine Campeau: I wanted to ask you about that. Have you been following the story?

DG: Pretty much. When I left home they just got the eleventh man out from underground.

CC: There has been so much in the news over the last few years, like the West Virginia miners...

DG: the Chinese

CC: I'm sure when you hear these stories your ears perk up? Think about your days underground?

DG: I personally try **not** to think about it! <laughs>

DG: <more serious> I try not to think about some of it, because if you're in the mines sooner or later you're going to have a close call or two.

CC: Did you ever have a close call?

DG: <gravely> oh yeah, oh yeah

Severn Brown: <laughs soberly and nods in agreement>

CC: Could you tell me about it?

SB: I was going through the stoopes, the chambers from which they extract ore with Beaner Bishop. You've heard about Beaner Bishop?

DG: Oh yeah.

SB: And he was a local farm boy that went in to the mines, all the miners there were local farm boys, they did not want the itinerant miner that you see in the western mines.

DG: Some of them were third and fourth generation, of the same family, working in the mine.

SB: We were in the Number 2 streeter zone going down the side of the stope and the back started to come in, the back is the roof, and we went over to the side and stood there, sat there, talked to each other probably for three-quarters of an hour waiting for it to silent, quiet down.

DG: Quit cracking and popping.

SB: You know that mining is an extra hazardous job, just like a farmer knows that someone in the adjacent farm fell in a silo, that sort of thing...construction, timber ...

CC: Logging industry.

SB: Oh yeah, especially. And uh, you know about it...you've seen.

DG: Well we were talking about all the accidents that have trapped underground.

SB: I don't total the number, and I never talked to my wife about it. (Grout, Don and Brown, Severn)

Don agrees that he never told his wife about many of the close calls he experienced, including being underground with a miner checking things, and at the end of the day that miner never came back up so they went looking for him. He had been crushed by a piece of falling rock in the very same spot where Don had stood with him earlier that day.

This oral document is stirring to read; it has the elements of a gripping story - danger, fear and death. The interview is even more riveting to listen to, Severn Brown's raspy voice demands attention and his emphasis on certain words draws you into his story. Using this interview in its passive form could get students intrigued about the local mining

industry. Letting students listen to the raw interview could be even more convincing. Including students in the interviewing process would have been the best learning situation. Had a seventh grader asked Severn to tell a story about his work underground then a meaningful learning experience would have been created. Active participation is what brings students to their fullest learning potential. Being there makes all the difference.

The key word is community. Sense of community. In all the works. Not just Working, all the books. There's a sense of community. Participation does something to a person. This applies to the students. When you become part of something, a cause in which you believe, something involves you. When you take part, you suddenly realize you count. You count!

Studs Terkel talking with John Ayers in 1999 (Ayers 156).

In 2001, professor and author Rick Ayers published a teaching guide to Studs Terkel's ethnographic masterpiece, *Working*. Included in the text is an interview Ayers' brother conducted with the man defined as the "father of oral history" (Lanman 18). Terkel chronicled ordinary human lives in volumes of books. His experience taught him that it is the sense of community that is key. That sense of community, of place, makes you a part of something. This echoes the basis of place-based education.

Rick Ayers' *Working: A Teaching Guide* encourages teachers to use Terkel's masterwork with their students as an impetus to an oral history project. There is provocative material in the text to engage students and ignite thoughtful discussion. The interviews are raw and uncensored. They are peppered with coarse language, and hard feelings bleed through. They are real, not sugarcoated. These interviews would likely

receive at least a PG -13 cinema rating. They might even be censored in some schools. They do reflect what is real and can be called authentic.

Reality is ripe in Terkel's interview with Joe and Susie Haynes of the mining town of Blackey, Kentucky. "Mining is about all the work here, outside of highway work or farmin a little," says Joe, whose father started work in the mines as a child. Joe went in to mining after graduating high school and after nearly four decades was forced to quit due to failing health. He and his wife recount the injustice of the mining company, taking his ancestors' land and stripping the minerals from it. Susie says she will pack her son's things and ask him to leave if he goes to work at the mines. She would rather see him go back in the army. And this is during the Vietnam War (Terkel 30). Bob Sanders is a strip miner in Indiana and Kentucky border. "People's misinformed about the environmental thing. But I don't think it's fair to the industry for this kind of talk to go on" (Terkel 17). An interesting dichotomy exists in these interviews. Sanders is "makin a livin," and admits "nobody likes to see the ground tore up." Although Joe himself worked for the mine, the Haynes are vehemently against their son going to work for the company, to the point where they will kick him out of the house. This is an intriguing illustration of social history. If students were asked to compare this story to life in the Adirondacks would they find a parallel situation? Would they compare it to resistance to Adirondack Park Agency regulations and resentment of preservationist ideals? Although this story exposes an ugly side of reality, could students find something inspiring in the recount? How might middle schoolers interpret this story?

The questions are infinite and cannot be answered until these accounts are presented to a group of students so they may unpack the meaning and be inspired to dig deeper.

Ayers' guide suggests students investigate how and why the workforce has changed, and speculate on the kinds of jobs and careers they can expect to encounter. This would be a useful exercise before and after an oral history project to see if answers shift in any way. Local students might be surprised to learn there are still jobs in the field of mining in the Adirondacks. *Oral history* is not just about the past. Mining is relevant in the lives of students today. Everything we have - food, building materials, creature comforts - comes out of the earth, grown or mined. Minerals and ores are vital to maintaining the way we live and played an important role in building our nation and state. Although much reduced, mining is still practiced in the Park. Garnet, the region's only continuously mined mineral, is still processed by Barton International in the heart of the Park at the Ruby Mountain site in North Creek. CEO Chuck Barton discussed the company's achievements with Adirondack Museum staff, outlining how they have been able to stay ahead of the market.

CB: We've been very fortunate as a company to continue to exist; if you think about it ...there are two things we have against us ...one is that mining companies in a sense generally don't last very long especially the small ones...go in and hit a deposit and then they run out and they haven't done enough forward thinking to be able to go on once the deposit is depleted. And we're also a family business and as you know family businesses tend to fall apart. And we've been fortunate enough we've held the family business together and we've done so within the mining industry.

Behind that is our product life cycle, it's always been garnet but it's had different uses. And when we talk about a product life cycle, I'm talking about when a product is developed until a point and then you get to a point when the product is no longer needed by the market or is obsolete.

We knew the color television tube manufacturing was going to drop off because of flat screen, however in the 80s there was this emerging technology called water jet cutting. And as the water jet cutting evolved, which is basically taking a high stream of water to cut through items, initially the items to be cut through would be soft materials. It would be leathers; it would be wood, items like that. And then they said “I wonder if this water can cut through harder materials,” metal, stones, etc. And what they realized they had to put a media, had to put a substance in the high stream of water, and lo and behold, after years and years of research, they discovered – and we were part of this development too because we were working with the equipment manufacturers, research team – discovered that garnet was the perfect media because of its hardness, its density and so that market started taking off into the 80s. And now is actually our primary market (Barton).

The Barton story is a true model of successful business. They made sandpaper for the first one hundred years they were in business. Realizing they needed to diversify they went into optical lens and picture tube manufacturing and are now leaders in water jet cutting. Few students know of this regional success story. Although Barton is a big employer in the area, many residents do not fully realize the true impact the business has on the local economy and the rich history behind the industry.

In the northern part of the Park in Willsboro, New York, NYCO Minerals extracts wollastonite, a versatile additive used in the making of construction materials and automotive parts, among other products. An interview with their Marketing Director, Dawn Revette, revealed a proud history of employing local residents.

NYCO, with a fifty year history, we are the foremost producer and supplier of wollastonite in the world. It all started in upstate New York in the Adirondack mountains where wollastonite was first discovered.

And it is nice, we've had generations of families – grandfathers, fathers, sons, that have wanted to stay in the community, stay in the area, and who have come to work for NYCO (Revette).

Comparing present day activity to past operations helps students to understand the industry over time and its significance to the region. They can also see the changing ideology of land use. The environmental impacts of mining in the Adirondacks are severe and cannot be ignored. Yet there are ways to investigate historical use without villainizing the industry. Looking at the reclamation efforts on the part of Barton Inc. and NYCO Minerals shows the evolution of responsible use and how resources can continue to be harvested in sustainable ways.

Workplace Bullying and Discrimination

Cultural stereotypes and racism run through the history of Adirondack mining. Workplace harassment was a persistent presence. Sometimes this was considered “all in good fun” even if it bordered on bullying. Students today are all too aware of bullying and its impacts. In addition to the seat time needed to cover material for upcoming tests, students have mandated anti-bullying training. Oral history lessons can be used for this instruction.

Earlier this year I had the privilege to sit and talk with Alice Paden Green who grew up in Mineville, New York. Alice's was one of a handful of African American families living in the mining community whose fathers' worked in the mines. Although the racism they encountered in northern New York in the 50s and 60s was not as rampant as in the south,

they did still feel the sting of discrimination. Here she tells the story of her first working experience.

APG: When each one of us turns 14 the first thing you want to do is get a job, cause things are rough, you have to buy your clothes for school, you have to do everything...because the thing with the mines is there were highs and lows. A lot of labor disputes, ...seems like always a strike. And when there was a strike we really suffered because there was just no money at all. Every time they talked about there was going to be strike in the mines our stomachs used to get tied up in knots because we knew it was going to be even rougher than was during regular times. So the minute you turn 14 all you wanted to do was work, and so most kids worked in the summer, and they did work in the tourism business and so we tried to do the same thing but...

I got a job at Claudices in Paradox Lake. And they had in the back of the property...a big ol'... barn, I called it a barn because that's what it was, that was housing for people who worked. Well I shouldn't say for *people* who worked, for black people who worked, they separated their staff. So they put the blacks and some other people who worked there.

CC- What year was this?

APG - this was... 56 or something like that.

I had a couple of friends, who were friends all our lives, they were white, so we went together to get this job, we got hired, and oh we said this is great, we'd been together our whole lives, we'll room together... and the owner said, "no, no you won't." <Laughs> She said, you have to live here (in the barn.) The white waitresses, the white bartenders, all of them lives where the family lived and so she separated the African American people to stay in the barn, which is what it really was. I had never really been away from my family. And the other three or four blacks who were working there, and living in this place, they worked at night because they worked in the restaurant part. And I was suppose to work during the day, I was just a chambermaid. And so night fall comes and I went up to this horrible place, nobody there but me, and it was I said - like a barn, but they had separated

them into rooms and I was scared. <laughs> And all of the sudden these things started appearing and I said Oh My God. The place was full of bats!

CC: Bats!

AG: I'm scared to death of a bat to this day. They were all lined up along the top, surrounding my bed. And every now and then they'd fly over, or just sit there and make this noise. I was scared to death. I didn't sleep, I had the light on, I couldn't do it. The next day I went down to the owner and said there are bats here. She didn't really care; everyone else thought it was funny. Then I had to make a decision. I got really angry about what was happening. I don't know how long I stayed there maybe a day or two. And I realized although I needed the money I couldn't do it, mainly because... she was a racist and was discriminating against me and put me in this horrible place and ... so demeaning...and that my friend was given a good place within the family. I said I have to confront her.

CC: So you were 14, your first job and you went down and confronted her?

APG: Yeah and I knew I was going to get in trouble...cause my mother...we knew it was great that I had a job, the plan was how I was going to purchase my clothing and everything and really help out...and I knew that I couldn't stand both the bats and the treatment, to be treated like that. So that was more important to me.

So I had a big fight <laughing> in the middle of the room.

The people from the south they had worked with her for years so they accepted it. I said how she was a racist and pointed out how she treated the black help as opposed to the white help. And she was insulted. <lots of laughter>

CC: Did you say this in front of everyone? The other black staff who was there, how did they respond?

APG: Oh they just sorta looked at me like I was crazy. They were from the south, they accepted it, that was part of their lives. The other guy from Port Henry he wasn't afraid of bats (laughs) he didn't mind it, for him it was a job. And I understand that. It was a job for me too but I wasn't going to sell my soul for it.

CC: I have so many questions. What about your friend, how did she feel about this?

APG: She quit

CC: She quit with you?!

APG: Yup. (laughs) We're friends to this day (Green).

Alice's laughter during the telling of this distressing tale is a testament to her will, and how she has risen above this experience. She explained that after she went away to school to earn a teaching degree she wanted to return to her hometown. She applied for a teaching position at Moriah Central School but was declined, most likely based on her race. Yet Alice's attachment to the upstate Adirondacks did not fade. In 1997 she and her husband founded the Paden Institute offering writers of color a peaceful place to work on the shores of Lake Champlain.

Many miners interviewed talked about pranks pulled on the job. Jim McIntyre worked for National Lead at Tahawus for over three decades and retired as a supervisor. Here he recounts a typical work day.

They'd hide your lunch pail or they'd catch you going down someplace where you hadn't been working and dust ya, they called it dusting. You're going and then somebody would hit the beams and you'd get a lot of dust down on top of you, you know. Things like that. Or hose you down. There were water hoses all over the place up there, and there was always water fights. I mean they weren't supposed to be doing that stuff.

I had a fella get awful mad at me and another man one time. We were on the midnight shift and we were working on huge pump that pumped materials from here, say, oh, quite a ways away. They always had two pumps, a standby, you know. So we were working on this one. And this guy was up overhead and he was dropping dirt down on us and we we're not too happy about it. We were trying to

get this job done so we could get done. And I told this guy, I said “when we get done he’s going to get it, we’re going to hose him down good.” So we got done about 3 – 4 o’clock in the morning, and the guy was sitting on his bench kinda dozing off, so I went up one way and this guy went around the other way and we both got water hoses and we put it right to him. And boy was he mad, he was ready to kill us both but he couldn’t catch us (McIntyre).

Archie Rosenquest recalls pranks pulled at Mineville.

AR: The dinner pails, they got nailed to the benches. Everybody was in a hurry to get home. They’d grab a dinner pail and leave half of it on the bench.

Angelia Snye: Was it all taken with good humor?

AR: Mostly generally it was. Sometimes it got to be a little bit...bullying. But, um, you know, boys will be boys I guess (A. Rosenquist).

A teaching unit on civil rights could be enhanced by listening to Alice who grew up on Elizabeth Street in Port Henry. How would students respond to Alice’s workplace experience? Could they imagine this happening today? The Common Core Standards stress college and career readiness, but do they prepare students for bullying and discrimination? Topics personally relevant to today’s student can be addressed through the study of oral history.

Bringing Place into the Classroom

Outlined here is a glimpse into the multi-faceted and richly compelling history of the mining industry in the Adirondacks. A teacher using one or more of these oral history clips could engage students in the heritage of this region and provoke critical thinking about the place where they live. Progressing from these passive clips, an entire unit on mining could be implemented that includes learning opportunities across all disciplines, and out of classroom place-based excursions that bring the history to life, and life to education. The following is a curriculum plan for using story, passive oral history, and place-based learning to ignite students' curiosity to seek further knowledge through an active oral history project. A deliberately thin lesson plan is included in appendix A. From their own perspectives, teachers, students and community members will add fullness and color to this project.

The Story:

In 1826 a party of prospectors set out from North Elba, New York in search of silver deposits. Among them were Archibald McIntyre, future namesake of an iron mine set in the heart of the Adirondack wilderness, and David Henderson, McIntyre's son-in-law, who would be the early mastermind behind the works. The travelers soon came upon Lewis Elijah Benedict, an Abenaki Indian and the son of Sabael Benedict, the first settler in Hamilton County. Benedict had with him a chunk of iron ore. Once learning what the men were seeking, he claimed that this ore was among the best in the land and he would lead them to the place he found it for a \$1.50 and a plug of tobacco. When they reached the site the men were thoroughly astonished by the richness of the ore and quickly make plans to travel to Albany to claim their discovery. As a precaution that no rival prospectors would find out about this treasure in the forest, they took Lewis Elijah with them. And to further keep him safe from the temptations that might be offered him to show others to the ore bed,

they took him on to New York City. They basically kidnapped him. In a letter to Henderson, McIntyre, expressing the sentiment of his time, noted "we ought to kept him all winter" but "the civilized life is very incongenial to a savage" (Hochschild).

So begins an epic tale of industry, tragedy, settlement, abandonment, re-inhabitation, boom years, decline, and tourist attraction. This local lore has passed through several generations and has found its way into scholarly texts on the region. The story has interesting elements that can engage interest in students, particularly because it is a story of where they live. This story becomes part of a unit on geology, introducing the ores and minerals present in the Adirondacks and the hard work and sacrifice involved in extracting those precious resources.

The region referenced in the story is that of the Tahawus tract, which lies just outside the town of Newcomb, New York. This is where Jim McIntyre, and countless local men and women from the area towns, worked until the mine closed in 1989. Incidentally, Jim is no relation to the original prospector Archibald McIntyre, however, Don Grout, the geologist from the Balmat mine introduced earlier in the paper is a direct descendent. A field trip today to the Upper Works of Tahawus allows students to stand in place where history happened. Remnants of the first blast furnace built by those eager prospectors of 1826 can be found. A short walk will bring you to the place where David Henderson died from an accidental gunshot, the body of water there called Calamity Pond for a reason. The 'new' blast furnace built in 1849 still exists, and is now receiving a 'face-lift'. The houses of the village of Adirondac, (the letter K was left off the name) are giving in to the earth

around them, having been abandoned. One building in the ghost town stands among the ruins intact. It is the MacNaughton house, saved from deterioration because of a famous guest from 1901. This leads to another story, "The Night Ride to the Presidency":

In September of 1901 Vice President Theodore Roosevelt vacationed with his family at the Tahawus Club, another incarnation of the Tahawus tract, a sportsman's club that is still in existence today. Roosevelt and his family were guests of James MacNaughton, a wealthy friend and fellow conservationist, and the grandson of Archibald McIntyre. Meanwhile, then President William McKinley is attending the World's Fair in Buffalo, where he is shot in the abdomen following the last speech he would ever give. Teddy Roosevelt rushes to be at the President's side, and is told by McKinley's cabinet that he is not needed. That in fact it would be best if he were not there at all because the American public needed to be convinced that the President is going to be fine and that would not happen if the Vice President was not waiting with bated breath for the President to die. You see McKinley and TR really did not like each other. McKinley referred to Roosevelt as "that damn cowboy," and Roosevelt felt that McKinley had the back bone of a chocolate éclair. Roosevelt returns to his vacation in the Adirondacks, which could not have pleased McKinley's Cabinet more because they saw Camp Tahawus as "the most remote human habitation in the Empire state."

On Sept 13th Teddy Roosevelt decides to climb the highest peak in the state. The mountain known today as Mount Marcy was once called Tahawus, an Iroquois word meaning "he splits the sky," or similarly, cloudsplitter. TR and his entourage reach the summit a little after noon that day. They retire to Lake Tear of the Clouds, a small body of water just below the summit of Marcy and the highest source of the Hudson, to have some lunch. Meanwhile back at the club messages are arriving from Buffalo that the President has taken a turn for the worst. David Hunter, the superintendent of the club, says to the unemployed guides who are hanging around

that day, "Boys, this is bad news from the President. Who will carry the message to Mr. Roosevelt?" The task fell to Harrison Hall, tall, thin, weather beaten. He made his way up and found the party at Lake Tear of the Clouds. The *New York Herald* reported, "Never before has so strange a courier borne notice to a man of destiny that his time of ruling was at hand." Roosevelt would remark years later, when he saw this man standing there with a paper in his hands he knew he had come for him and he knew the message he was bringing.

They made the descent. Roosevelt, however, was in no rush to go to Buffalo, probably still sore about how he was treated the last time he was there. Edith Roosevelt remarks that her husband told her, "I'm not going unless I am really needed." He went to bed that night only to be awakened at 11 p.m. by his friend MacNaughton with a message that read "The President appears to be dying and members of the Cabinet in Buffalo think you should lose no time in coming." And so began the night ride to the Presidency.

Roosevelt dressed in the clothes he had probably hiked in that day. And at 11:30 David Hunter drove him the nine miles to what is still referred to today as the lower works. They arrived about 1:00 a.m. where the soon to be next President of the US was passed onto Orrin Kellogg who would take him another nine miles to Aiden Lair, a hotel just outside of Minerva, New York.

At Aiden Lair there was a telephone. At sometime after 2:15 a.m., when McKinley expired in Buffalo, a call came in telling them the news. Mike Cronin, the proprietor of Aiden Lair, knew he would be carrying the President of the US to North Creek to catch the train. Kellogg and TR arrived about 3:00 a.m. Does Cronin tell them what he knows? He does not. Instead he sets out in horse and wagon at what is described at break-neck speed (later it would be determined that they were traveling at six miles per hour) to North Creek. It was reported to be a dark, rainy night and this was treacherous traveling. TR held a lamp as Cronin egged his team

along. At one point, one of the horses stumbled and went down on one knee. Here Cronin thought, that's it, it's done. Indeed he probably saw in his mind the horse going down completely, the carriage cart wheeling and himself and the President being injured or killed. But the horse, Frank or Dick, as they were known, got up and continue to run his course. They arrived at the train station at 4:46 a.m.

Now there are many who will tell you TR was sworn in as President at the North Creek station. He was not. However this was where he found out that he was to be President. TR took at the train to Buffalo where he arrived in the afternoon still in his hunting clothes, was loaned proper clothing by members of the Cabinet, and was sworn in as the 26th President of the United States (Murphy).

This thrilling story brings in elements of social history to the geologic history of the region. The telling of Roosevelt's night ride to the Presidency is best done orally to capture its adventurous essence. Classroom lessons can include students reciting the story and role playing the action. Theodore Roosevelt, a famous national figure, features prominently in this narrative, however if students were to be ask who the true heroes of the story are, local men Mike Cronin and Harrison Hall would be cited. Writing opportunities can include analyzing Mike Cronin's decision not to tell Roosevelt that he knew McKinley was dead. Continuing the out of the classroom experience to exploring the places depicted in both stories, students could travel the Roosevelt trail from the upper works of Tahawus past the remains of Aiden Lair on to the North Creek Station, which operates today as a tourist attraction offering excursions to Saratoga. The loop can be continued to the Adirondack

Museum where students can see Cronin's buggy that carried Roosevelt on the wild ride to the North Creek Station.

The captivating stories of Tahawus enchant people to this day. Hundreds of tourists and residents alike turn out for the annual Teddy Roosevelt weekend in Newcomb. A talk on the history of Tahawus, be it at the Long Lake Library, the North Creek station or standing in the elements at the upper works, is sure to draw an enthusiastic crowd. A large part of the draw is created by the stories that come after TR's night ride to the Presidency, the years when National Lead ran the mine that employed so many for the surrounding towns. Many turn out to hear about the more recent years of life in the Tahawus village.

Here Olga LaPelle nostalgically recalls her upbringing:

Tahawus was just special. It really was. It was great for kids growing up there. And when we first lived there, there wasn't that much. But they saw that we had movies, the latest of movies. There was a lending library type thing. The store had everything in it that we wanted.

You couldn't have asked for a better place to be brought up in – you know, to grow up in. The company did everything imaginable for the kids. I guess they had that feeling, "if the kids are happy, the parents are happy" (LaPelle).

Tahawus was a true company town, however there are not any Tennessee Ernie Ford-like prose describing the place. Everyone who lived there has only great things to say about their experience. The years from the Second World War until the mine closed in the late 80s were the National Lead years. National Lead is somewhat of a misnomer because lead was never mined at this site, and the company did change its name to NL Industries in

later years to lessen the confusion. It was iron and titanium that were mined at the Tahawus tract. During the McIntyre years they were unable to get a consistent project from the smelting. They referred to an impurity in the iron ore that they were unable to identify. Years later it was found that the impurity was titanium!

There is so much to tell about Tahawus; the stories and history can fill pages. So much can be learned from the place, from the land itself, so much that cannot be conveyed through classroom instruction. Students need to go stand in the place itself and feel its presence.

Public lands have tremendous potential to contribute to education and quality of life in our communities. Nora Mitchell

On a chilly fall morning a group of professionals from the Open Space Institute (OSI), the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Lands and Forest Division, SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry and the Adirondack Museum set out with consultant Bob McNamara to explore OSI's interpretative plan for the Tahawus tract. The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and sustain communities. In 2003 OSI purchased over 10,000 acres of the Tahawus tract; they transferred all but 258 acres to the State of New York in 2008, reserving the core area for historic preservation and education. There has never been a better time

for a field trip to the upper works of Tahawus. Interpretive panels illuminate the history while students stand in the place where history was made. These public lands, like much of the Adirondack Park, are places where students can connect with their heritage.

Conclusion

Calling up Umphrey's reference to young people being drawn to the power of the real, many would lament that education today is anything but real. Mainstream media recognizes this. Here is an excerpt from a recent episode of the Daily Show with Jon Stewart talking with Michelle Rhee, former Chancellor of Washington, DC public schools and proponent of radical school reform (Comedy Central).

The school system seems to have moved away from any practical reality of the modern world. There really hasn't been any innovation in education since, I don't know... John Dewey. There is the idea that we no longer have a connection to the way the real world works and the way schools should work in communities, it just seems like a much bigger problem...

Here again John Dewey is cited when speaking of educational innovation. How is it that we have not been listening all these years?

Place-based education proponents tout community reform as an outcome to this approach. Many Adirondack communities are in need of reform, economically chiefly, but also in spirit and pride of place. If we were to put it to the students to interpret community reform, might we see results?

The benefits of place-based education show up not just in students' academic performance, but also in increased community vitality, greater parent engagement in school and community events, and in the improved quality of the economy and environment in the local area. We contend that we can raise test scores, cultivate

civic responsibilities of students, and improve the quality of life in the community simultaneously (Bartsch and Sobel).

These are big promises. But suppose they might work? Is that not worth a try? As Umphrey tells us, it does not need to be perfect; you just have to start someplace and move forward from there.

We don't need to create an ideal community which will provide everything kids need. Kids, like the rest of us, don't need perfect communities. What they do need is invitations to join the work in progress of making places better (Umphrey, *The Power of Community-Centered Education* xxi).

Umphrey maintains that part of community-centered education is acknowledging the problems and plight of a community and putting these problems to the youth to explore and solve. "The trouble with schooling is that many young people do not see how the curriculum that we so dutifully deliver touches upon their interests" (2). How do we find out what interests them? We ask them, and start by including them in the conversation.

Many community issues are not adult only conversations. And kids 'get' things many adults don't give them credit for. Getting students talking about the place where they live, getting them talking to people who live in their communities and getting them out to explore sites that come up in conversation goes a long way to getting students excited about learning. It is now relevant to them. They now 'own' their education.

Using the local community as a teaching ground, incorporating what lies just outside the school walls into the curriculum, provides an engaging educational experience for students, and meets mandated state and national learning standards. Oral history

interviews can be used to demonstrate learning opportunities to be gained from talking with local residents. In their teacher handbook, *Our Town: Recording and Presenting Local History and Folklife*, the Vermont Folklife Center sums this premise up well: “Studying one’s hometown also fosters a heightened sense of place—as students learn to see evidence of the past in the familiar landscape of the present, that knowledge creates a special feeling of connection” (Sharrow 3). Adirondack students should be encouraged to explore their place, to be welcomed to the conversation and have a chance to become excited by the power of the real.

Coda

A letter came in the mail recently. It was a standard annual appeal letter from a nonprofit organization, one of many that arrive late in the year. This one was from the Vermont Folklife Center which does great work with ethnography. Giving it a cursory glance, guiltily knowing it would end up being thrown away, I was caught by the testimonial opening the letter, an educator commenting on an institute offered by VFC:

I am now committed to the basic tenet that individuals’ stories are the most powerful means of individual learning (Vermont Folklife Center).

That is a commanding statement, one that hopefully gives others pause (and compels them to open their pocketbooks for this fine organization). My letter did not make it into the trash that day, because that pithy statement struck me as the root of what is outlined here. Individual stories matter. They help us to learn about ourselves and the world around us.

Appendix A

Sample Lesson Plan

Standing in Place: The Story of Tahawus

This unit of study will be particularly appealing to teachers, students and community members of the school districts of Newcomb, Minerva, Long Lake, Indian Lake and Johnsbury. However, mining occurred throughout the Adirondacks and there are many stories to be explored and oral histories to be collected.

Essential questions: What can we learn from stories of our place?

How has the extractive industry shaped our communities?

(Teachers can start with these suggestions, although essential questions should come out of an organic conversation with students and their response to the project.)

Key words/topics: Discovery; Native Americans; Geology; Ore and Minerals; Resources, Work; New York State history; National history; Change over time; Cultural Diversity.

Goals: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the geologic, social and cultural history of this place.

(Again, goals can and should be discussed and decided upon by the participants. A question to be asked of students to help guide the program: What do you want to learn more about?)

Common Core: There are naturally numerous social studies curriculum connections to the history and culture of the local region. The CCLS for Social Studies are in draft form at present. The standards for literacy are a focal point and there are many literacy connections to be made here.

Place-based Activities:

- I. Share passive oral history clips with students. The excerpts included in this writing can be used. The clips do not necessary have to be from the mining community of Tahawus. They are a starting point to engage interest and to show the history that was made in the Adirondacks by local people.
- II. Share the historic stories outlined within.

- III. Place-based field trip opportunities:
- a. Upper works of Tahawus.
 - i. Explore remnants of original iron works.
 1. Explore: Pick up a piece of rock. Put a magnet to it and see what happens. (What should happen? The magnet sticks because of the high content of magnetite in the earth in this area.)
 - ii. Ghost town of Adirondac Village.
 - iii. Explore new interpretation at Blast furnace site.
 - iv. Visit the Tahawus Club clubhouse at the Lower Works (This is private property; ask permission before arriving).
 - v. Hike:
 1. Short - to Henderson Lake and Calamity Pond.
 2. Medium - Mount Adams. Steep in spots, does take some time.
 3. Longer - to Lake Tear of the Clouds and Mount Marcy. Probably an overnight experience.
- IV. Roosevelt Trail. Historic trail through Newcomb and Minerva culminating in North Creek follows Roosevelt's "Night Ride to the Presidency."
- Historic Marker – interpreted to be the spot Roosevelt was when McKinley died and Roosevelt, in essence, became President.
- Aiden Lair – abandoned hotel owned by Mike Cronin.
- North Creek Station-- there are two small museums here as well as train excursions.
- V. Adirondack Ecological Center in Newcomb. Provides science-related programming.
- VI. Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake. Provides history and cultural connections.

Active oral history project:

Based on what students uncovered in their exploration of place-based field trips and their response to the passive oral history clips they can identify community members whom they would like to interview to learn more about Tahawus. The project can also happen simultaneously with the place-based activities.

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