Session eleven: Archival literacy and teaching with primary sources

LBSCI 730 Archival Appraisal, Arrangement, and Access

Archivist as educator

Requires the archivist to increase:

1. theoretical knowledge of learning
2. teaching methodologies (pedagogy)

Why should an archivist be an educator?

Literacy

The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context.

Over time, literacy has been applied to a wide range of activities; in such contexts, it refers to basic knowledge of rather than to anything specific to reading and writing.

Information literacy

1. the ability to recognize when sources of knowledge or data are needed to address a situation or problem, and
2. to identify, locate, evaluate, and use the sources

Archival literacy

A contextual application of information literacy.

Competence in or knowledge of archival terminology, organization, and reference tools

Artifactual literacy

The ability to understand, contextualize, and interpret primary sources, in part by taking into consideration their physical characteristics

Archival intelligence

The knowledge of archival theory, concepts, practice, institutions, research tools and strategies needed to successfully engage in archival research

Archival literacy

Do I need archives?

How do I find archives material?

Artifactual literacy

Do I know what a primary source is? Can I identify it?

Can I distinguish archival material from interpreted material?

Archival intelligence

Do I know how archives are acquired, arranged, described?

Do I know what an archivist does and why?

Primary source

Material that contains firsthand accounts of events and that was created contemporaneous to those events or later recalled by an eyewitness.

Primary sources emphasize the **lack of intermediaries** between the thing or events being studied and reports of those things or events based on the belief that firsthand accounts are more accurate.

Primary source literacy

the knowledge and competency in finding, interpreting, evaluating, and using primary sources

Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy

Developed by the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force

These guidelines articulate the range of knowledge, skills, and abilities required to effectively use primary sources.

These guidelines detail what should RESULT from good primary source instruction, not how to do the instruction.

Core ideas of the guidelines

Analytical concepts	Ethical concepts	Theoretical concepts	Practical considerations
• Interrogation of materiality, historical context, narrative, mediation	• Laws, regulations, privacy rights, and how that affects ability to use primary sources in their own work	• Evidence, authority, power, authenticity, context, agency, value, absences, privilege	• Finding, accessing, gathering, handling primary sources

Learning objective

A clear statement of what the student or pupil should have learned by the end of the task, the lesson, the scheme of work, or the course of study.

Learning objectives provide **focus and direction**, and clarify what must be assessed in order to ascertain whether learning has taken place.

Learning objectives: **Conceptualize**

1. Distinguish primary from secondary sources for a given research question. Demonstrate an understanding of the interrelatedness of primary and secondary sources for research.
2. Articulate what might serve as primary sources for a specific research project within the framework of an academic discipline or area of study.
3. Draw on primary sources to generate and refine research questions.
4. Understand that research is an iterative process and that as primary sources are found and analyzed the research question(s) may change.

Learning objectives: **Find and access**

1. Identify the possible locations of primary sources.
2. Use appropriate, efficient, and effective search strategies in order to locate primary sources. Be familiar with the most common ways primary sources are described, such as catalog records and archival finding aids.
3. Distinguish between catalogs, databases, and other online resources that contain information about sources, versus those that contain digital versions, originals, or copies of the sources themselves.
4. Understand that historical records may never have existed, may not have survived, or may not be collected and/or publicly accessible. Existing records may have been shaped by the selectivity and mediation of individuals such as collectors, archivists, librarians, donors, and/or publishers, potentially limiting the sources available for research.
5. Recognize and understand the policies and procedures that affect access to primary sources, and that these differ across repositories, databases, and collections.

Learning objectives: **Read, understand, and summarize**

1. Examine a primary source, which may require the ability to read a particular script, font, or language, to understand or operate a particular technology, or to comprehend vocabulary, syntax, and communication norms of the time period and location where the source was created.
2. Identify and communicate information found in primary sources, including summarizing the content of the source and identifying and reporting key components such as how it was created, by whom, when, and what it is.
3. Understand that a primary source may exist in a variety of iterations, including excerpts, transcriptions, and translations, due to publication, copying, and other transformations.

Learning objectives: **Interpret, analyze, and evaluate**

1. Assess the appropriateness of a primary source for meeting the goals of a specific research or creative project.
2. Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source.
3. Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection.
4. As part of the analysis of available resources, identify, interrogate, and consider the reasons for silences, gaps, contradictions, or evidence of power relationships in the documentary record and how they impact the research process.
5. Factor physical and material elements into the interpretation of primary sources including the relationship between container (binding, media, or overall physical attributes) and informational content, and the relationship of original sources to physical or digital copies of those sources.
6. Demonstrate historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical sources and historical actors.

Learning objectives: **Use and incorporate**

1. Examine and synthesize a variety of sources in order to construct, support, or dispute a research argument.
2. Use primary sources in a manner that respects privacy rights and cultural contexts.
3. Cite primary sources in accordance with appropriate citation style guidelines or according to repository practice and preferences (when possible).
4. Adhere to copyright and privacy laws when incorporating primary source information in a research or creative project.

Pedagogical models

Object-centered learning

“Deep learning by interacting with objects…derive meaning by interacting with a single document and/or object.”

To avoid the passive historical nature of the “show and tell”/”look at the cool stuff”, you must identify learning outcomes.

Inquiry-based learning

Archival research instruction:

Follow the iterative nature of a research process:

- Ask a question
- Try to find evidence to answer that question
- Come up with new questions to refine initial question

Partnerships and stakeholders

Levels of archivist involvement

Developing a lesson plan

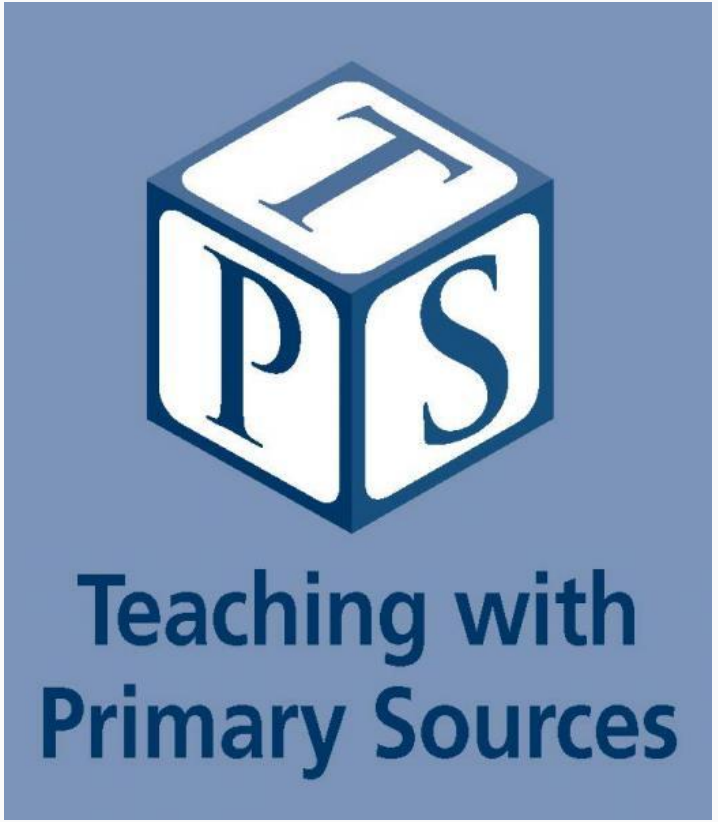
Archivists must, essentially, teach ourselves to teach

Centers for Teaching and Learning

CUNY Graduate Center

Society of American Archivists

Case studies on teaching with primary sources



NARA

[Educator resources]

New York State Archives

Consider the Source