

The Study of History and Development: Making History Come Alive in One Secondary School in Trinidad and Tobago

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If a country is to attain meaningful development, not only in the sphere of economics but also in terms of the quality of its human resources, then development must also include the inculcation of a national ethos. However, one of the criticisms levelled against History teaching is that it has failed to contribute to national identity. This paper advocates that exposure to the historian's craft can solve many of the problems of the teaching and learning of History in secondary schools. It reports on an experimental study in which Form Four History students at St. George's College were exposed to a unit in which they engaged in archaeological activities, one aspect of the historian's craft. A researcher-designed test of achievement in the relevant content and attitudes to History was used to measure the effect of this unit. A quantitative analysis of student responses was undertaken. The findings suggest that there were no significant differences in the scores on pre- and post-test performances on either attitudes or achievement, although qualitative analysis of student responses implied some positive effects of the unit.

This paper posits that if a country is to attain meaningful development, not only in the sphere of economics but also in terms of the quality of its human resources, then development must include the inculcation in its peoples, of a national ethos and national pride. National ethos is defined in this paper as the possession of a national identity, the understanding of ourselves as a people with a common history, who share a collection of experiences that bind us together and who also share a national system of values and beliefs, a common language, art, culture, literary tradition and history.

The development of a national ethos has a role in national development and it is the job of policy makers and educators. This is acknowledged in the 1985-1990 Education Plan of Trinidad and Tobago, which stipulates that its aim is "the development of well-rounded, young citizens, who

possess the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes to themselves and society that would make them responsible contributing members of society"(pp. 10-11). The Plan enunciates 14 goals of the secondary education system in Trinidad and Tobago (pp. 86-87). History has been assigned goal 11, that is, the acquisition of "basic understanding of the social, political and economic institutions of Trinidad and Tobago" (p. 93). Although the writer does not believe that this goal is a reasonable definition of the goal of history as a discipline, indeed a knowledge of one's past is important to provide the necessary context for the development of this basic understanding of one's national institutions and thus of a sense of national identity.

If policy makers are to foster the development of a national ethos, they must first possess it themselves and secondly, be aware that national ethos can only be developed within a framework of historical consciousness. The proper study of history can provide this framework and moreover the teaching of history must ensure it. But this is easier said than done. Philosophers of history differ in their views on the nature and purpose of history. According to Collingwood (1946), history is the knowledge of the past and the purpose of the historian is to re-enact the past events from the inside and outside. The positivists adopt a scientific approach to the study of history and seek to explain the events of the past by establishing general laws (Dray, 1964; Hempel, 1974). The narrativists view history as the narrative of past events and for them the historian's task is to attempt to relate the events of the past in a story (Walsh, 1967). Another view of history is that history is *challengeable* and that the historian's purpose is to interpret the past (Millette, 1974). History must not only involve interpretation, explanation and criticism of data but must also be engaged in *unmasking*. Since our attitudes, morals and modes of thought were all fashioned in a certain setting, there is need to reveal this setting, to explore its history in order to promote decolonization, prevent re-colonization and forge a new nationalism. We must, therefore, look beyond the exploitation of slavery, indentureship and degradation in our past to find that which is dignified. This is the only way to ensure that the future heritage will not be a patrimony of shame and degradation but will provide a sense of place and a sense of national pride.

Teaching History

This latter consideration leads us to a discussion of the approaches to the teaching of history which of necessity will be linked to the nature of the discipline. Burston (1967) emphasized that every teaching technique makes assumptions about the subject and every conception of the nature of history has implications for the teacher.

It is generally accepted that what history students need is not only to "learn the results but to know the process" (Bruner, 1966, p. 62). Students must be able to find the facts, ponder on them and interpret them, leaving in learning, the element of discovery. Students must also be allowed to practice collecting, collating and interpreting data. Thus, regardless of the level at which they operate, all students should be permitted to do a bit of what the professional historian does. It is only through such practical experience that they will acquire skills specific to the learning and understanding of history. Through exposure to the historical methodology, students will understand the necessity of sifting through evidence and they will comprehend the tentativeness of historical data. Through this process students will acquire the historical attitude. The exposure to the historical process should contribute to a new pride in one's history as a people and thus to the development of a national ethos.

Despite the benefits of studying history it has become the *endangered species* of the school curriculum in Trinidad and Tobago. It is becoming increasingly peripheral and marginalized; according to Haydn (1992), it continues only as a "limping and outmoded alternative to social studies" (p. 2) in Trinidad and Tobago. History is not done at the primary and junior secondary level; it is no longer being offered at the training college level, and at the secondary level the numbers that sit the CXC Caribbean History examinations have been decreasing annually. In 1983, 6627 students sat the CXC Caribbean History examinations in Trinidad and Tobago. Eight years later this number has been reduced by approximately 50 percent. This is also reflected in the actual number of classes that do history and social studies at the senior comprehensive level in Trinidad and Tobago. In most senior comprehensive schools there as many as 10 social studies classes and as few as 1 history class.

All history teachers and educators should be concerned about this growing phenomenon. The fate of history in the schools will ultimately affect us all at the national level and, therefore, we need to take an interest in promoting an awareness of history among the public. History should be recognized as an essential aspect of the educational experience of every Trinidadian and Tobagonian. All students in Trinidad and Tobago need to understand the complexities of all our historical experiences and our diverse cultural heritage. They need to know the origins and evolution of the political, religious, economic and social ideas that have shaped our institutions and those of others. Without studying our history, the history of the region and of the world, students will remain out of touch with reality in general and Caribbean reality in particular. For students at all levels, the study of the past is essential to informed judgement and to their attainment of democratic citizenship. It is vital to an understanding of ourselves and of our society, in relation to the human condition over time, and of the impact of continuity and change. History teachers, therefore, must address themselves to this process of the decline of history and to the existing gaps in the studying and teaching of history.

It is not all history teaching that can contribute to this development. The traditional methods of history teaching which are grounded in memorization of facts, prescribed curricula, lecturing as the only mode of instruction and textbooks as the only source of historical evidence, have impacted negatively on the discipline. History taught in this manner enhances neither education nor personal development, and it is no surprise that both parents and students see history as an irrelevant and *worthless* subject with no apparent use in adult life. But history teaching that exposes students to the historical process will of necessity contribute significantly to the development of a national ethos and a pride in one's history as a people.

It is important, therefore, to make history come alive for if we do not, the observed trends will continue. This can be done through the use of drama and role playing, creative writing, calypso, primary documents, oral sources and *field based* history. Teachers must make history participatory. Students must be able to relate to the subject matter. For history to be made a living experience, its study will have to be seen as an interactive process between the student and the history, and between

the researcher and the subject matter being researched. Students get out of the study of history no more than what they put into it. It is important therefore for student input and participation to become a significant element in this exercise.

The approach that I used to examine these beliefs is the method of archaeology. Archaeology has a crucial role in the teaching and understanding of history. Archaeology trains the student to pay specific attention to detail and accurate recording, to use inductive and deductive reasoning and to move from raw data (archaeological evidence) to interpretation of the past. The student is also inculcated with a sense of individual and group responsibility through commitment to an ongoing task. Archaeology also reveals to the student that history does not only exist strictly within the walls of the school building but that the sources of historical evidence are varied and are both primary (such as archaeological evidence) and secondary (textbooks).

The study of archaeology is likely to be a most effective means of achieving important affective outcomes. Archaeology encourages students to recognize the importance of local history and of preserving archaeological sites (Watts, 1985). It gives adolescents a sense of purpose and of self, so important for overall personal development (Hariss, 1977). Young people who experience the archaeological method learn to better understand the world in which they live. It helps students to see ancient people not as inanimate objects which existed, but as true to life characters who really lived. It helps the students to feel closer to their history. As a result they will better understand and appreciate their heritage as a people and, therefore, feel common bonds with all peoples who share or shared the same heritage and who hope to share the same future.

This paper concludes with a report of an experiment in the teaching of history at the secondary level. The pedagogical principle underlying the method of teaching used in this experiment is that of student-centred learning which stresses the development of divergent thinking and places emphasis on self-expression through student-centred interests and activities. The approach places emphasis on active participation by the pupils, oral discussion and co-operative group work. Accordingly, the experimental treatment was a unit of study which involved the students in archaeological exploration as well as other aspects of the historian's

craft such as archival research. The unit was intended to achieve both cognitive and affective outcomes.

This project was an attempt to investigate the effects on learning outcomes for a group of students who were allowed to engage in the historian's craft by way of visits to historical sites and participation in archaeological digs under the supervision of an archaeologist. The specific purpose of this study was to determine whether those Fourth Form students of St. George's College who engaged in an archaeological excavation would show any differences in the learning of the relevant areas of history content, and their attitudes to history when compared with those students taught by more traditional methods.

Hypotheses

1. A group of Fourth Form students exposed to seven archaeological digs would score higher on a history achievement test than a control group taught the same content by traditional methods.
2. Those students exposed to the archaeological digs would score higher on a test of attitudes to history than a control group of students taught by the lecture method.

Design

Both of the hypotheses were tested using a pre-test/post-test experimental design. The experimental and control groups were both intact Fourth Form history classes and both were given the pre-test on the attitudes to history measure and on the researcher-designed history achievement test. The treatment consisted of a unit of study related to the history of the Amerindians who settled in Trinidad and who practiced the Saladoid culture. This was taught to the experimental group by the use of archaeological excavation as the main learning experience.

The Sample

The target population was Fourth Form history students of Trinidad and Tobago. These students were in the first year of a two-year course of study leading to the CXC Caribbean History Examination. They were divided into two class units, one of which was regularly taught by this researcher and the other by another member of staff. Both the control and experimental groups were taught by the researcher nine months before the experiment and both groups chose history as one of their seven subjects leading to the CXC examinations. A sociogram was used to group the students into groups of three for the archaeological excavation. There were three students to each of the four pits.

Measures

1. **Teacher-Designed Attitude Test:** For this study, the device used was a researcher-designed Likert type questionnaire. Since the students chosen for the sample were all students who selected history as one of their Form Four subjects the response *strongly disagree* was deleted from the questionnaire. On the questionnaire 21 statements were arranged in the following order; the first 7 statements represented attitudes towards History; the next 5 statements the usefulness of the subject, and the last 10 statements opinions about how history is taught.
2. **Researcher-Designed History Achievement Test:** This was a multiple-choice test on the history of the Amerindians who had settled in a particular area of Trinidad. The test included items related to the craft of the archaeologist, and to the links between archaeology and prehistory as well as to archaeology as a field of study. This measure was administered as a pre- and post-test to both groups.
3. **Test of Attitudes to Archaeology:** This was a modified Likert-type questionnaire consisting of nine items which probed student reactions to the experience of engaging in the excavations. The test also included two open-ended questions which asked students to describe their feelings while engaging in the project

and to recommend improvements for future projects. This test was administered as a post-test, to the experimental group only.

4. **Observation Schedule:** During the entire treatment the researcher made observations of the student responses.

Treatment

Experimental Group Activities: The following activities were the ones to which the experimental group were exposed:

- (1) A lecture delivered by Dr. Arie Boomert, Senior Research Fellow in Archaeology at the University of the West Indies. This was based on the Saladoid culture and provided students with information on aspects of the life-style of the Amerindians who settled in the location of the proposed digs.
- (2) Seven days of digging spread over a two-month period.
- (3) Four discussion lessons interspersed between the digs. These lessons dealt with the craft of the archaeologist and explored the nature and limitations of archaeological evidence and the scientific nature of archaeology.
- (4) A visit to the National Museum. Students viewed exhibits related to the Amerindians.
- (5) A visit to the Cleaver Woods Recreation Park.
- (6) Wash day. This was conducted at the archaeological laboratory at the University of The West Indies under the supervision of Dr. Boomert.
- (7) A discussion lesson on the analysis of the finds.

Control Group Activities: The control group engaged in the following activities:

- (1) Four lessons based on the same content as those given to the experimental group but in this case the lecture format was used.
- (2) A visit to the National Museum.
- (3) A visit to Cleaver Woods.

The latter two activities were conducted together with the experimental group.

Post-tests: Both groups were post-tested on the researcher-designed Attitudes to History test and the History Achievement Test. Only the experimental group was post-tested on the Attitudes to Archaeology test.

General Objectives: The general objectives of the unit of study to which the experimental group were exposed were that students will:

- (1) Be exposed to the process of historical research (historian's craft);
- (2) be exposed to the process of an archaeological excavation (the craft of the archaeologist);
- (3) value archaeology as an important source of historical evidence (primary);
- (4) value the nature of historical analysis and interpretation;
- (5) value the tentativeness of historical evidence – nature of archaeological evidence and its limitations;
- (6) be able to apply the textbook pre-knowledge on Amerindian society in the Americas to a fixed location in Trinidad;
- (7) analyze the finds unearthed from the Blanchisseuse site.

Validity and Reliability of Measures: Attempts were made to ensure a high degree of content validity for the researcher-designed achievement tests. Other types of validity could not be ensured.

Limitations: Both the experimental and control groups were taught by the researcher for nine months prior to the experiment and were thus exposed to very similar experiences. The fact that both groups showed highly positive attitudes (means 72.5 for experiment and 72 for control) prior to the project, would limit the size of any change possible and the size of the differences between experimental and control groups. Moreover the attitude questionnaire may not have covered the areas where changes occurred.

Procedure

On the first day of the dig, students met at the archaeological laboratory at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine to be given an introductory lecture by Dr. Boomert. They were also given some information about the people who settled. They were shown pieces of pottery that had already been collected on the surface of the site. On arrival at the site, students cleared the area. They were then instructed to draw a map of the location, so that anyone could find the site a hundred years later. They were also taught how to pace out the map. The pits, having been marked out, were assigned to each group and work began. It was necessary to give basic instructions about the use of the tools. Care was also taken to impress upon the students the necessity for careful, scientific and honest documentation.

Each day of the dig, one student volunteered or was chosen to be responsible for checking the equipment (taking stock) before and after the day's activities. On arrival at site, students moved to their respective pits, took levels, labelled their bags and began digging. A reporter was appointed for the day. He or she was responsible for keeping the diary for that day. In the diary the students recorded:

1. Conditions in which the site was found;
2. weather conditions;
3. starting level, ending level;
4. finds;

5. those in attendance.

The students usually worked from 9.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon, stopped for one hour for lunch, then worked again until 3.00 p.m. The diary of events was to be written up and submitted to the teacher on the following Wednesday. On the final day of the dig, the students had to fill back up the pits with the earth they had removed.

Back in the classroom, other lessons were structured to give more in-depth knowledge of the relationship between archaeology and history. It focussed on the nature of archaeology and its subject matter. The limitations of archaeological data were also discussed. One lesson looked at the qualities needed for archaeological field work. Students were able to participate meaningfully in the discussion because of their experiences of the days of *digging*. Lessons also examined other aspects of Archaeology, for example, dating techniques. Terms such as *stratigraphy* and *relative dating* were discussed.

Two field trips were also undertaken as part of the project, to Cleaver Woods and to the Museum. The objectives of these two visits were to allow the students to describe what they found, comparing and contrasting from their previous knowledge. They had to submit reports in which they were advised to give their personal reflections on each visit as a source of historical evidence.

On the wash day, students were given basic instructions on the method by Dr. Boomert. They then collected their finds according to pits, proceeded to different areas of the laboratory outside the building and set up a workshop. Washed finds were then placed to dry in cardboard trays. Each group selected a particular area of the verandah or yard to display the finds. Care was taken to keep the levels and pits separate. Students took the opportunity to draw the washed pieces.

In a final session, Dr. Boomert questioned the students about what they had found and what information could be deduced from the evidence.

The lesson had five sections:

1. Blanchisseuse as a unique archaeological site in Trinidad. Other sites in Trinidad are shell middens but only one shell was found at this site. The implication of this for the economic life-style of Amerindians was discussed.
2. Characteristics of Saladoid culture as revealed by the finds.
3. What conclusions could be drawn about their economic and social life?
4. Indigenous fruits of the Caribbean.
5. Things not found at site and why.

The control group was taught the same content and exposed to all other activities as the experimental group except the seven days of archaeological digging. The pre-tests of achievement and attitude were administered to both groups before the archaeological excavations commenced. The post-test on achievement and attitude was administered to both groups at the end of the excavations. The attitude to archaeology questionnaire was administered to the experimental group only at the end of the excavation.

Findings

Analysis of Data: Both hypotheses were tested by means of t-tests to determine the significance of the differences between means for both groups on both variables. Means and standard deviations on the attitude and achievement tests were determined for both experimental and control groups. Tables 1 and 2 show the mean scores obtained by each group in each test, while Tables 3 and 4 display tests of significance of differences between post-test means of achievement test and attitude test for experimental and control groups.

Table 1

Means of Achievement Scores for Experimental and Control Groups

	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean
Control group	19	24.6
Experimental group	19.5	26.5

Table 2

Means of Attitude Scores for Experimental and Control Groups

	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean
Control group	72	72
Experimental group	72.5	75

Table 3

t-Tests of Significance of Differences Between Post-test Means of Achievement Test for Experimental and Control Groups.

	Mean	t values	D.F.
Control group	24.6		
Experimental group		1.292	18
	26.5		

Critical value $P = .01$ $t = 1.73$

There was no significant difference in achievement scores on a teacher-made test of achievement between an experimental group exposed to a unit based on an archaeological excavation and a control group taught the same content by lecture method.

Table 4

t-Test of Significance of Differences Between Post-test Means of Attitude Test for Experimental and Control Groups.

	Mean	t values	D.F.
Control group	72		
		.6382	22
Experimental group	75		

Critical value $P = .01$ $t = 1.72$

There were no significant differences in attitude scores on a teacher-made attitude questionnaire between an experimental group exposed to a unit based on an archaeological excavation and a control group taught the same content by lecture method. These findings suggest that in the case of achievement and attitude scores, there were no significant differences between control and experimental groups.

Results of the Attitudes to Archaeology Questionnaire: This questionnaire tested various aspects of the students' attitudes to archaeology. The first nine questions were positively stated and students were asked to rate them on a scale of 1 to 4 (highest). These questions dealt with the cognitive and affective aspects of the archaeological excavation as an educational experience. Questions 10, 11 and 13 were open-ended and question 12 asked students to rate specific aspects of the organization of the project and itemized aspects of the educational experience.

Based on the first nine questions, 95% of the students agreed that they had a positive attitude to the project and that: The archaeological dig:

1. Helped in understanding history;
2. Helped in understanding Amerindian society;
3. Helped students gain greater knowledge of the landscape and geography of Trinidad;
4. Taught them the skills of an archaeologist and the rigours linked with archaeological field work;
5. Improved the spirit of co-operation in the class so that they not only got to know their classmates better but the teacher/pupil relationship also improved.

Question 10 asked the students to describe how they felt when they held the first piece of pottery: 33.36% felt very excited; 27.28% experienced an inability to believe findings; 36.36% expressed a sense of having a unique experience.

Question 11 asked students to recommend changes they would like to see implemented if they were asked to do another archaeological excavation. These could be put into four clusters: 35.71% felt the project needed better planning and preparation; 28.58% suggested that more students should have been given the opportunity and more equipment should have been available; 21.43% voted for better transportation, and 14.28% wished for media coverage.

On question 12, 69% agreed that it was a *rewarding* educational experience and 66% agreed with the stated problems experienced in the project.

Question 13 asked students how they considered the profession of an archaeologist. Students interpreted this question to mean whether they considered choosing archaeology as a future profession. This was reflected in their answers: 9.09% strongly considered it as a profession;

36.36% were not interested, and 54.55% appreciated the amount of hard work involved.

Discussion and Recommendations

The data collected on the measures of history attitudes and achievement suggest that the archaeological excavation made no difference on these variables for the experimental group. However, in the light of student responses to the attitudes to archaeology questionnaire, and more so in the light of observable behavioural changes exhibited by the experimental group, it is reasonable to assume that the treatment produced favourable outcomes that were not measured by the tests used but which were manifested in observed behaviours of the experimental group.

It was perceived that there was greater involvement in the subject. This carried over into the classroom. Students became more attentive during classroom lessons. This is substantiated in another study (Watts, 1985). There was no necessity to ask students to see a progressive report of the write up of their project. Students in the experiment group stopped the researcher/teacher in the school corridors handing in pieces of work. This motivational growth was extremely significant in the case of one student.

Throughout the excavations, students often displayed willingness to help other students in their pits. However, students did develop a deep personal attachment to their assigned pits and their finds. Interpersonal relationships might not have improved significantly but definitely students learnt to appreciate the individual contribution of others. Moreover, students' perceptions of other students underwent a change and this was revealed when at the end of the project they were asked to choose three persons they would like to work with if they had to do the project again.

If they were to be scored on their ability to stay on task at site, students would score very highly. For many students not only moved in and helped others to finish their pits but during the extremely bad weather several worked non-stop. Students, however, tended to express great relief at the end of the project knowing that the task was completed.

Students did not hesitate to call the researcher at home asking whether there would be *digging* on the weekend.

In the session with Dr. Boomert on the analysis of the finds, the students were able to compare and contrast information from different historical sources, that is, textbook (secondary source) and artifacts (primary source). Students showed the ability to challenge statements in the textbooks. They questioned Dr. Boomert closely on whether his observations and conclusions were based on theory or fact. His answer that they were based on theory founded on well documented facts provided the students with a living example of the nature of historical evidence. The historian as interpreter and his/her duty to rewrite history in the light of new evidence were clearly shown. History as *puzzlement* and as *case-making* and the role of the historian in *unmasking* became self-evident.

These outcomes met the highest aims and objectives of school history teaching in particular and education in general. For students to see that one can only arrive at an approximation of truth is indeed significant for the overall development of the individual. Archaeology provides ample room for students to be self-actualized. The excavation succeeded in achieving one aim of education, that is, "to transmit aspects of human experience to the as yet uninitiated, and so involves our introduction to modes of behaviour - which includes modes of thinking and feeling relevant to our common life" (Bantock, 1965, p. 11).

Students were able to identify with their Amerindian heritage. They recognized that they all shared this heritage in common, that their Amerindian heritage not only belonged to all of them but that it was important to *rediscover* it from a non-Eurocentric perspective. They reaffirmed their commitment to finding out about it, preserving it, and most importantly, correcting the false notions that presently exist. Students became insistent that the excavation work should not only be publicized but that the truth must be revealed for the common good and for future generations. They were proud of their heritage. The students' interest in the tangible remains of their past culture was clear. They also seemed to experience self-discovery and an emerging feeling of commonality of shared history; of connections rather than differences. It is this sense of one's potential as part of cultural development that was

a major goal of the project. These behaviours could lead to the development of national ethos and more of this kind of history teaching is therefore highly recommended.

The extent to which the findings of this study may be regarded as generally applicable to the target population is limited since St. George's College is not typical of secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. It is a school to which higher achievers are assigned based on the results of the Common Entrance Examination, so that the students in this experiment are not typical of all Form Four students in Trinidad and Tobago. This is a limitation of the study which will make us cautious about generalization of the results of this study to the entire population.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there is a role for archaeology in the teaching of history to secondary school students. It increases enthusiasm, interest and motivation of Form Four history students. It makes history come alive. It provides the teacher with an opportunity to *create life experiences* that would expose the students to the process of historical research. The writer believes that it is only through this historical process that students would begin to view historical facts as evidence and it is only then that they would begin to acquire the historical attitude. This method may, therefore, be able to initiate a renewal of interest in the study of history at the secondary level. This approach, however, modifies the role of the history teacher, so that he/she becomes a facilitator of intellectual inquiry motivating students to study the past.

The use of archaeological evidence was specifically chosen to show that even prehistory is relevant. The study of the prehistoric past is useful because it enlightens us about the nature of man; it also aids us in finding the *true* roots of our identity. History as a discipline in its own right must remain on the school curriculum: It has a role to play in the development of our human resources; it is ideally suited to the development of a national ethos, and it can be of immeasurable value in helping us as a nation to: a) understand where we came from--the factors, events and institutions which influenced and shaped our past; b) define where we are at present, and c) delineate where we are going, or rather,

where we would like to go from here, and to decide and determine how best to get there.

For tomorrow's world, we need creative, questioning individuals, well informed and literate, who can work together to devise solutions to the many problems that face us. We need people with a national ethos. If national ethos exists, members of a society will work for something they can identify with, something that they perceive as part of themselves. With a sense of belonging to the whole; with a collective responsibility for the whole, they are likely to work for the good of the whole and this is crucial to their future development.

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