

Introduction

The study of history provides the opportunity for reflection on the past and a compass for future. Historians hope that each subsequent generation will examine historical events for their effects and implications. The history of the exploration of the United States, and specifically, the west coast of the United States provides the historian with an excellent opportunity to study the effects of colonialism and expansion on indigenous peoples. The explorers and missionaries that claimed California for Spain brought important advancements and cultural implications to the area. These advancements brought significant changes to the already vibrant lives of the Native Californian Tribes. It is these historical events and effects that are studied each year by the over 400,000 fourth graders living in California.

California State Standards are clear about curriculum goals related to the Spanish exploration of California and its effects on its people and society. Teachers are left to their own devices to decide how students will acquire the information, but with the advancing trend toward technological literacy and the legislative pressures of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* that requires that students be technologically literate by eighth grade many teachers are choosing to provide technology-integrated California Missions units to cover the requirements of the State Standards. Students are not the only ones affected by the process of studying the California Missions. Research of this type involves three different audiences; students, parents, and teachers. An effective resource website would need to take into account the needs of each of these groups. Each of these groups has different needs but an effective website needs documented, high quality historical information and pertinent suggestions developed for each audience member.

Teachers' primary needs are accurate historical information, information regarding best practices in history/social studies education, and innovative curriculum ideas. Parents may have little familiarity with the topic and will need accurate historical information as well as guidelines for helping their child succeed during the Missions research experience. Students should be the primary focus for an effective California Missions Resource website. Clear, developmentally appropriate information that is historically accurate is crucial. In addition, students need to be supported in their research experience through modeling of appropriate citation methods and assistance in properly citing website references.

Literature Review

History/Social Studies Education and Trends

The study of history, by definition, is a subject that has been taught for centuries. The historical events in California's history, specifically the era of the Spanish Missions of California, occurred in the relevantly recent historical past--about 200 years ago. As listed above, teachers would benefit from new lesson ideas that incorporate learning tasks suited to the study of history and social studies. Compared to the study of other subjects such as reading and mathematics, little has been written on specifics of teaching California history but analogies can be made among similar topics.

Effective Teaching Methods

Jere Brophy's 1992 study, "Fifth-Graders' Ideas about the Westward Expansion of the United States Prior to the Civil War, Expressed before and after Studying the Topic within a U.S. History Course," looked at students studying westward expansion. He compared the use of narrative stories with textbook instruction as it related to students' knowledge on several specific concepts related to the era of Westward expansion in pre and post unit interviews. Brophy

concluded that for instruction to be most effective teachers should include a timeline to help put events in context and that instruction should include a balanced focus on people, events, and the historical/political reasons surrounding the specific historical events. The study also found that students tended to focus on the people involved in events at the exclusion of other important details. A more balanced approach would allow students to experience the excitement of personal narratives while also providing historical context and details.

Students' understanding of historical context was also investigated in a 1994 study by K. Barton. The study, "History Is about People: Elementary Students' Understanding of History", of 29 elementary students investigated students' understanding and knowledge retention of specific historical events. Barton found that students' understanding of historical events tended to be in the singular view of individuals and that students needed additional instruction to understand what pressures and political motivations faced the historical figures of the period. Without an understanding of the overall political pressures and motivations students were unable to make connections to the events in a broader context. Both studies results seem to agree that a balanced approach to history/social studies instruction includes personal information from people of the time as well as a historical perspective on the political and social issues of the period as well as how the entire period of study fits into the breadth of historical understanding.

Providing students with the historical information and background that they need is rarely enough to insure that they will assimilate the information into their lifelong learning experience. A 1994 study of 18 secondary education teachers by Edward Hootstein, "Motivational Strategies and Implicit Theories of Social Studies Teachers" discussed a number of different motivational strategies that could be used in teaching history/social studies. Although secondary education includes increased pressure to make history education motivational, the study provided

interesting information on effective strategies to help students stay motivated about historical concepts. The five most common strategies listed by study participants as being effective were, “simulations; projects; games; historical novels, and relating history to the present.” (Hootstein, Pg. 3) The study found that simulations and student-directed projects were the most effective. Hootstein also found that students learned best when they understood the relevance of historical events which is in line with the findings of the Brophy and Barton studies.

Using Primary Sources and Historic Places in the History/Social Studies Curriculum

With motivational projects such as simulations and student-direct projects providing increased student involvement, the ability to see, read, and touch historical artifacts allows an enhanced opportunity to make history/social studies relevant to the learner. The Internet has permitted unprecedented access to primary source material. The Library of Congress lists primary sources as objects, images, audio recordings, music and lyrics, written text, statistics, and personal/community artifacts. These primary sources allow children to access history through a concrete, hands-on method that brings the realism of the historical period into the students’ reality.

The inherent physical nature of the California Missions provides an exceptional opportunity to introduce students to investigating history/social studies through primary source materials. Marilyn Harper, historian for the National Register of Historic Places, discussed the importance of using historic places in conjunction with history/social studies curriculum. Her article delineated the reasons why using real-world sources, whether being visited in person or through images, were valuable to student instruction. In her opinion the use of real places and artifacts allows the integration of geography with social studies concepts as well as providing students opportunities to experience history.

Review of Current Spanish Missions Internet Research Resources

The Internet has been an increasing factor in the delivery of historical information. An evaluation of existing websites related to the California Missions will provide a gauge as to the effectiveness of available resources for all three target audiences. As of August 2006 the number of sites returned in *Google* search of the exact phrase “California Missions” was approximately 254,000, an unrestricted search on the two words returned over 35 million pages. Obviously most researchers would narrow this search term considerably, but the majority of fourth grade students are just beginning to hone their research abilities. It is unlikely that they will make an exhaustive search, and they often do not yet have the understanding unless supervised during their search how to narrow their search terms. With this developmental limitation in mind, most students do not search beyond the first page of search engine results. This means that the highest ranking sites have a better chance of being used by a student researching the California Missions.

Although most students study a particular Mission, evaluating all the websites available for all 21 Missions would be difficult. A review was conducted of the 10 highest ranking sites in *Google* using the unrestricted search terms ‘California’ and ‘Missions’ since it is unlikely that most fourth grade students would be aware of the ability to limit search terms to an exact phrase by using quotation marks. The *Google* search engine was chosen for its popularity as well as perception within the educational community for appropriate search engine ranking and content. A November 2005 Nielsen NetRatings survey by *SearchEngineWatch* showed that *Google* completed 46.3% of Internet searches, almost twice as much as its nearest competitor *Yahoo!* with 23.4% of Internet searches. *Google* sites are ranked on a proprietary mix of popularity, external links, and bandwidth traffic instead of content, but the ranking provides an understanding of which sites are most likely to be visited by someone attempting research on the

California Missions. Each of the 10 sites was evaluated by a rubric customized for this investigation (see Appendix). Categories evaluated included content, images, authority, and authenticity.

Online resource content on the California Missions spans three main categories; sites by supporting organizations, encyclopedic entries, and those created as comprehensive resource sites.

Supporting Organization Websites

The California Missions Foundation website www.missionsofcalifornia.org was ranked #7 in the *Google* search. The site focuses on the current state of the Missions and what can be done to improve their condition. The information provided about each mission is succinct but helpful to the user including location, directions, and contact information. Details on the current state of each Mission could be very helpful for all audiences. A competing website, the California Mission Studies Association's www.ca-missions.org ranked #3 in the *Google* search. The website's primary focus appears to be on resources for academia. The California Mission Studies Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to preservation and education related to Hispanic-era resources. Although this site ranks high on the search engine list, its audience does not appear to be fourth grade students. Its content which includes journals and scholarly articles is mostly directed at adult researchers rather than children. The website includes excellent contact information and appears to be updated recently, but several of the links on the individual Mission pages are broken. In addition, virtual tour videos are available in Apple's QuickTime format only which may hinder access for those that have not downloaded Apple's QuickTime software.

The last site in this category, Pentacle Press' California Missions Resource Center is not highly ranked by *Google*. In fact it is well outside the top 10, but it is included in the review as its resources are so unique. The California Missions Resource Center website is very different than most of the other websites reviewed. It appears to be supported by the publisher, *Pentacle Press*. The site includes wonderful images and comprehensive information on each of the Missions. No bibliographic resources are evident and there is an ecommerce presence on the site, which could mean a biased purpose, but the wealth of historic information and unusual images outweigh the site's few shortcomings.

Encyclopedic Entries

Only one encyclopedic entry appeared within the top 10 results. New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia's The California Missions ranked #8 in the *Google* search and includes high-level content relating to the history of the Spanish exploration in Alta and Baja California. The language would be difficult for most children and although a list of the missions is present individual mission pages are not present. Children who do use the site as a resource may not recognize the inherent bias of historical information being provided by a Catholic-related entity.

Comprehensive Resource Websites

The next category of sites, those appearing to be comprehensive resource websites have a wide range of quality and authenticity. The top *Google* site in the search, California Missions (missions.bgmm.com) ranked #1 and contains information on all 21 missions. This website's high rank in the *Google* search gives it a weighted importance in students' research. The website contains information on each of the missions but the images are small and of poor quality. The website does not list information regarding the author or what sources were used to gather the information. Parent and Teacher sections are not listed.

Another site, California Missions (www.lausd.k12.ca.us), ranked 10th in the *Google* search. The site does not include an author or contact information although it appears from the URL to be located on a Los Angeles Unified School District server. The information is simply a copy of the information found on the missions.bgmm.com website and a notation appears that the information is used with permission. Unfortunately the missions.bgmm.com itself did not rate highly on the Website Evaluation Rubric and therefore this site did not fair well either.

Several other resource sites appear in *Google's* top ten results. California Missions by The Civic Group ranked #2 in the *Google* search and has comprehensive history and mission information although it is a bit difficult to read. The author, The Civic Group, is listed but there is no information other than a contact email to determine their authenticity or bias as a source of Mission History. The author has included images but the sources, including a map on one of the main pages are not clearly cited. Citations do appear under a small “how to cite this page” link contained on individual Mission information pages. The California Missions another resource site (www.thecaliforniamissions.com) ranked #4 in the *Google* search appears at first glance to be a comprehensive resource site but is primarily a source of images for each of the Missions. There is some interesting information on touring the Missions but historical information is not presented. The images on the website appear to be the property of the author, but no name or citation information is given to the user. Visitors will find that the ‘Educational Resources’ section links to a page that is incomplete. The next site reviewed, The Spanish Missions of California a Thinkquest competition site, ranked #5 in the *Google* search. The site was created in 1996 by two high school students as part of the Thinkquest competition. The site has information about the historical reasons behind the Mission era and a tour of a typical Mission (Mission San Juan Capistrano) as an example rather than information on the individual Missions. The site

states it was last updated in 1998 and is difficult to navigate with pages that do not display properly; probably due to neglect because of its age. The resources section acts as a bibliography but appears from the language used to have been written by a different author. The last website in this section on comprehensive missions resource websites fared the best on the rubric evaluation. The California Missions On-Line Project by Rob Garretson ranks #9 in the *Google* search and was completed as partial fulfillment of a Masters' Degree project. The history and individual Mission information is complete and appears accurate with the exception of recent changes in the condition of Mission San Miguel due to a 2004 earthquake. A unique feature of the website is an assessment page/quiz for each Mission. Specific sections for parents and teachers are not included.

Design of Project

History/Social Studies instruction benefits from a balance of reading, hands-on, and analytical sources such as time-lines as well as the use of primary sources to provide students with concrete representations of the historical period. Studying missions allows teachers and students to meet California State Standards while providing opportunities for research, synthesis of information, and hands-on learning opportunities. Effective research resources must include information for parents, teachers, and students so that they can meet these goals while studying the California Missions. A review of Mission-related websites showed that the vast majority did not provide information specifically target teachers and that they did not model appropriate handling of borrowed sources and images. In addition, the authority and credibility of many of the sites' information could not be authenticated because little to no contact information was available. Lastly, none of the 10 sites evaluated had a specific section for parents. Since many

fourth graders are just starting their Internet research skills it is appropriate to make the assumption that parents are often involved in guiding the research process.

With these factors in mind the Californias-Missions.org Project encompasses information for all three audiences: teachers, students, and parents. The information presented provides a historical background on the Spanish Exploration of California, quality images and information on each of the 21 Spanish Missions of Alta California, as well as sections directed specifically for parents and teachers. Source information has been synthesized from books, primary source materials, and credible Internet sources providing historically accurate information for all audiences.

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