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A Grand Slam of Possibilities When Educators Partner With the Hall of Fame

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LEARNING AND LEADING**

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A Grand Slam of Possibilities:

When Educators Partner with The Hall of Fame

by Amy E. Tucker

“Baseball, Geography, Mathematics and Character Education” is the chant echoing from the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum (HOF) in Cooperstown, New York, as educators partner up with America’s favorite pastime and explore topics covered in classroom curricula.

The concept isn’t new. The museum has been offering seven different standards-based thematic units for nearly 15 years. Still, it hasn’t been easy getting the message across that baseball lends itself nicely to what’s being taught, and tested, in the classroom.

"There are still educators out there who question how baseball is relevant," said Jeff Arnett, director of education and visitor programs at the HOF. "We help administrators, educators, and board members understand that baseball is really a prism through which a wide range or spectrum of subjects can be taught including science, geography, fine arts, civil rights, communications arts, American history, economics, mathematics, labor history, and popular cultural."



Why Baseball?

Getting teachers on board with the concept was easy, because teachers were involved from the very inception. The idea originated from Jim Hill, a teacher at the Richfield Springs High School, near Cooperstown, and member of the Education Advisory Council at the HOF. A longtime baseball enthusiast, Hill had been a "Red Coat" tour guide at the HOF for a decade when he realized the museum's resources weren't being utilized to their fullest potential.

"I think, as teachers, we see things a bit differently than others do," Hill explained. "I offered my time to develop a simple lesson plan, originally geared toward visiting families. When the HOF management readily accepted that idea, I realized we should just develop a true educational program."

Hill knew they needed a clear direction with distinct themes, lessons, and results to make the modules work. His initial thought was to do a unit on mathematics, because baseball statistics and math correlate so well. But, when the group of educators assembled for the first meeting, it became apparent

that baseball lent itself nicely to social studies as well. Thus, the module, **America Grows: Inning by Inning**, soon evolved from those discussions.

Miss Mary Frances Cosgrove, a social studies teacher at the Wellwood Middle School in Fayetteville, NY – and another baseball fanatic – decided after visiting the HOF that she wanted to incorporate some of her curriculum goals with a trip to the museum. She recruited Principal John Almonte and got the rest of the fifth grade teachers on board, and the HOF became their annual, grade field trip.

"We're always looking for ways to motivate kids and get them enthusiastic about their learning," Almonte said. "Baseball is the great American pastime and it's of high interest to kids. Everybody knows about it or has some kind of contact with the game in one way or another."

According to Hill, engaging kids was never a problem at the HOF. They focused on getting teachers on board and training them to use the product the way they wanted it used through teacher workshops.

It's precisely baseball's versatility that makes it a perfect fit to supplement classroom teachings.

"A teacher who knows how to use the product will be much more successful," Hill said. "If you just throw technology or curriculum at a teacher and say, 'Use this to reach these goals,' it's not going to work. But, if a teacher is comfortable and takes some ownership in the product, they'll want to become involved in making it better. That's how you get their buy-in," explained Hill.

The Schenectady City School District

has been actively involved with the HOF, both in developing new thematic units and participating in videoconferences with the existing modules. Instructors Karin Yettru, Gwynne DeLong, and Angela Serrell of Schenectady's Woodlawn Elementary (K-5) traveled to the HOF last year to revise the **Geography: Baseball Coast to Coast** module and develop the connections to the school's curriculum.

"What I like about this content provider in particular," said Woodlawn Principal Patricia Doyle, "is that they have fantastic units." "It's because they [HOF] have reached out to teachers, and collaborated with teachers in creating these modules."

"The HOF has a vision and they're holistic in their approach," Doyle continued. "It's a no-brainer for a teacher to go to this website and pull up everything he or she needs to integrate the unit into their curriculum."

Doyle's teachers make regular use of the **Cultural Diversity** module featuring Jackie Robinson, since they routinely study the player as part of their "important people in history" lessons. Another module getting regular

use at the school is **Women's History: Dirt on Their Skirts**.

"I have one instructor with limited knowledge of the women's baseball league that was predominant during WWII," Doyle explained. "She's doing a unit on women's history first, using Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the founders of the women's rights movement. Now, they're transitioning into the **Dirt on Their Skirts** unit



and the kids are choosing who they're going to be writing about. The teacher took the names right from the online lesson!"

Doyle described the pre-program activities and entire units as "user-friendly and laid out so the teacher doesn't have to recreate the wheel" – a key factor, according to Doyle, in contributing to teachers' success in stepping out-of-the-box with new teaching methodologies.

Arnett agreed, and admitted that the HOF is trying to cater to teachers' appeals for ways to make learning fun and enjoyable for kids, while preparing them for standardized testing simultaneously.

"Through conferences and professional development opportunities across the state, we know teachers don't enjoy teaching to the test," Arnett said. "We know from our conversations that teachers are desperate for programs that are substantive, meaningful, and relevant to the very curricula they're trying to teach in their schools."

"We're trying to help teachers, administrators, and board members better understand," explained Arnett, "that what we can provide here at the Hall of Fame directly supports the very thing they're trying to accomplish in their classrooms – raising student achievement by showing how closely connected our programs are to state and national standards."

Making the Grade

The HOF's partnership with the Schenectady City School District has been instrumental in recruiting teachers, not only from their schools, but from the Central New York region as well.

"They have a very solid understanding of professional development and curriculum development that fits well with the mission of our program," Arnett explained. "They've helped us recruit teachers willing to come in and sit down with us, and actually develop curriculum along a certain topical focus."

The teachers spend two-day workshops

standards," Hill continued, "and are starting to use the national standards even more." "But, we're not tailoring our programs based on what the Board of Regents does in Albany."

Hill said he knew from the outset that the product was strong and teachers would love it, but getting administrators and school boards aligned would take creative marketing.

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writing, researching, and creating the content around a certain subject. Then, the last step involves reviewing everything that was developed, and the lesson continuum that resulted from the program, and lining it up with the standards.

"We're not starting out with the standards and creating curriculum based upon them," Arnett continued. "But, we are developing a curriculum and seeing how it lines up with the standards; so we can show teachers and administrators how it augments what they're teaching in their classrooms."

"It's like the 'Ah-ha! Effect,'" Arnett explained, "when people first see how deeply engrained baseball is in the American culture, how closely it ties into every subject being taught, and how it directly lends itself to improving student achievement."

Hill echoed that philosophy and hopes the HOF never gets into "teaching to the test." "We're using the state

"We arranged an enormous wine and cheese party and invited hundreds of administrative folks to learn about the program early on," Hill recalled. "If you don't have the superintendents, administration, and board of education backing your decision, there won't be funding to go to Cooperstown or to set up a videoconference." No one knows this better than Doyle.

Technology & Outreach

The Schenectady City School District became involved with ProjectView (see sidebar on page 7) through a Federal Technology Innovation Challenge Grant that enabled them to become a hub center for videoconferencing and digital technology in the capital region. Woodlawn Elementary has an actual auditorium-like lab, with 30 computers and a widescreen TV for videoconferencing with the HOF (and other content providers) to add to the learning experiences of the thematic units.

"Videoconferencing is another tool we use to enhance learning," Doyle continued, "when we can't afford to put kids on a bus, and drive them to Cooperstown to spend a day." "This is another way we can reach out to a place that's an hour-and-a-half away and bring this content into the classroom."

Through Project View and the videoconferencing program, the HOF has been able to reach schools in NYC, Rochester, and Buffalo where before, the bus ride to the museum would have been prohibitive. Arnett maintains that the crucial "tangible" aspect (handling the artifacts and replicas) one experiences when visiting the museum is not lost through a videoconference program.

for teachers to be able to do a field trip in-house."

In the last three years, the HOF has built their videoconferencing program to the point where the numbers nearly equal those who visit the museum. Arnett envisions the next outreach phase as employing educational ambassadors to help spread the message and the exhibits across North America.

"We're cultivating ambassadors from experienced and retired teachers who are passionate about baseball and would be willing to go into schools to represent the museum and our programs," Arnett explained. "We're developing a sort-of 'traveling trunk' of replicas and reproduction artifacts that we can ship to teachers for use in the

Student Outcomes

The Education Advisory Council at the Baseball Hall of Fame strives to actively cultivate relationships with various school districts and teachers and has sought feedback on evaluating the success of its programs. Through this process, the council learned of additional subjects educators and students wanted to see addressed at the museum.

"In 2004, we added three modules to meet the needs of our constituents," said Arnett. These included a math unit, women's history, and character education."

"This spring, we're launching **Science in the Sandlot** which is a great fit for a high school audience," he continued. "2005 will also feature a labor history module entitled **Hardball and Handshakes**, which was our first formal attempt to create a module for an older, more advanced audience. It's appropriate for upper middle and high school students and a terrific fit for AP students and courses."

And, perhaps the breakout module for 2005, **To the Best of Their Abilities**, highlights different aspects of what is traditionally a disabilities awareness emphasis in many schools. The module features players such as Jim Abbot, who, though born without a right hand, became a major league pitcher for the NY Yankees and a US Olympic gold medal pitcher. The unit also covers NY Yankee manager Joe Torre and his campaign against domestic abuse, as well as Dennis Eckersley who overcame alcoholism and was eventually inducted into the Hall of Fame.

"We address the controversial issues and look at everything from the recognizable disabilities to the not so easily recognizable and discussed issues," Arnett explained. "We wanted to bring out those issues in a conversational format and give kids the opportunity

"We're always looking for ways to motivate kids and get them enthusiastic about their learning."

"They're still seeing the same artifacts and objects," explained Arnett, "but we also encourage them to find their own artifacts in their classrooms, communities, and homes." "We did one women's history module where a local school brought in two women who played on the All American Girls Professional Baseball League during WWII. So, while our museum educators are leading the discussion from Cooperstown, they have actual players in the classroom from the time period we're discussing."

"The parents are really excited, too," Doyle said. "Certainly, this is the wave of the future. It's a way for inner city kids, for rural kids, whatever type of kids, to expand on their education and

classroom, or that our ambassadors can bring in person to the videoconferences, which replicate any one of our 13 programs into a tangible experience for the kids."

Schenectady Superintendent of Schools John Falco is the project director for Project View, and has fully supported Doyle's efforts to fund the videoconferencing programs.

"I think any school would say that videoconferencing is the least expensive way to build upon your units," stated Doyle. "Field trips are expensive. But, if you can do it in your building and you pay someone \$100 or so for the experience, I think that's a really good bargain."

to talk about their own stories in a setting that might be perhaps not as threatening. That's the module that for the first time as an institution, we made inroads where we know that students are familiar with these issues in their own lives and families."

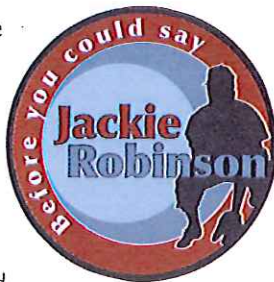
Three more modules are on deck for 2006 including a Popular Culture unit, a Leadership module and a revamp of the

Cultural Diversity unit to focus on Latin American and Japanese- and Asian-American ballplayers. The original Jackie Robinson module will focus more specifically on the Civil Rights Era.

"The administrators, teachers, and students, particularly at the high school level, have said that leadership is a priority in schools throughout NYS and across the country," Arnett explained. "We'll be partnering with the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS) in the development of this module and will focus on how baseball commissioners provided leadership and the positive and negative characteristics they portrayed."

"All of these additions came about by listening to our teachers," Arnett continued, "and determining what we could add to our program that would best meet their needs and the needs of their students, while at the same time augmenting the NYS standards that we know they're accountable for in their classrooms."

"When we set out in '91 or '92, our mission wasn't to teach kids something that would help them on a test," Hill said emphatically. "We wanted every child who visited the HOF to leave with a smile and have a good time – a



Project View

Project View is the Federal Technology Innovation Challenge Grant that made possible the funding of two technology hub-training centers for the purpose of teaching educators how to incorporate videoconferencing and digital technology into their classrooms.

The Schenectady City School District and New York Institute of Technology comprise the two hubs and together they have partnered nearly 100 New York state schools with content providers to develop and integrate the technology and resources offered into their curriculum. VIEW, which stands for Virtual Information Education Web, enables students from far-reaching locations – or rural and urban schools with limited resources – to experience "electronic" fieldtrips and videoconferences with national museums, art exhibits, and over 75 content-providers including the Bronx Zoo, Guggenheim Museum, NASA Johnson Space Center, the Library of Congress, the Ocean Institute and National Aviary, as well as the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

In addition to opening doors to a wealth of learning opportunities, VIEW staff members provide teachers with technology courses and professional development and offer guidance and assistance in setting up videoconference capabilities at their own schools.

Projects are developed with the students' interests and curricular needs in mind, and accompanying lesson plans are cross-referenced to their corresponding NYS and National Learning Standards for quick reference. In addition to Electronic Field Trips and the interactive Point-to-Point Videoconferencing, a new collaborative partnership called Points of View, is being developed with Time Warner Cable's C-Span. The program, developed by the Schenectady City School District along with the National Council for Social Studies, will utilize the high-tech C-Span resources and involve eight separate videoconferences.

In addition to the training and support that the VIEW staff provides, their website offers a wealth of resources for educators looking to stretch curriculum dollars and devise creative, outside-the-box programs for interactive learning that challenges kids. The site includes rubrics and there are tips and guidelines for setting up and evaluating videoconferences. There is also a link for the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Project.

For more information, visit
www.projectview.org
or contact VIEW's Project Coordinator
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(518) 370-8100 x126
sal@projectview.org

'controlled' good time – not just running helter-skelter through the museum."


"Every module has four or five goals, and our initial idea was that every student should complete a module having learned at least one of these goals," explained Hill. "We wanted them to bring home something they could talk about at the dinner table that night . . . to come away with something of value that they had learned."

"While increasing their knowledge of various subjects," Hill continued, "we want kids to have fun, learn some new information, and learn that when you're outside of the classroom, there's a certain decorum that must be observed with regard to how to behave in public."

"Our mission is baseball," Hill stated. "But, certainly, our secondary concern is to increase the love of baseball."

"We're getting kids to read and write and think about and analyze things," Almonte added. "We're getting them to appreciate cultural diversity and exposing them to some character role models. They're able to experience an integrated approach to teaching. It's not just about baseball!"

"We're getting kids to read and write and think about and analyze things. We're getting them to appreciate cultural diversity and exposing them to some character role models."

For more information on the National Baseball Hall of Fame's educational offerings, contact its education department at (607) 547-0347 or visit its website at <http://www.baseballhalloffame.org/education/index.htm> 

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