



Unraveling Roots: Cultivating Genealogy as an Instructive Journey

At the end of June, a group of teachers met to learn about using genealogy to teach inclusive history with Dustin Axe, the Youth Genealogy Curriculum Coordinator with the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS). This workshop kicked off the American Ancestors pilot that supports teacher planning for inclusive historical inquiry projects using genealogy. During the next school year, teachers in this pilot program will participate in monthly virtual meetings to deepen their understanding of this work and to collaborate with each other. Twice a year, teachers will meet with NEHGS in one-on-one meetings that are personalized to their instructional needs. There will also be a monthly professional learning community led by the Maine Department of Education for teachers to collaborate and share their work.

As many teachers know, teaching genealogy can be challenging. By focusing instruction on critical research and thinking skills, teachers learned how to empower students to make personal connections to history by connecting to the process of historical inquiry instead of the product. As one teacher commented, "I loved all the resources available online for schools and the multiple levels of scaffolding that were available. [Dustin] did an excellent job at making this accessible to all learners regardless of their circumstances, but also gave us a framework for research/investigations that can be applied to any topic." According to NEHGS, research finds that genealogy can help students' well-being and connect them to their communities when it is done well. The free resources from NEHGS support high-quality genealogical practices.

One strategy to make genealogy more accessible is to look at the lives of other people, particularly those who have impacted their community. NEHGS developed several case studies of key figures in American history, as well as important Mainers, like Gerald Talbot and Samantha Smith. Rooted in inquiry-based practices, the skills and processes learned by doing genealogical research can help students learn about important events for communities that place more value on the collective. In this way, many of the resources provided by NEHGS can help teachers develop inclusive lessons that can meet the requirements of state mandates regarding Wabanaki and African-American studies and the history of genocide including the Holocaust. "I had not considered using genealogy with my students, but I now see that it can be a good way to connect to my students and for them to connect with history," remarked a teacher after the workshop.

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