



FORD'S THEATRE SUMMER TEACHER INSTITUTES | 2016 AND 2017

# AN EVALUATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## INTRODUCTION

The Ford's Theatre Society (FTS) in partnership with the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, President Lincoln's Cottage, Tudor Place Historic House and Garden, the National Mall and Memorial Parks, the Civil War Defenses of Washington and other sites and organizations, offered summer Teaching Fellow Institutes in 2016 and 2017 designed to engage participants in learning the complexity of Civil War Washington-era history and a range of teaching strategies that enhance their ability to reach all students. **The Civil War Washington (CWW)** Institute met in two, intensive week-long sessions each summer. Session one drew teachers from metropolitan Washington, DC schools while session two invited teachers from schools throughout the United States. **The Seat of War and Peace (SWP)** Institute attracted teachers nationally in one weeklong session each summer.

Across the two years 82 Civil War Washington and 49 Seat of War and Peace fellows benefited from engagement in history, teaching strategies, and resources shared by teaching artists and expert staff at an array of historic sites. Following the historic site-based professional development teaching fellows learning continued during the school year as they participated in online webinars, accessed resources provided by Ford's Theatre Society and partner institutions, and implemented new knowledge and strategies in their classrooms.

This report synthesizes the impact of the Teaching Fellows Program on teachers' knowledge, efficacy, and pedagogy and teachers' perceptions of how their learning will impact their students' learning.

## PROGRAM PARTNERS

Arlington National Cemetery  
Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial  
Civil War Defenses of Washington  
Clara Barton Missing Soldiers Office Museum  
Tudor Place Historic House and Garden

Fort McNair  
Frederick Douglass National Historic Site  
Howard University  
National Mall and Memorial Parks  
President Lincoln's Cottage

Cover photo of The Seat of War and Peace 2017 participants. Background photo by Alysse Bortolotto.

# EVALUATION DESIGN

## Purpose

The evaluation of the summer institutes investigated the following research questions:

- What is the impact of the Ford's Theatre Society's summer institutes on teachers' content knowledge and teaching skills, and their confidence in applying new content knowledge and teaching skills in their classrooms?
- What are teachers' perceptions of historic site-based professional learning?
- How do teachers apply content and teaching strategies from the institutes in their classrooms?
- To what extent will teachers utilize the online webinars and resources and what benefits do they perceive accruing from participating in the Ford's Theatre Society's online professional learning community?

According to FTS, the Teaching Fellows Program is designed to develop teachers' history knowledge and pedagogy by exposing them to: 1) Civil War content available at and through historic sites and, 2) the rigorous programs and practices provided by staff at the various historic sites.

## Participants

Forty-one metropolitan area teachers participated in session 1 of the CWW Summer Institutes, another 41 teachers from around the country participated in the second summer sessions of CWW, and 49 teachers from various states participated in the SWP institutes. Unlike the CWW institutes, SWP participants included returning teachers or teachers that participated in CWW institutes in previous years.

## Methods

Evaluators employed a mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014) to collect and analyze data that addressed the research questions. Data were collected through a **pre and post-efficacy survey, pre and post-content knowledge assessments, focus groups and written reflections**. Video-recorded classroom learning activities and reflections tracked how teachers implemented what they learned in their classrooms.

The survey and content knowledge assessments were completed pre- and post-institutes. The survey was completed online while the knowledge assessments were completed face-to-face at the start and end of each institute. Six focus group interviews were conducted, one each on the final days of the six sessions of the summer institutes. A total of 22 teachers voluntarily participated in the CWW focus group interviews and a total of 14 teachers participated in the SWP focus group interviews. Teachers' written reflections of the impact of the professional development on their teaching and learning were submitted online mid- September each year. In all 72 CWW and 39 SWP fellows submitted written reflections. By July of each year, teachers uploaded a 10 or 15-minute video of their implementation of content or pedagogy they learned in the summer institutes in their classrooms along with pre and post-video reflections. Thirty-three teachers uploaded videos in 2016 and 34 in 2017 for a total of 67.

## Analysis

The efficacy surveys yielded quantitative data that were analyzed using SPSS, a statistical software package. Descriptive statistics and means were calculated. A paired t-test was run to determine if changes between the pre- and post-responses were statistically significant. A level of  $\leq .05$  indicates that 95% or greater results were not due to chance.

The content assessments consisted of open-ended items. A scoring rubric was used to assign numerical values to each response that indicated correctness and completeness of the responses. As with the efficacy surveys, descriptive statistics and means were calculated and a paired t-test was run to determine if changes between the pre- and post-responses were statistically significant.

The focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Qualitative deductive coding was applied to categorize the data and then a second cycle of pattern coding was used to identify themes.

Similarly, written reflections were coded to identify patterns and themes in teachers' perceptions of their learning and the impact of learning at historic sites. A purposive sample of the Video reflections and video segments of lessons were analyzed to determine the strategies, resources, and content teachers incorporated in their lessons, what students were doing in the lesson, and what teachers thought their students learned. The videos of 13 CWW and 11 SWP fellows were analyzed.



Photo by Alysse Bortolotto.

# IMPACT OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Teaching Fellows Program strived to improve history teaching by increasing teachers' knowledge and skills and developing their capacity to more deeply engage their students in history learning. Key Findings of the evaluation indicate that the program met its goals.

## Key Findings

1. Teachers gained significant new historical knowledge about the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the history of Washington DC.
2. Teachers reported an increased sense of efficacy in teaching the Civil War and implementing student-centered pedagogies.
3. Teachers reported the significance of being at historic sites and learning from knowledgeable individuals for their professional development.
4. Teachers designed and implemented lessons that integrated a range of new content and pedagogies learned in the summer institutes.
5. Teachers perceived that their improved knowledge and skills would/did positively impact their students' learning.
6. Teachers offered high praise and gratitude for their summer institute experiences.

## Knowledge and Understanding

Changes in teachers' history knowledge is evident in the assessment results, reflections, and focus group comments. Quantitative and qualitative results of the data analysis show that the Teaching Fellows Program advanced teachers' knowledge and understanding of history. Teachers across all groups described the development of authentic learning communities over the course of the week-long professional development. They described the significance of community and conversation in their capacity to learn about history and to consider ways to improve their teaching. Teachers described Ford's Theatre staff fostering this sense of community through structured discussions, creating a social atmosphere, treating teachers as professionals, and setting clear guidelines and expectations up front.

A synthesis of the knowledge assessment and the qualitative results are in Appendix A. Two themes relative to changes in teachers' knowledge and understanding emerged from the data:

- Teachers increased their knowledge and gained new and deeper understanding of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, African American history, specifically pertaining to the Black history of Washington, D.C. and Washington D.C.'s Civil War and Reconstruction history.

Teachers described the significance of community and conversation in their capacity to learn about history and to consider ways to improve their teaching.

## Teaching Efficacy

Along with learning at historic sites, Teaching Fellows were exposed to activities, strategies and resources they could apply in their classrooms to teach Civil War and Reconstruction to their students. Results of the data analysis are that the professional development enhanced teachers' efficacy to teach Civil War and Reconstruction and to employ the student-centered pedagogies they experienced in the institutes. Three themes emerged from the analysis of teachers' responses to the efficacy surveys, focus group questions, and written reflection prompts (Appendix B):

- Teachers came away with new knowledge about history and **new teaching strategies** that they reported feeling confident and excited to include in their curriculum.
- Teachers described how their experiences over the institute provided **inspiration to try new things** in their classrooms.
- Teachers described **emotional connections** to history that they found personally inspiring and that they believe will also inspire their students.

## Pedagogy

Teachers reported learning many strategies to help them teach historical thinking skills through authentic and active pedagogies. Specifically, teachers described and demonstrated their capacity to incorporate close reading of primary sources, teaching with multiple perspectives, interpreting documents, and analyzing monuments and memorials into their teaching. Teachers also described feeling better prepared and motivated to help students see the relevance of history in their teaching. Their comments coalesced around two themes (Appendix C):

- The professional development led teachers to think more deeply about how they teach history, specifically **moving beyond a militaristic approach to teaching the Civil War** to taking a more social and place-based approach in their teaching, thus content, and embracing a more interpretive approach to their conceptions of history.
- Teachers committed to using or used historic sites, physical and virtual, and implementing the strategies and resources they encountered in the professional development in their teaching.



Photo by Alex Wood.

## Historic Site-Based Learning

Teachers visited multiple historic sites and learned from a variety of experts about the history of Washington, DC, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Teachers appreciated the attention to detail in the structure and planning of activities across sites and across the week. Teachers identified collaboration of the multiple historic sites as influential in deepening their historic understanding. Teachers also described making emotional connections to historic places and people through these visits and the structured activities they engaged with at each site. They reported being committed to engaging in – or engaging more in - incorporating historic sites into their teaching. Four themes emerged from the analysis (Appendix D):

- Teachers described the power of place to create connections to the past and to make history relevant.
- Pedagogical experts at the historic sites, people who know the history and people who know how to create learning experiences for teachers, were crucial to ensuring teachers were engaged, learning, and motivated to improve their practice.
- Teachers describe historic sites as providing unique learning opportunities as a result of the emotional connections to history that are fostered there.
- Learning at historic sites gave teachers new knowledge about and perspectives on history.

## Extending Learning to Students

Teachers consistently described being eager to share what they learned in their professional development with their students. Many local teachers described their intent to visit one or more of the summer

institute sites with students. Non-local teachers described taking students on virtual field trips and expressed confidence that the knowledge, perspectives, and enthusiasm they gained would be directly transferable to improved learning experiences for students back home. Video lessons and reflections demonstrate that teachers integrated what they learned in their lessons and that they perceived their students gained new knowledge and deeper understanding of history as a result. The two themes that surfaced are (Appendix E):

- Teachers believed that their students learning would be/was enriched by the knowledge and skills they gained.
- Teachers described themselves as conduits for history learning between the historic sites they visited and students in their classrooms.

## Impressions of the Professional Development

In focus group interviews and written reflections teachers highlighted the many strengths and benefits of the professional development. While some simply said it was “an amazing experience” others detailed facets of the summer institutes they found most beneficial. These included the highly organized activities, experts sharing their knowledge, learning from other teachers and the staff, and a range of inspiring people and experiences. Many teachers’ comments suggest that the professional development reignited their passion for teaching history (Appendix F).

- Teachers expressed praise and gratitude when they commented on the richness of their summer institute experiences.



Photo by Alex Wood.



## CONCLUSIONS

Teachers across both years and all groups demonstrated growth in their history knowledge and sense of efficacy for teaching about the Civil War and Reconstruction. Teachers consistently described their experience with Ford's Teaching Fellows Program as one of, if not the, best professional development experiences of their teaching careers. They described having fun learning about history, making friends, learning from colleagues

across the country, and developing the knowledge and skills to improve their teaching. They highlighted the significance of being in historic sites, of learning from experts and in community as some of the highlights of the week. Teachers felt respected as professionals and were eager to try out what they learned – both in terms of new pedagogies, new knowledge, and new ways of thinking about history – in their own classrooms.

Photo by Alysse Bortolotto.

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This project was made possible in part by



[MA-10-15-0006-15].

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