

Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills

radio producer, who joined the BHS staff to become our first full time oral historian, by the name of Sady Sullivan.

Sady was quick to see the urgency to shift these valuable historical records to digital formats, not only to preserve them but to make them available for our public—historians and community activists alike, some of whom were eager to reach back into their own community history to help guide their future. New technologies and free software (share ware) made this process of making these moribund collections accessible relatively painless. In particular it meant that an upcoming exhibition about the history of the Latin American Community in New York at the Museo del Barrio in 2010 will utilize this valuable material.

Sady and the rest of the BHS team worked together to activate an energetic oral history program, collecting stories from Vietnam Vets, World War II Vets who had worked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the employees of a local bank that was about to merge with another, the founders of the Bed Sty Restoration Corp, the first community development corporation in the United States, and on and on. We set up listening stations in our library where people can hear these interviews and use them for research, for personal interest, for genealogical projects, etc.

All of these projects are the early phases of BHS using technology to make our collections more available to communities, and to make the relationship between our institution and their communities more engaged and effective.

These are the transitional phases that focus on making collections accessible around collections, access, and use of technology.

A very particular new component of our oral history program personifies the goals described in the 21st Century task force report.

It is a collaboration between BHS and a new K-8 public school, called the Brooklyn School of Inquiry. The school, even before it had a public building, approached BHS to hold an open house for perspective parents because they literally did not yet have a building and wanted a community venue that would allow parents to get a sense of the school as an exciting culturally engaged place. Over 300 people came to a standing room only open house, and the school principal was deeply grateful for our generosity. And so began a serious conversation about a partnership when the school finally opened 6 months later.

Sady and our Education Staff sat down with the principal and began a conversation about how she might imTm[7r10(ith)-u(a)-5()D 0 18T(E)-2(d)-6(a)gd)-e

how they spend their leisure time, the families they came from, their favorite toys, and who they imagine they will be when they are 11 years old.

Another set of questions that would probe further into who the children are and how they think included the following: What is something that you know now that you may forget and you want to remind your future self about it so you can remember it in the future?

What do you want to say to your future self?

What do you think the world will be like when you are in 8th grade?

but he already knows how to do this—she never lets him go on his blogs or his twitter account. This is very annoying.

Another student, Arinola Soyemi talks about the earthquake in Haiti and wants to be a doctor who takes care of kids when she grows up. Arinola is not as interested in technology, but has a clear sense of herself in the world, connected, and powerful, and able, she hopes some day to help others through knowledge and education.

And finally, Donald, age 7 says “I’m really active at all times, and I really love legos. School is really important to me. Science is my favorite subject, and I love art too. And I’m really good at Math. I’m pretty much liking math. I didn’t like Math before. School made me like Math, It made think it was the right thing for me.”

When asked about his most exciting field trip, Donald did not hesitate: “to the Skyscraper Museum. My most favorite thing was when we built skyscrapers. He named his the Chrys Rice. He built it out of blocks. The building was 1 foot, 3 inches and one centimeter.”

This project is about partnership, museums and schools working together, real-time feedback, hands on support of what the school wanted to do, improving skills and empowering community—all of these are services that bring us as a museum closer to our goals supporting communities in their needs in the 21st Century.

Sady with her skills in conducting oral history uses some of her energy to ensure that these interviews with children will be available digitally, in written form, to the teachers, the parents, and the administrators of the school. She is also teaching teachers how to conduct the interviews so that our contribution to the project might expand far beyond Sady’s limited time and energy, and that the school is less dependent upon us, and more self-reliant. This process of empowerment is an essential characteristic of 21st century museum.

Today I have deliberately shared one small project that took very modest resources as an example of how the 21st century skills report is practical, and that the implementation of its findings are imminently

one as a test case of how we are serving the needs of the community through shared authority, born out of careful listening and the spirit of collaboration.