

our plan

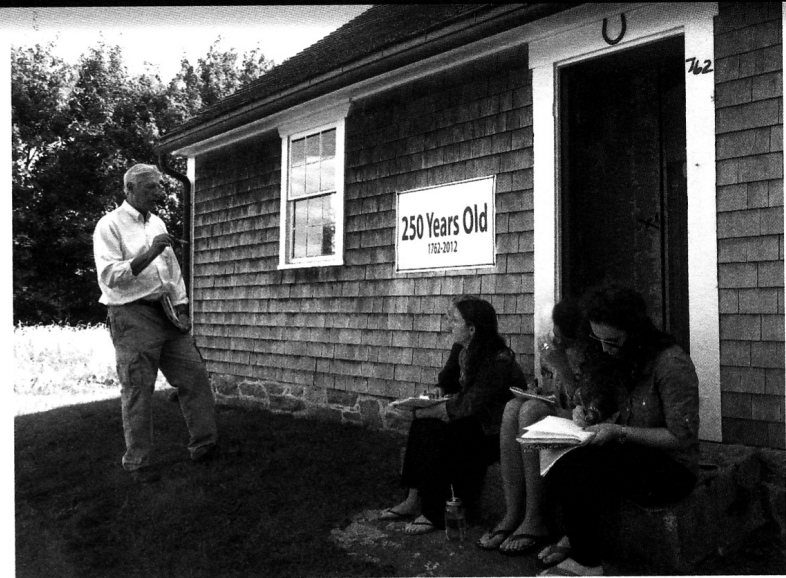
Designing Lesson Plans for Real-World Success

A CLAY MARBLE PROPELLED MAYA HIMMELSBACH '14 into an inspired train of thought about the colonial-era Dartmouth, Mass., home from which the marble had been unearthed. What was life like for the children who lived there? What other games did they play? What were their expected contributions to the household?

With those questions guiding her research, the education major collaborated with six students on a Community Partnerships Center project to create a living history curriculum about the Akin House, a 1762 home owned by the Dartmouth Historic Preservation Trust, which will use the information for public tours. Their instructional approach – developed under fifth-grade education standards for Massachusetts – includes hands-on activities where students make observations and draw their own conclusions about daily life for the 18th-century inhabitants.

The Akin House experience illustrates the benefit of project-based learning, which joins students and faculty with community partners to solve real-world challenges. Partners gain the expertise of faculty and students, while students augment classroom knowledge with the practical skills that often lead to jobs. Himmelsbach, for example, designed lesson plans on everything from dipping wax candles to writing narratives as the Akin children; her classmates created curriculum on topics including Akin House's shipbuilder/entrepreneur patriarch.

"The project helped me learn to think logically but also creatively, while incorporating literacy and reading comprehension into a social



studies lesson – that's an important skill that any teacher should acquire," says Himmelsbach, a senior who will complete her degree with student-teaching in Puerto Rico this spring.

With most teaching materials already predetermined and scripted, Alan Canestrari – a professor of education who guided the students – called the project an opportunity for students to create their own curriculum inspired by their personal experiences, visits to the field and independent research. This real-world professional experience gives graduates an edge in a competitive field, he says.

"Résumés all look the same these days," Canestrari says. "This CPC project might be the catalyst – the exact thing a superintendent might be looking for that could separate them from the pool of candidates."

Source: Roger Williams University, 2012-2013 President's Report, **our lively experiment**. Article featuring the successful partnership between the Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust, Inc. and Roger Williams University's Community Partnerships Center on a project to develop living history programming based on the 1762 Akin House.