

BI-International grant for a professional visit to Germany—Summer 2023

## **Final Report: Comparative library considerations for the curation of history of education collections**



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Photos on title page:

Exterior of GEI; Exhibition space of BBF; Top floor stacks of GEI, Pia Russell, CC BY—SA 4.0

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Rare textbook at the GEI, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Special thanks—Besonderes Dankeschön

The professional visit outlined below would not have been possible without the very generous support of the Bibliothek & Information International (BII), a standing committee of the Bibliothek & Information Deutschland (BID), the Federal Association of German Library and Information Associations. In particular, the following BII colleagues were wonderful resources throughout my time affiliated with the international program: Jacqueline Banford and Elena Hollemann. The BII's innovative program allows librarians from around the world to learn, share, and create vital information-based work together in order to innovatively address pressing professional and global issues. The positive ripple effects of the BII program exponentially improve the lives of colleagues and the wider public they serve. When librarians and information professionals have more meaningful practices, their patrons have richer informational experiences. The BII's generous support ensures such important connections are initiated and sustained.

This professional visit was also possible with the support of The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media's Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) for Historical Textbook Studies, The Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education's Research Library for the History of Education (Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BBF)), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Much appreciation is also extended to supports at my home institution of the University of Victoria (UVic): specifically, University Librarian Jonathan Bengtson, the Kalman Award for International Heritage Studies, the Department of History, and Special Projects Librarian Christian Schmidt.

In sincere gratitude.

*Pia Russell*



Another journey on the DB, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Introduction

This final report for the BI-International (BII) is titled, 'Comparative library considerations for the curation of history of education collections.' The report is the summation of a professional librarian visit to Germany by a Canadian librarian, Pia Russell, who is based at the University of Victoria (UVic) in British Columbia, Canada. To support the work of this professional visit, the BII generously provided grant funding and professional connections to Pia. Her professional visit was completed throughout June and early July of 2023, and included two site visits centred in both Braunschweig and Berlin. This professional visit was conducted during a portion of a six-month study leave which is an opportunity full-time and continuing librarians at UVic are able to benefit from every six years. This visit to Germany was part of a larger three-month research trip throughout various libraries, archives, and institutes in Europe.

The professional visit was based at two Leibniz Institutes. First, it included a three-week fellowship at The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media's Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) for Historical Textbook Studies in Braunschweig, Germany. Second, it included a week-long site visit and related conference at The Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education's Research Library for the History of Education (Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BFF)) in Berlin. A short section is also included on other, book-related excursions conducted while visiting Germany.



View from the GEI villa towards the new addition,  
Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0



## About the visiting international librarian

Pia Russell is a librarian within the Special Collections and University Archives team and a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at the University of Victoria (UVic), in British Columbia, Canada. At UVic Libraries, Pia is the liaison librarian for the subjects of education, children’s literature, and Indigenous studies where she regularly develops these collections and supports many students, faculty, instructors, and public researchers as they engage with these unique resources. She is the curator of UVic Libraries’ British Columbia Historical Textbooks (BCHT) collection and the Primary Investigator of a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Insight grant titled, “Unsettling History: An Interactive Digital Library of British Columbia’s Historical Textbooks, 1871-1921.” Pia’s program of scholarly research focuses on the where the histories of childhood, the book, and education converge in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Canada. Her work draws upon decolonizing and feminist approaches and critically considers Indigenous-settler relations in the formation of print and visual discourse and collective memory. The historical consciousness of children and youth is of particular interest. A public historian based in the GLAM-sector, she regularly works alongside Indigenous community members and practicing K-12 educators to make respectful space for meaningful dialogue towards truth-telling and reconciliation. Most recently, Pia’s scholarship takes a comparative approach to international and transborder conceptions of imperial imaginings of the past. Through this lens, she centrally positions children and youth as makers of history in their own right. Critical analysis of empire as well as settler colonialism are integral to her research. Trained as an archivist, librarian, historian, and educator, Pia has over twenty years of experience in the fields of both heritage and higher education.



Evening in Berlin at the Oberbaumbrücke, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0

Learn more about Pia’s professional and educational experiences on her home institution’s web pages.

- UVic Libraries: <https://www.uvic.ca/library/help/librarians/prussell/index.php>
- Department of History: <https://www.uvic.ca/humanities/history/people/graduate-students/profiles/russell-pia.php>
- More information about her publications can be found through ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3887-1728>.

She can be reached at UVic via email: [prussell@uvic.ca](mailto:prussell@uvic.ca).

## Part I: Professional visit one—The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) for Historical Textbook Studies, Braunschweig

Curating the British Columbia Historical Textbooks collection (BCHT) at UVic is a role I have actively engaged in for ten years. Throughout this time, I have developed my knowledge of critical textbook scholarship and the importance of the GEI within this discipline has been clear from the outset. As my work with the BCHT evolved, visiting the GEI became an important goal as I knew how impactful the visit would be to the development of my professional skills with these unique historical print sources.

Applying to the GEI's fellowship program was a key objective of my European research trip in the summer of 2023 and a main focus of my six-month study leave/sabbatical at UVic. The leading objective was for me to meet with my professional counterpart librarians in order to learn and share best practices about how their curation of historical education collections may be similar and different to my own curatorial work as UVic's librarian responsible for the British Columbia Historical Textbooks (BCHT) collection.



Exteriors of the GEI, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0

A large, three-building campus in the centre of Braunschweig, the GEI's research library houses the world's largest collection of historical textbooks from across the globe; its staff and research initiatives are known as second-to-none within the discipline. As I Visiting Fellow I had dedicated space within the research library, regular access to the print and digital holdings, and was invited to research team gatherings. The GEI also generously allowed me to stay in one of their apartments.

Perhaps my most productive times at the GEI were meeting with counterparts. These colleagues included: Katharina Baier, Kirsten Gerdes, Sebastien Klaes, Maret Nieländer, Marcus Otto, Tatjana Penner, Steffan Samler, Kerstin Schattenberg, and Kerstin Schwedes. During this professional visit, I also presented at the GEI's weekly colloquium and convened a session at the GEI's Georg Arnhold International Summer Conference (GAISC) titled 'Educational Justice and Sustainable Peace.'

Throughout my time at the GEI, I was able to observe comparative library considerations for the curation of history of education collections. While presenting and through conversation, I was also able to observe how different institutional and even broader societal differences exist on topics such as decolonization, truth-telling, and reconciliation within collective historical consciousness. Perhaps the aspect I admired most about the German approach to librarianship, as opposed to the Canadian approach, is how important values of posterity are. In Canada there is not that same sense of future-oriented record retention. Canadian institutions are more responsive in the present, but seem less clear about future collection development unless there is a financial or reputational factor to consider. To be clear, it is not that Canadian institutions do not care about print collections, they most certainly do. However, if given the choice to focus on print or electronic, I observed that Canadian institutions tend to share a sense of collective, cross-institutional retention for analog resources while emphasizing digital collections, even if this means discarding print. Also, I observed that collection scope was more refined in Canada than at the institutes in Germany that I visited. Canadian institutions tend not to acquire everything that comes their way and only select if an idea fits within their collection scope. Conversely, in Germany, I noticed that most items would be considered for retention even if it was not clearly within a collection's scope. In Germany, my observation was that the discarding of print would not be considered as willingly. Notions of print posteriority seem very important in Germany. The idea that someone may find it useful one day, was enough to consider print retention. Neither approach is better than the other, rather these speak to different professional and cultural values. To be clear, it is not possible to generalize too broadly, though as different facilities constrains and institutional purposes must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Each approach has its merits.

Regarding humanities computing, both the GEI and my home institution have similar goals of digitization, metadata, and encoding. We share informational infrastructures and standardization aspirations, as well as human capacity limitations. I hope to build upon professional connections with like-minded colleagues in the future particularly on infrastructure development and knowledge mobilization. Developing shared applications for grant funding would also be worthwhile endeavours; these could include Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, and European Horizons funding.

More information about The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) for Historical Textbook Studies can be found on their website: <https://www.gei.de/en/>





Various collection and architectural highlights from the GEI, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Part II: Professional visit two—Research Library for the History of Education (Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BBF)) | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education, Berlin

While the lead component of my visit to Germany was to complete a professional fellowship at the GEI, the trip would not have been complete without also visiting the Research Library for the History of Education (Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BBF)) in Berlin. A sister Leibniz Institute, the BBF is the research library and archive of the Institute for Research and Information in Education (DIPF). Berlin is only a two-hour train ride from Braunschweig. Also, the BBF was hosting the 19th Annual Symposium of School Museums and Collections of Educational History at the end of June and beginning of July, so it would have been a pity to not also visit this remarkable collection as well. This added professional visit did not disappoint.



Public and closed facilities at the BBF, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0

At the symposium, I met fellow history of education colleagues from around the world and I co-presented the following presentation:

- Russell, Pia and Graham McDonough. June 30, 2023. TOPIC IV: Presenting Collections and (Digital) Visibility—“Unsettling History: From Digitization to Public Dialogue following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada.” *Exploring Collections of Educational History*. 19th Symposium of School Museums and Collections of Educational History (SMCEH 19). <https://bbf.dipf.de/en/news/news-from-the-bbf/smceh19-2#13>



It was also an enormous privilege to have a comprehensive tour of the print and digital collections of the BBF. Particularly noteworthy was learning about differing cataloguing practices (for example, by chronological assessment, not publication date or subject) as well as how BBF colleagues provide thorough climatically safe facilities for preservation and treat controversial titles for sensitive access.

While the facilities and collection of the BBF were exceptional, my favourite aspect was spending time in conversation with the institute's superb researchers, librarians, and archivists namely: Sabine Reh, Stefan Cramme, Lars Müller, and Stefanie Kollmann. These colleagues were most generous with sharing their time and expertise. And, happily, our conversations continue. Recently, Sabine Reh invited my co-presenter, Graham McDonough, and I to present virtually in December 2023 at the Research Colloquium of the History of Education Centre at Humboldt University in Berlin. It is my sincere hope that connections with the BBF will grow in the future either through professional collaborations or as part of their own residency-based fellowship program.

More information about the Research Library for the History of Education (Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BBF) of the Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education is available on their website: <https://bbf.dipf.de/en>



Various collection and facilities highlights from the BBF, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0



## Part III: Extra, book-related excursions

### The Empty Library memorial

The Empty Library is a near-hidden, subterranean memorial in the centre of Bebelplatz just off Berlin's Unter den Linden boulevard in front of the old library of Humboldt University's law faculty. Designed by Israeli sculptor, Micha Ullman, in 1995, it marks the place where on May 10, 1933, a group of Nazis led by then German minister for propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, burned 20,000 books deemed 'un-German' from the university's collection. Easy to miss from view, it is a subtle series of underground white empty bookcases positioned into cobblestones beneath the square.

As a librarian who values freedom of information and expression, it was upsetting to see this site and reflect on how many seemingly 'educated' people at the time felt compelled to violently erase the histories and literatures of ideas they were threatened by. It makes me wonder how librarians must continue to work against such violence which persist in various guises even in contemporary times.



Ullman's 'Empty Library' monument in Berlin, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0



## Book exhibitions in Luther House

Located in the centre of Wittenberg, the German town where Martin Luther spent most of his adult life, Luther House is a large museum housed in the original 1503 building where he studied, wrote, and lived. While at the Luther House, I spent quite a bit of time exploring the exhibitions of the museum's print collection. This included early print copies of Luther's prayer book (1522), Papal Bulls issued against his teachings (1521), copies of his Ninety-Five Theses (1517), pamphlets distributed throughout Germany during his lifetime, and Luther's Autumn hymns (1527). Given the monumental ideological and technological shifts concurrent with this place and time, visiting Luther House as a librarian felt somewhat like a professional pilgrimage.

- More information about Luther House is available on their website: <https://lutherstadt-wittenberg.de/en/see-discover/sights/luther-house>



The first complete edition of Luther's Bible translation into High German (1534), Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0

## Conclusion

This report, 'Comparative library considerations for the curation of history of education collections,' outlines site visits conducted in the summer of 2023 to two Leibniz Institutes at education-related rare book collections throughout Germany: The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media also known as the Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) for Historical Textbook Studies in Braunschweig and the Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education's Research Library for the History of Education (Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BBF)) in Berlin. It also includes a short section on additional book-focused excursions to view early editions of Martin Luther's printed work at the Luther House museum in Wittenberg and a quick stop at the Empty Library monument in Bebelplatz in Berlin.

While at the GEI, I had the affiliation of a Visiting Fellow which provided full access to the institute's collection, events, and available staff. While at the BBF, I was a conference presenter and participant as well as a professional visitor which provided an in-depth tour of the facilities and access to staff expertise. The leading objectives of the visits were for me to meet with my professional counterpart librarians in order to learn and share best practices about how their curation of historical education collections may be similar and different to my own curatorial work as UVic's librarian responsible for the British Columbia Historical Textbooks (BCHT) collection. During these professional visits, I also presented at the GEI's weekly colloquium, convened a session at the GEI's Georg Arnhold International Summer Conference (GAISC) titled 'Educational Justice and Sustainable Peace,' and co-presented at the 19th International Symposium on School Museums and Collections of Educational History "Exploring Collections on Educational History."

Special features of comparison between the German collections I visited and the Canadian library practices I have experience with included: contrasting advancement on decolonization, diverse perceptions of collections for truth-telling and reconciliation, differing values of collections for posterity, and consistent technical practices for digitization. Additionally, I hope to build upon professional connections with like-minded colleagues in order to collaborate in future on infrastructure development and knowledge mobilization. Developing shared applications for grant funding would also be worthwhile endeavours; these could include Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, and European Horizons funding.

As a result of these visits, I now feel better prepared professionally to complete the inventorying, metadata, and public engagement aspects of my curatorial work with the BCHT. Also, I learned that collaboration is always productive; one should not assume they are the first to encounter a professional challenge. Rather, when one reaches out to counterparts, one can see that other colleagues have likely worked to address similar challenges. This collaboration reduces the unproductive duplication of effort and increases capacity and innovation. The relationships I developed and the technical skills I acquired have enriched my practices as a librarian in Canada. This professional visit was one of the most impactful experiences of my entire twenty-year career as a librarian. Germany is a beautiful country and its librarians and information professionals are highly knowledgeable and collegial. I look forward to much continued work together in the future—the professional collaborations have only just begun.



Weltkugel or world globe sculpture at marktplatz in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Pia Russell, CC BY-SA 4.0