

David Harris Flaherty Undergraduate Library Scholarship 2023 Recipient
By Erin Mugford, Faculty of Education
Award-winning Essay

As I have embarked on my journey as a secondary school educator through UVic's Post Degree Professional Program, I have been struck by the nuances, complexities and at times, contradictions involved in the current day school system in British Columbia. Occasionally, it has been enough to make me reconsider entering the field altogether: how can I be the teacher that I want to be while operating in a system that defies some of my core values? Has it always been this way? *Will* it always be this way? What role do I play in everything?

And then came my Historical Foundations of Education class. For the first time, I came to see my position as a future teacher as not only that but also as one of a historical actor. The course helped me zoom out and begin to see my own upcoming career as part of a larger system, and to understand the workings of it in greater detail. I slowly came to realize that without a clear understanding of how the education system in B.C. was established and has changed over time, I was limited in my ability to use my position as a teacher effectively. The class culminated in an independent research project using the library's online British Columbia Historical Textbooks collection. As part of the process of developing the written essay and video recorded presentation for this project, I had the opportunity to engage with the collection physically. This experience sparked my interest in the project. Something about seeing the marginalia in those old books propelled me into the assignment with enthusiasm that I had been struggling to muster all semester! After that introductory class in Special Collections, I worked with the digital archive to find and examine two visual art textbooks. My project explored the subtle (and at times, explicit) exertion of control over young students through attempts to regulate their artistic production. I

also drew conclusions about how art may have been valued as a school subject and the demographics of the audience for which the books were intended. Through my work I came to appreciate my autonomy as a teacher operating in 2023. I also started to think more critically about the resources that are valued and commonly used in art instruction currently.

The experience I had working with the British Columbia Historical Textbooks collection influenced the decisions I made during my first practicum this past month. It made me think about why I was teaching art to my students and got me wondering about the motivations behind the curriculum that I was following. Without access to this archive through the library, I would not have had the opportunity to engage in this impactful learning experience which will stick with me as I start my career as an educator!