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## Three Cases: Bridging the University-School-Community Divide through Collaborative Learning and Innovative Uses of Educational Technology

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## **Three Cases: Bridging the University-School-Community Divide through Collaborative Learning and Innovative Uses of Educational Technology**

The following three articles are presented together because each is a case study exploring a common theme: How the cultural and systemic differences between school and university might be bridged in partnership, as educators work together with community members to educate and promote the wellbeing of children. The cases show how personal relationships, collaborative learning, and innovative uses of technology can be fostered by “hanging out and joining in.”

Each of the cases has three levels of significance, which is in keeping with the nested contexts of partnership work: (a) teaching and learning with elementary students and their families; (b) collaborative professional development for teachers; and (c) incentives and policies at the systems level, which in this case included university, school district, and the Collaborative Schools for Innovation and Success (CSIS) grant project.

### **Professional Development for Community Schools**

It is widely recognized that learning opportunities for teachers ought to be ongoing and intensive, relevant to the teacher’s goals and needs, and situated in practice within a professional community (e.g., Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991). These are key features for all educators: preservice teachers, inservice teachers, teacher educators and district instructional support specialists. The professional development approach described in each of these cases has the three essential features above. Furthermore, in these cases, teacher learning is situated within a community school context (Murrell, 2001; Murrell, Strauss, Carlson & Dominguez, 2015): The educators are all striving to learn core practices effective for students in the schools of this particular community.

Typically, teachers across the school-university professional continuum do not have the opportunity to spend extended periods of time with each other in communities of practice. In Case 1 and Case 2, professional leave sabbaticals offered by the university made it possible for university faculty members to work alongside teachers, teacher candidates, and a district-level, digital literacy specialist nearly full-time from September through March. Case 3 describes how a preservice teacher (PST) used social networking technology to help her students explore cultural practices in families around the world. The faculty member in Case 1 and the district literacy specialist in Case 2 were both in that classroom to coach and help support the preservice teacher’s instruction. These three cases explore how the web of relationships and sharing of expertise plays out in ways that are beneficial for teacher *and* student learning, if educators are given the opportunity to spend meaningful time together in school settings. They are also models for how partnerships can leverage policies at the systems level.

### **An Overview of the Three Cases**

***Case 1: Doing Inquiry in Second Grade Social Studies: An Integrated Unit That Uses Digital Storytelling to Make Family and Community Connections—by Joanne Carney and Lori Sadzewicz***

This case describes how an inservice teacher, preservice teacher, and university teacher educator designed and implemented a social studies unit in a grade two classroom. Students used iPads for inquiry into the communities where their families had lived, and in the process, tapped into powerful stories of family migration. The faculty member, who was also a CSIS team member, was granted two quarters of professional leave to support grant initiatives and learn more about how digital technologies might be used to enhance instruction for diverse learners. In addition to the larger systemic partnership themes, this case is a model for how digital technologies and a place-based focus can support best practice in social studies.

***Case 2: Two-worlds: How can collaborative partnerships help bridge the chasm between university and school cultures in support of preservice and inservice teacher learning?—by Paula Dagnon and Martha Thornburgh***

In this case, a university faculty member used two quarters of professional leave to collaborate and develop a strong relationship with a digital literacy coach in the school district where CSIS was located. For mutual understanding of each other's academic and cultural structures, the digital literacy specialist taught one of the faculty member's university courses and the faculty member did the sort of instructional support and modeling typically done by the literacy coach. A culture of collaboration and a strong relationship were developed, which allowed for critical conversations. The case concludes with questions about how the university-school connections can be sustained beyond a professional leave.

***Case 3: Inspiring Global Connections: Exploring Cultures Beyond the Classroom—by Chloe Unruh and Martha Thornburgh***

This case describes how a teacher candidate used an Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) framework to plan a grade one social studies unit focused on how families live around the world. Inquiry into the topic included a Skype session with a family in New Zealand. The district digital literacy specialist had modeled similar technology use in the preservice teacher's instructional technology course, and she was present to support the intern's lesson. The university faculty member who was teaching her social studies methods course (Case 1, first author) was also present. This case shows how situated teacher learning across the professional continuum can be enhanced by a school-university partnership and personal relationships.

**CASE 1**

**Doing Inquiry in Second Grade Social Studies: An Integrated Unit That Uses Digital Storytelling to Make Family and Community Connections**

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Western Washington University

Lori Sadzewicz  
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**The Setting—An Elementary School in Partnership with a Teacher Education Program**

Washington School is an elementary school located in a small town within a rural agricultural area, with a diverse population of approximately 470 students. This K-5 school has high poverty measures (80% free and reduced lunch) and a high percentage of students who are English Learners (over 30% transitional bilingual). Two-thirds of the students are identified as Hispanic, although a significant percentage of families in that category natively speak one of Mexico's indigenous languages (mainly Mixteco) rather than Spanish. This school thus has the demographic characteristics targeted by efforts in the state of Washington to close the achievement/opportunity gap (Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee, 2011).

The Collaborative Schools for Innovation & Success (CSIS) partnership between the Woodring College of Education and the Mt. Vernon School District has been ongoing at Washington School since 2012. The project is supported by significant annual funding provided by the legislature of Washington State. This CSIS partnership project has dual goals: (a) to enhance K-6 student learning and close the opportunity gap; and (b) to prepare all teachers with the skills and dispositions to teach in ways effective for closing the opportunity gap. The case presented here shows one small-grain model for how such goals can be addressed in an integrated, collaborative manner by schools and teacher education programs.

### **Situated, Collaborative Teacher Learning**

Educators in the U.S. are confronted with a societal imperative for closing the opportunity gap and better preparing teachers. Better organizing schools so that teachers, both preservice and inservice, have ongoing, situated professional development opportunities is a key element in that effort and a challenge for both school districts and teacher education programs. At the same time, teacher educators also need regular opportunities for learning in school contexts so they are able to prepare new teachers with the skills for closing the opportunity gap. The CSIS grant has worked to create contexts within schools for situated teacher and teacher educator professional development so that teachers are able to meet the needs of today's diverse learners.

What does *situated* teacher learning mean? Theorists who take a situated stance characterize learning as involving both individual construction and enculturation in social practices (e.g., Greeno, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Teacher learning thus involves fuller participation in a professional community of practice as the teacher becomes more knowledgeable in and about teaching (Adler, 2000). This case shows how preservice and inservice teachers, in concert with teacher educators, can work together in a community of practice to develop an engaging, best-practice social studies unit.

In this case, the placement of a cluster of seven teacher candidates at an elementary school for a three-quarter internship fostered a situated approach to teacher learning. The social studies unit that will be described was developed and implemented in a classroom where there was a teacher candidate in the final quarter of internship, the regular classroom teacher (second author), and a faculty member (first author) from the Elementary Education program at WWU, who was able to be present quite regularly because she had been granted a two-quarter sabbatical.

### **Instructional Innovations to Enhance Student Learning—One-to-one iPads, 24/7**

While the collaboration among the three educators in the classroom contributed to innovative

social studies teaching, the unit described in this case was also greatly enhanced by the availability of iPads. CSIS funds had enabled the purchase of a cart of iPads, one for each of the students in the grade two classroom. During this unit, the classroom teacher, intern, and teacher educator were together exploring how these digital devices might be used in all subject areas. In addition to having access to their own iPad throughout the school day, if approved by the parent or guardian, students could take their iPads home. Thus, many of the students had access to these engaging and powerful digital devices 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In making these iPad purchases, the CSIS project had aimed to have an impact not just on student literacy (in terms of language as well as technology), but also on family literacy. This was considered highly important, given that the majority of students and their families were English learners (EL).

The ready-availability of the iPads made it possible for the teachers to plan for students to do inquiry into the concept of *community* by taking their iPads home to record an interview with a family member talking about communities where they had lived. Later students would locate those communities on a Google map and draw a line to Mt. Vernon as a way to understand how people move from place to place and the geographical relationship between those communities.

## **A Second Grade Unit to Investigate the Concept of *Community***

### ***Building a unit on “big ideas”***

Alleman, Knighton, & Brophy, J. (2010) explain that teachers need to plan social studies lessons around “big ideas.” In so doing, teachers need to think about what *story* they want students to be able to share with others about the events or examples that comprise the unit. Students’ capacity to do so is an indication that they are making sense of the learning activities and using them to come to a better understanding of how the world works. The big ideas are the overarching themes and understandings that connect concepts and facts; standards and themes are typically stated as objectives.

Big ideas for the community unit described in this case come most directly from social studies frameworks formulated by Washington State’s Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI, 2013). These frameworks suggest that teachers at grade two should have as one of their units, a study of community, and provide the following essential questions to guide student learning:

#### *Our Community — Essential Question(s):*

- What makes a community?
- What causes communities to change?
- How are communities alike and different? (OSPI, 2013, *Suggested Unit Outlines*, grade 2)

These Washington State essential questions are themselves based upon National Council for the Social Studies themes (NCSS, 2010). In the OSPI framework, NCSS Theme 3, *The study of people, places, and environments enables us to understand the relationship between human populations and the physical world*, is explored at a developmentally-appropriate level for second grade students.

While the essential questions guide investigation at the highest level, the Washington State social studies frameworks also provide Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) with more specific learning objectives in civics, geography, economics, and history related to the unit topic of community. Individual lessons in this unit were focused on particular GLEs.

### **Using iPads to Tell the Stories of Our Communities**

The second-grade community inquiry unit had three phases, each corresponding with one of the communities within which students are embedded:

- Our school community
- My family and neighborhood community
- Our Mt. Vernon community

Each phase will be described and the nature of student work explained.

#### ***Phase 1—Our school community***

The inquiry into community began with the community all of the students shared, the school community. A visit by legislators from the Washington House of Representatives, who had voted to fund the CSIS projects, provided an authentic purpose and audience for investigating the two-part question: Who are the people in our school community, and what do they do here?

After finding out the answers to these questions, students introduced people in their school community to the visiting legislators, providing video introductions that could be viewed on the newly-purchased iPads. Pairs of students were given particular people as their targets, and then the second graders used their iPads to take photos all around the school.



Later, in the classroom, each pair of students chose four photos they would feature in their video slide show. They then needed to write a script to prepare what they would say about the people and places in their photos. The teacher provided a graphic organizer, which functioned like a storyboard. Students listed their photographic choices and wrote what they would say about each one. Since this occurred in September, the task was a big challenge for early second graders, many of whom were EL. They talked with each other, trying to decide what they might say, and worked on writing a version of what they were rehearsing orally.

This scriptwriting task prompted a great deal of oral language practice in a low-stakes

environment, which lowered students' affective filter (Krashen, 1982; Zwiers, 2008) and made the task conducive to second-language acquisition. By purposefully pairing the students, matching students with less facility in English with those who had more, the teacher made it likely that each group could produce a script. The educators in the room, teacher, intern, and teacher educator, assisted students who were struggling.

Students then used the application Videolicious (2012) to record their voices and make a video slideshow with a partner, assisted by their teacher (second author) and the teacher educator on sabbatical in their classroom (first author). Some of the students were bilingual, and they recorded their parts of the script in Spanish. When viewing the bilingual slide shows, teachers noticed that Spanish-speaking students were often hesitant, and at times spoke a mixture of Spanish and English. This might be explained by the fact that students had previously not been encouraged to use Spanish in school, and perhaps some may also have been starting to lose their facility in Spanish. The CSIS-funded Club de Lectura, which fosters learning in students' heritage languages, began shortly after these videos were recorded, and Spanish-speaking students had more opportunities to practice their first language in school.

Selected student videos focused on members of their community were later shared both within the community and with the visiting legislators. Anticipating those authentic audiences had motivated students to do their very best on the project.

### ***Phase 2 — My Family and Neighborhood Community***

The second phase of the project was for students to tell about their family and neighborhood communities. To get ready for phase 2, they practiced finding [Washington School on Google Maps](#) and took a screen snap of it. This action helped students understand the geographic location of the school in relation to other community sites. It also helped prepare students to be able to locate the places where family members had lived prior to migrating or immigrating to Mt. Vernon.



***Preparing to interview family members.*** Students then wrote interview questions, and in pairs videotaped each other answering those questions. This helped them practice for the real interview with their family member. Once again, this practice and the process of hearing their own oral language and that of others repeatedly was very beneficial to these young children. All second grade students are language learners, but those whose home language was not English benefitted even more.

After the rehearsal interview was recorded, photos and video were combined into a digital story on the iPads by means of the Explain Everything (2011) application. This too was practice for

bringing together media from their own family stories. After their practice interviews, the second graders found their own home/neighborhood on Google Maps and took a screen snap of that location, which they would later include in their video.

***Interviewing a family member.*** After this preparatory work in the classroom, students took the iPads home to record interviews with a family members. In their interviews, students asked where the person being interviewed originally came from and why they left that community to come to Mt. Vernon. Although most students chose to interview a parent, they had been told that it was acceptable to interview any family member—including older siblings who might be able to speak about other communities where the family might have lived.

After interviews were complete and the iPads returned to school, the three educators in the classroom helped students bring images and videos together by means of the *Explain Everything* applicaton to create a digital story. Some of the interviews were in English, some in Spanish and one in which the parent spoke Mixteco, one of Mexico's indigenous languages. The teacher encouraged students to record their parents speaking in whatever language they preferred.

Once the videos were completed, all of the students shared their video slide shows with each other in small groups, playing and replaying with animation and joy. That repetition, the hearing of one's own oral language and that of others, is conducive to second-language learning (Krashen, 1982; Zwiers, 2008). Viewing each other's videos also helped students learn a great deal about geography, migration, and family, with audio being supported by graphic modes. The second author notes that she was worried at the time about how to translate the videos that were not in English. However, in the years since, she has had the students translate their own videos. This has been empowering and also gives them practice with translation skills.

Although permissions do not allow us to show the actual student videos, an audio version of two of them is [linked here](#). Only the second slide in the presentation, the map, is presented visually. Although the faces of children and parents are not shown, the reader will get a good sense of the winsome power of those family interviews from the audio.

### ***Phase 3 — Our Mount Vernon Community***

As the final phase of the project, students learned about their larger community. Students used traditional media like paint and paper to create pictures of important places in Mt. Vernon. Later, students took a field trip to downtown Mt. Vernon, carrying their iPads so they could take photos. They later made drawings of what they remembered and had recorded in photos.



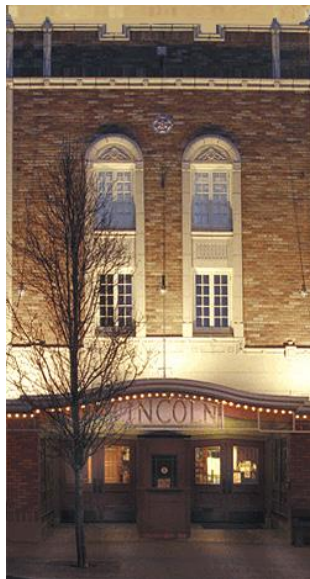


*A pilot to consider using QR codes to share student stories in the community*

While the final stage of this project was not fully implemented, the teachers explored whether the students might create audio recordings that could be uploaded and made available within the community via Quick Response (QR) codes, which are a type of barcode that contain data often to point to a website and are easily read by digital devices, posted near particular sites.

Three students created a model of the type of video it was anticipated each group of students would eventually record,

[telling about Mt. Vernon's landmark Lincoln Theater.](#)



The QR code pilot project was not completed because it required large amounts of time from both the children and the teachers, and at this point in the year, the faculty member's sabbatical had concluded and the intern had graduated.

The authors presented at the Northwest Council for Computing in Education conference in

March 2013 about this project.

## Discussion

This unit provides a model for how best practices in social studies pedagogy can be supported by digital technologies. It is at the same time a model for how educators in schools and teacher education programs can engage in situated, collaborative, professional development. We will first discuss how this unit models best practice in social studies and then turn to a discussion of how the professional learning community of preservice, inservice teachers, and teacher educators functioned.

### Best Practice in Social Studies

Best practice in social studies unit design implies three characteristics: (a) a foundation of big ideas and standards-based competencies; (b) authentic inquiry; and (c) connections to student experiences and family funds of knowledge.

#### *Student learning structured by big ideas and standards-based competencies*

As explained previously, the big ideas in this unit were derived from NCSS themes, Washington State unit frameworks, and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). The specific lesson outcomes/objectives competencies were based on state and national standards, which will be specified and discussed here.

#### *Developing citizens for a pluralistic, democratic society*

The social studies goals for understanding and learning targets in this unit are foundational for preparing students who are able and willing to be citizens contributing to the diverse communities within which we are all embedded—local, state and national. Washington State’s goals for social studies education emphasize preparation for participation as a citizen in a democratic society and recognize the need for students to contribute to the health and prosperity of their own communities:

*“Goal: Social studies education contributes to developing responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. Social studies equips students to understand their own power and their own responsibility as citizens of the world’s most powerful democracy. It equips them to make sound judgments and to actively contribute to sustaining a democratic society, to good stewardship of the natural environment, and to the health and prosperity of their own communities” (OSPI, 2013a, p. v).*

Boyle-Baise, Bernens-Kinhead, Coake, Loudermilk, Lukasik, & Podany, (2011) say that citizenship ought to be identified as a verb rather than a noun, and that we ought not consider civic education to be the transfer of a body of information about government; instead, teachers need to use strategies that involve students in meaningful engagement and study at the local and state level in particular, so they are ready for active participation as citizens later. The multiple phases of this case show how a teacher begins with a community familiar to all the students, the school, and then step-by-step extends the investigation out to family, neighborhood, and city or town.

### ***Technology-integrated tasks to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century digital literacy skills***

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, literacy includes being able to use digital technologies to access and present information. Both the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) and the Washington State Technology Standards (OSPI, 2008) identify numerous competencies that are addressed in an integrated way in the various learning activities of this unit.

The following CCSS English Language Arts (ELA) digital literacy competencies are demonstrated by students in the unit:

*Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas—7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*

- Writing.2.8 Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

*Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas—5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.*

- Speaking Listening.2.5 Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

*Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge —7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.*

- Writing.2.7 Participate in shared research and writing projects

The community project also addresses competencies defined by Washington State's Educational Technology standards:

*1. Integration: Students use technology within all content areas to collaborate, communicate, generate innovative ideas, investigate and solve problems:*

- *Innovate: Demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge and develop innovative products and processes using technology.*
- *Collaborate: Use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.*
- *Investigate and Think Critically: Research, manage and evaluate information and solve problems using digital tools and resources.*

Giving students from lower-income families and those whose first language is not English regular opportunities to use digital technologies in authentic, language-rich ways is particularly important since they may lack access to those technologies at home. Evidence suggests that students from affluent families develop great facility with advanced technologies and communication practices at home, while students from lower-income families have few opportunities to use technology in ways that develop their *information capital* (Neuman, & Celano, 2012). Neuman and Celano argue that this technological inequity contributes to the social and economic disparities in our society. They note that even when low-income children are able to use technologies in school, too often it is of the drill-and-practice variety. On the

other hand, this community case study presents a model for how technology can be used in powerful, integrative, and creative ways in a diverse school with high poverty measures.

### ***Engaging students in authentic inquiry, with a place-based focus***

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2013) has essentially hardwired inquiry in social studies through the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards using an embedded inquiry arc. The inquiry arc supports students to ask good questions, conduct and evaluate research, and propose and communicate possible solutions to questions about the world around them. Long before the inquiry arc was incorporated into social studies education, however, the importance of engaging students in inquiry into their own experiences was recognized by John Dewey, who pointed out the disconnect between school and the world and urged educators to provide learning experiences that make connections to the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in the child's home and neighborhood (Dewey, in Smith, 2002).

In order to remedy the disconnect between students' experiences in the world and school, Smith (2002), calls for a place-based focus in curriculum and instruction. Taking a place-based focus—grounding curriculum in students' lives, communities, and regions gives children the opportunity to do real inquiry in their homes and neighborhoods. In this way they are able to study social studies conceptual relationships at first-hand. As Mitchell (1928) noted,

What makes a geographer or what makes a scientist of any sort is handling source material. Teachers and children have a right to this fun of handling source material; they have a right to have more than unrelated facts given to them to memorize, they have a right to study relationships (p. 223).

This community unit involved first-hand inquiry, with relationships—geographic, historical, economic and cultural—at its heart.

### ***Making connections to student experiences and family funds of knowledge***

The second grade students in this classroom were able to make powerful emotional connections to what they are studying because their investigation was built upon their own family stories. Often busy, financially-strapped parents may not take the time to share such family migration stories with their children. In fact, many of the children in this classroom told the teachers they had never heard about where their parents had lived in the past.

Authentic inquiry into family experiences and the use of digital storytelling tools to present oral histories to an authentic audience can result in powerful motivation and learning. The children who participated in this project were highly engaged throughout, even though the oral and written language tasks in the unit were quite challenging for them. They persisted because they perceived each step as meaningful and leading toward a product they had seen adults or older siblings create—a video. The teachers were asked frequently, “Will we be putting these on YouTube?” Even students whose language skills were still at a developing level were willing to stretch beyond their comfort zone and produce oral language more advanced than they would venture for typical classroom learning activities.

Through the unit, students were engaged in asking real-life questions that connected with their own experiences and those of their families. Most families have stories of how particular family

members moved from place to place but in classrooms with diverse populations, these migrations are often from other countries. In this school, where two-thirds of the students are identified as Hispanic, investigation related to the communities where family members have lived naturally raises the topic of immigration.

Asking students to interview family members is an authentic way to engage children in the real work of social scientists, and collecting evidence by means of oral history is a common method of inquiry for social scientists, e.g., historians, sociologists, and anthropologists. These oral histories brought insights from family funds of knowledge into the classroom (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Digital storytelling is a powerful way to bring family stories to life so that we all can better understand other's perspectives and develop empathy for fellow community members. As Bob Dillon (2014) notes:

*Telling our story is an essential part of our humanness. It allows us to feel part of the community that knows our story, and it fosters empathy for those that surround us. Story is a powerful force in shaping mental models, motivating and persuading others, and teaching the lessons of life. Telling story extends back to a time when oral history dominated the tools of communication. And now the flood of technology tools that allow for instant communication has spun us back into a golden age where story again dominates the media landscape.*

History is essentially narrative; it involves gathering stories about the past (Levstik & Barton, 2011), and oral history is an important tool for historians. Digital technologies like the iPad enabled each child to do the work of a historian, gathering family oral histories and presenting them to classmates. In addition to history, the unit's thematic focus on migration/immigration prompted investigation into conceptual relationships that cross social studies disciplines, such as geography, economics, sociology and anthropology (culture). The final videos incorporated geography in their Google map representation of family journeys.

The sharing of the video oral histories occurred in a small group and then in the whole class, a sequence that enabled all of these primary-grade language learners to hear more oral language. The presentation also communicated a message to children from all different backgrounds that their family experiences were recognized and celebrated. The inquiry gave children a greater appreciation for the hardships many family members had endured, as well as pride in their accomplishments.

All too often, in the current climate of high-stakes testing and schools concerned about accountability, it is English Language Learners and students disadvantaged by poverty who are given a steady diet of basic skills instruction rather than being engaged in real-life inquiry about things that matter to them. This case provides a powerful model for how children can do what Mitchell (1928) advocated: using source material to investigate relationships across time and geography. The learning process resembled what people do as family members, workers and citizens: interacting with others and gathering evidence to answer questions about the world in which we live.

### **Situated Teacher Learning**

How did this project function as an opportunity for situated teacher learning for the preservice, inservice and teacher educators involved in it? As noted previously, learning theory and research on teacher professional development all point to the need for teacher learning experiences situated in schools and in collaboration with peers (Adler, 2000; Borko, 2004; Greeno, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Inservice, preservice teachers and teacher educators planned and taught this community unit together, all of them learning collaboratively in a school context as they grappled with the challenges of a complex series of performance tasks or projects, with students who had limited facility in reading, writing, and using an iPad. Darling-Hammond, et al. (2009) call for teacher professional development that is rigorous, sequenced and situated in schools. This project was all of that and more, and as the educators collaborated, a partnership was developed across the school-university divide.

### ***Continuing preservice teacher learning in a social studies methods class***

The teacher educator involved in this project (first author) has continued to present this case to teacher candidates in her social studies methods classes, using it as a model for the kind of social studies pedagogy the program aims for its candidates to plan and implement as teachers. With a limited repertoire of their own, novice teachers need to see fully-developed models of best practice and be able to examine student work samples that provide evidence of learning. Each time the teacher educator has shown the videos and other documents provided here, she has noted how powerful they have been in inspiring preservice teachers' to go beyond the inert social studies materials that are so often used in schools to designing their own units.

One of the readings in the social studies methods course is a chapter in the Levstik and Barton's *Doing History* text, entitled "Nosotros La Gente." In it, the authors emphasize the importance of teachers' incorporating diverse perspectives and helping children make *human* sense of history through the use of various forms of narrative. The accounts in history texts have most often presented stories about European-American men. We as teachers must ensure that *all* students see themselves reflected in the historical accounts presented in the classroom. Focusing on family stories is an engaging, developmentally-appropriate way to do that in grade two.

### **Challenges**

While the community unit described in this case study was exemplary in many ways, it nonetheless had its challenges in terms of supporting student use of technology and being realistic about their developmental level and skills in reading and writing. The primary challenges were in supporting student use of technology and the students' developmental levels.

### ***Supporting student use of technology***

In doing a multi-step project of this sort with young students, many of whom at this stage had little experience with iPads, it was important that the teacher was not the only adult in the classroom, trying valiantly to deal with numerous student questions and technology challenges. The year when this community project occurred, a university faculty member who had taught instructional technology to elementary teacher candidates was spending the two quarters of her

sabbatical in the school. At the same time, an intern from the WWU elementary education program was completing the final full-time quarter of her internship. Thus, there were three educators available to support the unit, the inservice teacher, her preservice teacher intern, and a teacher educator. This is an example of how clinical field experience can be leveraged to support innovative models of best practice, at the same time providing a setting for collaborative, situated teacher learning.

In the years since doing this unit, the teacher (second author) has had to scale back the use of technology in this unit due to the lack of other adults in her classroom. However, some of her students have now become familiar with Google slides in first grade, and so she is looking forward to using that application as a way for the students to put together a slideshow about their families and the Skagit Valley.

Although the field trips to downtown Mt. Vernon have continued, the teacher has not had her students take their iPads, since they seemed to be more a hindrance than a help. As with any field trip, she wants her students fully involved in the experience, and having a camera or iPad puts that device between them and the experience. Instead, she herself takes pictures and then has the students access her photos to tell their own stories.

### ***Students' developmental level***

Another challenge in implementing this unit is students' developmental levels. As noted previously, second graders are all language-learners, and the reading and writing tasks in this unit are challenging for most of them. The key to success is providing enough supports—graphic organizers, step-by-step foundational tasks, rehearsal, and support from adults or other more advanced student-helpers—to enable the students to be successful with their unit projects.

## **Conclusion**

The discoveries that students make about their community help the teacher to plan subsequent lessons. Students' interests differ from year-to-year and group-to-group. The teacher provides the background and the basics, but *students* lead the discovery. For example, one group was very interested in the community workers, while another was focused on all the different businesses in the community. The teacher notes, "We are only held back by time."

For the second-grade teacher, the most powerful parts of this experience are the conversations that families have and the recordings of these conversations. These conversations lead to discoveries and further inquires that she is sometimes able to facilitate.

For the teacher educator, the most powerful parts of this experience are the conversation she is able to have with teacher candidates, many of whom have not experienced social studies as something one *does*, but instead have experienced social studies in their schooling as learning superficial facts about other peoples' lives. Conceiving of social studies as sociocultural inquiry and family narrative will make a significant difference in the ability of these teacher candidates to make social studies truly engaging and reflective of the experiences of all family, ethnic, and language groups.

The imperative for American schools is to prepare citizens for a pluralist democracy. Democracy requires participation, and much of that participation involves collaboration in local community organizations. By engaging in a place-based exploration of community with connections to family stories, young students hear about the varied perspectives and experiences of their classmates' families. This sort of understanding is foundational to becoming a citizen in a pluralistic society, taking everyone's interests into account and working for the well-being of everyone in our communities. This project is not only a model for social studies pedagogy, but also a model for how schools and universities can work as partners in that crucial effort.

*Authors' note: Permission granted for use of photographs*



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## CASE 2

### **Two-worlds: How can collaborative partnerships help bridge the chasm between university and school cultures in support of preservice and inservice teacher learning?**

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Martha Thornburgh

Mount Vernon School District

In the late 1980s, as recommended by the Carnegie Forum and Holmes Group, an emphasis on teacher education reform centered on university-school partnerships where teachers and university faculty collaborate in a mutual exchange to systematically research and improve teaching practice (Carnegie Corp., 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). Yet, as Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1983) discussed 25 years ago, inherent chasms in hierarchies and cultures remain between the two-worlds, those of university studies and field-based experiences.

According to Goodlad (1993), there are significant differences in the cultures of universities and schools. University faculty have relative freedom over their time, are encouraged to engage in inquiry, and are evaluated on a merit system of tenure and promotion. School employees are bound by time and space, forced to attend to immediate needs in schools, and asked to work for the betterment of a democratic society. Further, cultural conditions of universities and of schools do not encourage mutual partnerships. On the university side, there are few incentives or funding for tenure-track faculty to closely monitor students in field-based components; field-placement is often outsourced to a centralized office; and the development of mutually beneficial relationships takes significant time and is not rewarded in promotion (Zeichner, 1995). On the school side, classroom teachers are asked to take on the extra job of mentoring teacher candidates as well as maintain full responsibility of teaching, with minimal compensation or mentoring support (Goodlad, 1993; Zeichner, 2010). Meanwhile, university faculty retain authority over the construction of the field-based experience, and the disparity between what is taught in university courses and the opportunities to enact these ideas in field-based placements is often great (Bullough, Birrell, Young, Clark, Erickson, Earle, et al., 1999). Moreover, classroom teachers are often not versed in the current methods that student teachers are learning in their university studies, and university instructors know little about the classroom practices where their students are placed (Zeichner, 2010).

Yet, as Darling-Hammond states, “the enterprise of teacher education must venture out further and further from the university and engage more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda” (2006, p. 302). If mutual partnerships are essential for preparing better teachers, how then, can we create collaborative conditions for bridging these chasms in culture and hierarchy to encourage mutual learning among university faculty, school teachers, and students? In this article we provide one example where these cultural chasms were bridged through a professional leave opportunity with a particular focus on mentoring preservice and inservice teachers in the use of instructional technology.

#### **An opportunity for collaboration**

One approach we undertook to bridge the divide between schools and universities was for Paula Dagnon, a Western Washington University (WWU) faculty member, to apply for and spend her professional leave collaborating with Martha Thornburgh, Digital Literacy Specialist (DLS) in Mount Vernon School District, where many of the WWU teacher education students are placed.

Given Paula's role at the university as director of and teacher in the Instructional Technology Program, this was a perfect fit both personally and professionally, and the collaboration addressed a number of the barriers to school and university partnerships. The structural incentives for her were in place through professional leave, which provided funding, time, and space in which to study, learn, and practice from and with the DLS about the cultural context of the school district, specifically with regard to technology integration. For Martha, she had an opportunity for a temporary colleague, as she is the only Digital Literacy Specialist in her district, but admittedly she was asked to take on the job of mentoring without extra compensation.

### **Creating a culture of collaboration**

On Paula's first day working in Mount Vernon, Martha took her on a tour of the K-12 schools in the district. This tour was immensely valuable, as Martha was able to articulate the culture of the schools with regard to technology integration, introduce Paula to many teachers, and show her the technology resources available, as well as how technology was configured (such as in laboratories and shared carts). According to Ertmer (2005), "teacher beliefs have been shown to be heavily influenced by the subject and school in which they participate" (p. 264). While some teachers have a high degree of self-efficacy in the use of technology, many times this innovation is suppressed for conformity, due to the social, organizational and cultural contexts of a school and its leadership (Fullan as cited in Grunberg & Summers, 1992; Mumtaz, 2000). On the other hand, if the social, organization, and cultural contexts of a school and an administrator's vision encourage innovation, pedagogically meaningful integration of technology more likely occurs (Somekh, 2008).

Following the tours, Martha involved Paula in individual consultations with teachers who had requested technology support. In her review of the literature on factors affecting teachers' use of information and communication technology, Mumtaz (2000) found that teachers were more likely to integrate technology if there was ample support and if experimental approaches to teaching were part of the academic and cultural structure of the school. Mentoring can also provide teachers with an opportunity to observe how technology can be used and managed in the classroom, as well as "just in time" professional development (Franklin, Turner, Kariuki, & Duran, 2001).

In this particular year, a number of teachers were receiving Chromebook carts, as a result of being awarded an Early Adopter Grant. Collaboratively, we created a [presentation](#) that was shared at each team meeting with the grant recipients before they received their Chromebook carts. Participating in these presentations afforded Paula an opportunity to meet individual teachers, as well as provide teachers with an opening to request additional support. Although the grant applications were awarded to teams, often there was one person who was technologically more advanced than the rest of the team. Thus, mentoring support was needed. As an example, we facilitated two days of technology integration in a third-grade classroom. The first day was simply to help all the students in *the caring and feeding* of their Chromebooks, logging onto their Chromebooks, and getting into Google Classroom, the learning management system the district has adopted (Muhtaric & Ziemke, 2015). While this may sound like a simple task, with 25 third-grade students who are logging in for the first time, a solid classroom period of 50 minutes is easily consumed, as students need to be given their usernames and passwords, type them in correctly, and, often times, have them reset at a central IT administrative office.

After successfully getting students logged on, we were then invited back to model a lesson using Google Classroom. At this time, students were studying and observing snails. Thus, we

introduced a basic lesson using Google Slides where students labeled a snail, responded to a question, and used the research tool to find pictures of things snails need to survive. In addition to allowing the students to use technology, by presenting a Google slide lesson through Google Classroom, we were able to model how a collaborative assignment can be seamlessly distributed to all students.

Clearly, this lesson could have been taught without technology, but, as a number of conceptual frameworks discuss different methods of technology integration (e.g. [TPACK](#), [SAMR](#), [TIM](#), and [trudacot](#)), much like learning to swim, teachers often need to start in the shallow end of the pool to build confidence. Thus, in this situation, knowing that the teacher had low technological self-efficacy, we created a lesson that would fall under Augmentation in the SAMR model, in which technology improved the lesson on snails and the teacher would be able to create something similar on her own. By presenting a lesson that the teacher perceived she could do on her own, she is more likely to use technology on a regular basis (Hu, Clark, & Ma, 2003).

During this lesson, Martha, the classroom teacher, and Paula learned a number of practical lessons, many of which Paula can now relay in her university classes. For instance, students should carry devices with two hands, younger students may need practice with trackpads, logging in can be a time-consuming task for younger students, and they may need to practice this skill alone for a week.

### **Building Capacity**

Another instance in which we were able to facilitate instruction came out of the Digital Literacy Coach (DLC) meetings. Each school in the district had identified one teacher to be a DLC for their building. This model of having a coach in each building is effective because they can be advocates for the use of technology and are more accessible to mentor teachers in their own building (Kopcha, 2010). In this role, the DLCs are asked to attend monthly meetings, for which they are provided a substitute, as well as help their colleagues with technology integration.

During some of the meetings, the DLCs have a technology showcase to demonstrate tools being used in their classes. In this instance, having just purchased some new equipment for the University, Paula was able to bring in some new tools that sparked innovation. For example, we set up a Makey Makey and Sphero for the teachers to try. A [Makey Makey](#) is a two-sided circuit board that allows everyday objects to turn into touchpads (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Makey Makey. An invention kit for everyone.

Combine this with the Internet and you can play Mario with playdough or bananas, make musical art, or even create an animal camera at home. However, in creating with Makey Makey, students also learn about circuits and coding. When one teacher saw the Makey Makey, she

immediately wanted her 5<sup>th</sup> graders to use it, as they were studying circuits, but she asked for a bit of support for that first lesson. While this teacher is extremely adept with technology, it is not uncommon for teachers to lack self-efficacy in actually using the technology with students (Mueller, Wood, Willoughby, Ross, & Specht, 2008). Thus, support from a coach is essential. Given that there were not enough Makey Makey boards in the district, we were able to borrow some from the University for this lesson and allow the students to use them for the week. We presented a [lesson](#) on electrical circuits, in which students tested various materials for conductivity (e.g., lead, graphite, playdough, asparagus, copper), completed an electrical circuit, made a human piano, and created a game controller. As demonstrated in Figures 2 and 3, the students were solidly engaged for well over 90 minutes, the teacher jumped in as she learned, and we stood back and admired the students and teacher for taking a risk to invite us to their learning environment.



*Figure 2.* Using a Makey Makey to test playdough and graphite for conductivity.



*Figure 3.* Collaborating to make a human piano.

Another outcome of the same DLC meeting was the demonstration of and interest in the [Sphero](#). A Sphero is a spherical robot that can be controlled by a smartphone or tablet (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Sphero SPRK. a robot designed to inspire creativity through coding.

While its fame comes from the BB8 in the later *StarWars* movies, Sphero has created a number of educational lessons to teach students about robotics, coding, and STEAM principles. Again, Paula was able to provide a teacher with a Sphero to try before she invested in them. One year later, her students used a variety of household materials to build and conduct chariot races for the Spheros, even featuring them at a TechFest, which showcased innovative uses of educational technology across elementary, middle, and high school (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5. Setting up for a Sphero chariot race.



Figure 6. A display of the chariots students made with household goods.

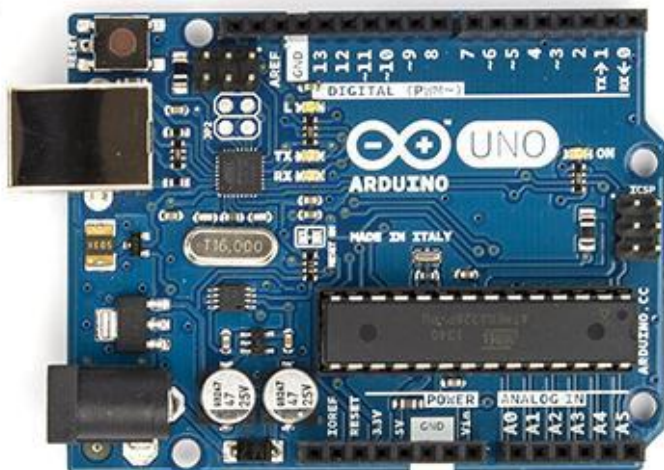
### Learning from teachers

Through this collaboration, Paula was able to provide physical resources, such as the Makey Makeys and Spheros, to the school district, as well as be another human resource for helping teachers think critically and creatively about technology integration. Reciprocally, Paula was able to learn a variety of new tools teachers were using in their classrooms to inform her



preservice teacher education students. For instance, a high school French teacher shared a friendly Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) compliant portfolio tool, [SeeSaw](#), which allows students to document their own learning through images, drawings, text, video and documents. This information can privately be shared with families and selected information can be pushed to a class blog. As a result of learning about this tool, Paula introduced it to her Instructional Technology Class for Early Childhood Educators and was happy to hear that after learning about this tool, one student utilized it during her summer employment at a preschool and reported that families loved seeing the answer to “What did you do at school today?” Another DLC who also attended the meeting where SeeSaw was shared has implemented it with her 4<sup>th</sup> graders.

Terri, a computer science teacher and DLC, shared how she is using Arduinos in her classroom. [Arduino](#) is an open-source platform used for building electronics projects and consists of a programmable circuit board and a piece of software used to write code to the board (see Figure 7). Because Paula had not had time to experiment with these and felt intimidated by them, Terri kindly shared her teaching materials for introducing Arduinos in the classroom. Because of her scaffolding, Arduinos have been added to the University IT curriculum.



*Figure 7.* Arduino. An open-source platform for creating electronics projects.

A last example, among many others, was the sharing of [autoCrat](#), which is a merge tool that allows for the creation and sharing of personalized documents. When used in conjunction with Google Forms and Google Docs, it can be used as a scaffolding tool for students who are language learners or who are learning a new content area concept, for example. Once responses to questions on a form are submitted, the responses are merged into a pre-written document and then emailed to the user. Try it [here](#). As Zeichner (2010) said, faculty often do not know what is being taught in K-12 classrooms, and he was right. The opportunity to learn from practicing teachers was invaluable for Paula and has strengthened her university courses.

#### **University-School Classroom exchange**

On the other hand, to address Zeichner’s (2010) concern that teachers are often not aware of the methods taught in university courses, Martha taught one of Paula’s university courses while Paula was on leave and has continued to teach at least one class per academic year. This collaboration was mutually beneficial for a number of reasons. First, a sharing culture across P-12 and the university ensued. Second, Martha’s experiences in the P-12 system allowed her to

closely connect content in the university class with experiences and experts in the P-12 system. For example, she invited the district Assistive Technology Specialist and Speech Language Pathologist to have a discussion with preservice teachers about assistive technology. Additionally, a teacher in the Highly Capable Program shared his passion for using Arduinos. A first grade intern and her cooperating teacher elaborated on their experience with introducing Chromebooks to first graders, integrating Google Classroom, and utilizing Padlet (See [What we wonder about clouds](#) and [What we think we know about clouds](#)). Finally, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher discussed SeeSaw as well as [Mystery Skype](#).

Chloe, who had been a student in Martha's class at the university, reached out to her the next quarter while interning in a first-grade class in the district (See Case 3 in this article). Martha had introduced the concept of using Skype or Hangouts to make connections in the classroom. When the students in Chloe's classroom were learning about other cultures, Martha was able to facilitate a Skype conversation with a family in New Zealand. This lesson was very successful for both the intern and students as they were able to use the available technology in such a transformative way. The students were excited to learn from students on the other side of the world, and the intern was empowered by the ease with which she could extend the learning in her class in such an engaging and effective way. Having the opportunity to work with former students as they intern in the district and subsequently, in some cases, become teachers in the district has built a powerful partnership. Martha is able to make connections for her university students and also build on those connections and ideas as the students begin their work in classrooms. This grassroots approach is beginning to build a culture within the Mount Vernon School district where the professional development process is a more seamless transition from university to classroom. This partnership also allows Martha to gain a clearer picture of what skills and understanding new teachers coming into the district possess, and with this understanding she is better able to support the needs of these new teachers.

### **Developing Relationships**

Developing relationships is a complex process that takes time. For example, one university teacher educator admits to spending more time building relationships with mentor teachers and building staff than with teacher education students, largely because she knows that the relationship with the mentor teacher will more than likely endure longer than the relationship with the student (Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011). This university teacher also understands the delicate nature of a collaborative partnership: "Collaborative relationships are fragile things, difficult to build and easy to destroy. Like friendship, they cannot be forced, even planned for with any significant degree of certainty" (Bullough, Draper, Smith, & Birrell, 2004, p. 518). In addition to taking time and being fragile, Martin et al. discuss the complexity of university-school partnerships across and within groups, such as with students, preservice students, teachers, and administrators. As a result of these multiple relationships, there is a constant shift in interactions, such as providing feedback to students or discussing the latest educational research with an administrator. Moreover, with each relationship, one must navigate various terrains, such as a teacher's skills, knowledge, and dispositions as a classroom teacher and as a teacher educator.

Zeichner (2006) suggests that relationships need to be extended into the communities in which preservice educators serve in order to develop sociocultural competence. The underlying component required for the development of positive relationships and social interaction is trust (Louis, 2006). Just as Baeten and Simons (2016) detail about mentor and student teachers,

university faculty and school faculty require mutual respect, openness to learning, and consideration that each partner is an equal peer who has valuable knowledge. Prior to Paula's professional leave, she had very little time to collaborate, discuss, and foster relationships with practicing teachers who could potentially be guest speakers. However, because of the relationship-building Paula engaged in while on leave, she was also able to connect students more closely with how practicing teachers are integrating technology into their classrooms by inviting in-person and virtual guests to class.

Trust that developed between Paula and Martha provided an opportunity for Martha to see her work and the district initiatives through another lens. As we visited with teachers and worked together, Paula was able to ask questions that probed into the district thought processes and priorities in integrating technology into classroom learning and instruction in meaningful ways. This process brought to light things that had been implemented in the district without clear understanding or focus about the impact on teaching and learning across the district. Furthermore, working with Paula and the university provided support for research-based strategies that Martha was working to implement in the district, and having a university connection added value to initiatives. Working with Paula provided an excellent opportunity for problem solving and creative collaboration, but much of this would not have been achieved if it were not for the willingness of both to engage in open, and sometimes, difficult conversations that challenged our practices.

### **Teaching the Principals about Technology**

A last example for how a professional leave allowed for breaking down of hierarchies occurred through a collaborative presentation in a University Educational Administration course. According to Byrom and Bingham (2001), "Leadership is probably the single most important factor affecting the successful integration of technology into schools" (p.4) at all levels: state, district, and school. Yet, few higher education administration programs have a course with technology leadership or even digital technology (Fletcher, 2009). We want principals to be able to see that students are not just using technology, but rather are redefining learning with technology. According to the administer standards of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2009), educational administrators should "model and promote the frequent and effective use of technology for learning." In fact, Anderson and Dexter (2005) suggest "that a school's technology efforts are seriously threatened unless key administrators become active technology leaders in a school" (p.74) and that technology leadership has an even greater effect than resources. But administrators need to know what effective uses of technology are rather than simply seeing students' using technology. For instance, Elementary Principal Price states, "I want to know more about what kids should be doing with technology" (as cited in Fletcher, 2009, p. 3). To begin this discussion of what administrators need to really understand about effective integration of technology and how leadership can create a shared vision for technology use that becomes part of the definition of effective teaching (Mueller et al., 2008), Martha, Linda, the university's Assisitive Technology Center Director, and Paula spent an evening engaging with Education Administration students about these topics. Our presentation can be found [here](#). While this was extra, unsupported work for all of us, the collaborative spirit of our work in the schools and at the university compelled us to connect our experiences for better academic and practitioner knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

Since the late 1980s, teacher educators have been working to strengthen teacher education programs by situating learning in schools. While we have improved in this goal, we still have

great strides to make in crafting planned, purposeful field-experiences for which university professors and school teachers work collaboratively. Cultural conditions both in higher education and in P-12 schools present us with numerous barriers to the work of mutual learning. Yet, in this article, we have articulated how a professional development opportunity at the university allowed Paula to begin a relationship with the DLS of a school district and collaboratively take action to bridge the university-school chasm. Much work remains, however, for bridging these organizational systems and cultures. For example, professional leave is allowed only at certain intervals. How, then, can the university merit system reward and value the development of partnerships for their own sake, not solely when it results in a tangible outcome, such as a presentation or publication? On the school side, how can teachers be offered time and/or compensation for collaboration, in the absence of sabbatical opportunities? While many professional collaborations are fostered as the result of external grant funds, how do we find fiscal and personal resources in times of financial constraints to do this work on a regular basis, without external funds? Research has shown us the value of truly collaborative work and this article testifies to the personal value for a teacher educator, district specialist and both inservice and preservice teachers. We need to continue to advocate at all levels for opportunities to enhance teacher education through field-based experiences with community partners, where we are truly good stewards and partners to one another.

*Authors' note: Permission granted for use of photographs*

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### CASE 3

#### **Inspiring Global Connections: Exploring Cultures Beyond the Classroom**

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#### **Introduction**

A key task during the first quarter of a Western Washington University (WWU) elementary education candidate's internship is to use an Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) framework to plan and teach a three to four lesson social studies mini-unit. With the support of the Mount Vernon School District (MVSD) Digital Literacy Specialist, an intern at Washington School used digital technology to enable her first-grade students to communicate with a family in New Zealand as they did inquiry into the culture of families around the world. In this article, the intern, Chloe Unruh, and the MVSD Digital Literacy specialist, Martha Thornburgh, describe the lesson and explain how it fits into the context of a school-university partnership.

#### **Part 1: An Intern at Washington School**

In the spring of 2016, I was placed in a first-grade class in Mount Vernon, Washington, for my year-long student teaching experience. In this class, there were 25 students, seven of whom were labeled as English language learners. In addition to the high population of English learners in my class, there were two students receiving speech therapy, five struggling readers, and two students who were recognized as highly capable. This class was about 45% Latinx, 5% Native American, and 50% Caucasian. I started off my first quarter of internship in the classroom on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and had a social studies methods class in the afternoons at the Mount Vernon district office. In this class, we learned how to plan a unit via backwards planning and dove into Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) concept of *Understanding by Design*, or UbD. In studying this UbD approach, each intern was given the task of creating a social studies unit for our K-5 students, which we would subsequently teach and reflect upon, using assessment data to evaluate our impact on student learning. In planning for our units, we started with our end goals and what we wanted students to take away from our lessons first, and then worked backwards from there to create our learning targets and eventually, our lessons.

As I prepared for my UbD unit, I struggled immensely to create my own social studies curriculum. This was my first time creating my own lessons, and although I had guidance in my classes, I still was unsure of how to execute teaching the learning targets I had created. Because my students had already done a unit about their own families, I knew that I was going to focus on families around the world next. The main areas of focus in their previous unit were shelter, celebrations, and food, as well as the fact that all families have similarities and differences.



These areas of prior knowledge were great building blocks to start with, and they led me to plan to teach these same areas of focus in the unit I was creating.

Ultimately, I selected grade-level expectations (GLEs) from the Washington State social studies standards (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Social Studies K–12 Learning Standards, 2015) that students would demonstrate during my unit. Here are two of the social studies competencies identified in the GLEs I targeted in my lesson:

5.2.1 Student understands how questions are used to find out information

5.3.1 Student engages in discussions to learn about how families live around the world

A Common Core language standard (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017) I targeted was that “Students will identify real-life connections between words and their use” (Listening.1.5.C). All of these standards tied into the central focus of my unit, which was that students would learn about families and different cultures around the world by asking questions and participating in discussions. By the end of the unit, my goals were to have each student understand that families in different cultures are both similar and different in the areas of shelter, food, and celebrations, and to have the skills to form questions in order to learn more about families and cultures around the world.

In order to emphasize the language standard of identifying real-life connections between words and their use, we focused on the vocabulary words *characteristic* and *culture*. As a class, we created a definition for each of these words and an action to link the word with a physical-motor activity in order to solidify our understanding. To support this vocabulary acquisition, I hung vocabulary cards for each word with the word, the definition, and a visual example, and explained how the picture related to the meaning of the word. Including the class-made definitions, picture support, and action, or total physical response, in the process of learning this vocabulary provided comprehensible input for the many English learners in my class.

One day after class, my friend and I were discussing an instructional technology class that I had taken at Western Washington University before I started my student teaching—Instructional Technology 442, *Digital Decisions for the Elementary Classroom Teacher*. My friend, an intern at the same school, had mentioned the mystery Skype we experienced in one of our class sessions. I thought back to our class, where we had participated in a Skype call that was set up with a classroom across the world. We had asked each other questions and guessed where they were from. Right away I knew that I wanted to put a spin on this idea and fit it into my lesson plans. Having had Martha Thornburgh, Mount Vernon School District’s Digital Literacy Specialist, as my teacher for the IT 442 class, I reached out to her for help in exploring this idea. This connection between Mount Vernon and Western Washington University was crucial in my lesson planning. With Martha’s help and the relationship that we had already established, I was able to be confident in planning a Skype session with my class.

After reaching out to Martha, we met and she explained the Mystery Skype in more detail to me, solidifying that this approach was the perfect idea for the unit I was going to teach. In addition to helping me set up my Skype teacher account and walking me through the process of finding classes to Skype with, she remembered a friend of hers who lived in New Zealand with her husband and three children. Her friend, Misty, was from the United States, her husband was from New Zealand, and they had lived in China for many years with their children, until this year.

Leading up to the Skype session, I taught three lessons about cultures and families around the world. My lesson plans originated from reviewing their prior knowledge of families, which led into identifying aspects of each student's own culture. The learning target for the first day was "Students will understand what culture is and identify a characteristic of their own culture." For our first lesson, we reviewed these concepts and then identified which aspects of our culture we would want to share with someone learning about our cultures for the first time. After reflecting and sharing examples of food, shelter, and celebrations in our cultures, I had each of them do some writing and finish the statement "One characteristic of my culture is..." That thought process and what students wrote would later develop into questions that they could ask people in other cultures as they were learning about them for the first time. After creating these questions, we would ask these real and applicable questions to Misty's family across the world, in New Zealand, via Skype. This family is rich with cultural experiences since they have lived in various places across the globe, and was the perfect fit for this project. Martha contacted Misty, and she agreed to Skype with my first-grade class and let us ask them a variety of questions about their culture, including the focus topics of food, celebrations, and shelters.

For my second lesson, we reviewed the characteristics of our own cultures that we had discussed the day before. Then I read the book *Families Around the World* (Ruurs & Gordon, 2014) to them, reminding them to keep in mind what kind of food, shelter, and celebrations these families had, and if they were similar or different to the cultures in our class. This book gives a window into the lives of 14 different families around the world, sharing their daily routines and different aspects of these different cultures. After reading, we had a discussion about what we noticed about their food, shelter, and celebrations and the similarities and differences. I then organized their thoughts on a large Venn diagram, which in retrospect was not the best choice for a graphic organizer because students had not practiced with them enough to see how the overlapping circles represented similarities. I would think of a different graphic organizer to make the similarities and differences very clear.

Once we created our Venn diagram as a class, I introduced their assessment for the day, which was to reflect on all of the different things we learned about multiple cultures today and write one question that they would want to ask someone in a different culture. After giving multiple examples of what they could ask, I explained to them before writing that they should be very

thoughtful in creating their questions, because we were going to ask them to real people the next day. This got the class fired up, which made them very serious and creative in forming questions to ask. Some examples of their questions are, “What do you do for fun? What languages do you speak in your culture? What do you celebrate in your culture?” And my personal favorite, “Do you love nachos?” Many students made a connection to their own cultures in their questions, asking if they have similar celebrations such as Christmas and Thanksgiving, or if they like the same foods, such as nachos, tamales, or macaroni and cheese.

On the last day of the unit, we Skyped with Misty’s family and students got the chance to ask one question that was created by the class. Before we started the Skype session, we had a conversation discussing how thoughtful the questions they created were, but because there were so many questions, not all of them could be asked. In fact, throughout the Skype, Misty’s family answered many of our questions before we had a chance to ask them!

Misty, her husband Mark, and her three children, ages 7, 9, and 9, were present for the Skype session and shared different aspects of their culture and what their experience was like across the globe. Martha came to my classroom during the Skype session to provide assistance, if I might need it. In video 1 you see Misty explain all the places the family has lived and the languages they speak. Because many of the students in this class themselves speak two languages and some may have lived in different countries, this was a connection to their own experiences. [See Video 1.](#)

In video 2, you will see the actual beginning of the session where I introduce the first-grade class to Misty’s family. In this introduction, the process of our Skype session is explained, and I ask Misty and her family to provide as much relevant material as possible in relation to all cultures they have experienced in the many places they have lived. Following this, students are chosen at random to read one question that was written by a member of the class. These first few questions are related to food, which brings some strong connections between Misty’s family and the class, especially over their love of macaroni and cheese. Their family explains the differences between cooking and eating out, as well as some differences between the types of foods that are easily accessible depending on which country they were living in. One thing that shocks the students, many of whom are Latinx, is that they found no Mexican food in New Zealand, unless they made their own. [See Video 2.](#)

In video 3, Misty and her children tell the students all about the many unique animals in New Zealand. They use stuffed animals to show visual representations of the animals they talk about and some of them even play the sounds that those birds or animals make. In the beginning, Misty explains the extreme numbers of sheep that are in New Zealand, and her children take turns sharing examples of birds native to their area. As they share each bird, they show the stuffed animal, share some facts, and then play the sound that the bird makes. For example, when

showing the Kiwi bird, they tell the class that Kiwifruit is actually named after the Kiwi bird and that when someone in New Zealand wants to eat a Kiwi as a snack, they better say Kiwifruit or someone might think they mean the bird! The involvement of Misty's entire family made this a genuine and authentic experience, and it was fun to have her children so involved in the process of teaching our students about where they live. This showed the students that they could be great teachers of their cultures, too. [See Video 3.](#)

This discussion with a family in New Zealand was a wonderful and enriching experience for everyone involved, and Misty did a wonderful job of explaining their culture and having things prepared to show the class. Some of the geographical aspects that she taught us were the location of where they have lived on a globe and how seasons are different based on our location. She also shared plenty about the details of celebrations in the many cultures they have experienced. In addition, because of their experience living in China, they taught the class some phrases in Chinese...and so much more!

Because this lesson involved a Skype session, I was also able to show the class a valuable digital resource to connect across the world. By exposing the class to this type of technology, it showed them one new way that technology can influence their education and be a useful tool. Implementing this source of technology was the perfect fit in order to solidify my learning target from the previous day, which was that students were able to state that asking questions is the best way to learn new information about someone. By asking the thoughtful questions that the class had created, they saw the importance of their questions and, through the discussion their questions prompted, how we could learn more about other cultures. And people across the world came to life in our classroom.

While debriefing after our Skype session, student partners shared their biggest takeaways from talking to the family, and we all talked about what we learned about their cultures. As they shared things that they had learned, I would repeat what they said for the whole class and either add details, or ask them a question to extend their thinking on those topics. By doing this, I made sure that the class understood what we were talking about, and I could have them think back to specific things we learned during our Skype session, such as why they ate chicken for Thanksgiving instead of turkey in New Zealand. Overall, students learned a great deal about different families around the world thanks to the collaboration between my cooperating teacher, Martha, Misty, and myself. These connections created between WWU and Mount Vernon School District forged a pathway to success for the first-grade students at Washington Elementary.

## **Part 2: Mount Vernon School District Digital Literacy Specialist**

The Mount Vernon School District created the position of Digital Literacy Specialist in 2008. The position was created to help support the integration of technology into teaching and learning through instructional practices. This position is separate from those working in the district who focus on the hardware and infrastructure; however, the best integration happens when both Teaching and Learning and Information Technology Services communicate well and work together. As the one Digital Literacy Specialist for the district, my role and responsibilities are constantly in flux as the needs change due to equipment changes and additions, curriculum adoptions, and the district's focus on a variety of different teaching strategies and initiatives. I develop online curriculum, teach after-school classes, meet with Professional Learning Communities, and work individually with interested teachers. By far, the most powerful efforts I have made have been when I have been able to connect with and support teachers with just-in-time projects, where they have a need, we work together to come up with a strategy or solution, and then I am able to support them through the process. This very individual response happens only when trust and relationships have been developed. By having this just-in-time, one-on-one type of approach, I have found that a ripple effect takes place as individual teachers gain skills and confidence and begin to share with others. This sparks more self-initiated projects and provides additional opportunities for me to teach and model effective technology integration.

It has been fortuitous that in addition to my position as Digital Literacy Specialist in the Mount Vernon School District, I have also had the opportunity to teach preservice teachers at Western Washington University in IT 442, Digital Decisions for the Elementary Classroom Teacher. Teaching this class at Western has provided valuable insight for me as I work through the process of what teachers need to know and be skilled in to best incorporate technology into the classroom to transform lessons and accelerate learning. The beauty of this opportunity is that many of my students at Western go on to do their internships in the Mount Vernon School District and even better, become teachers in the Mount Vernon School District. The relationships that I am able to build in IT 442 extend beyond that class into working with our students here in the Mount Vernon School District. Students who have been in my teacher education class know that I am available to them as a resource and a support long after the grades are in and the class is completed.

Chloe's request for support in her social studies unit in the first-grade class where she was a student teacher provided a great opportunity for me to build that professional relationship with both her and her mentor teacher. My real passion in teaching tech integration is to help teachers see how they can use technology to extend the learning outside the classroom and provide opportunities for students to create, collaborate and communicate with many different people and cultures. Chloe's Skype project was a great way to make these connections, and I was thrilled to be asked to help support her teaching. Helping teachers connect with other cultures and classrooms through technology is my very favorite thing to do, so this was a fun and rewarding project for me. I was able to get the equipment and software needed for the project and help her

get things set up for the virtual conversation. One issue in making these virtual connections with people in distant places is the time difference. Sometimes it is harder to arrange a time with a classroom on the other side of the country than it is with a classroom on the other side of the world. Since Chloe had asked me to help her find a class or person to connect with, I worked on finding someone who would be in a contrasting culture and be able to meet at the appropriate time for the first-grade students in Mount Vernon.

In addition to getting to share how to Skype with another class, I was also able to share the power of using social media to build a personal learning network. I was able to connect with a teacher friend and her family living in New Zealand with ties to China. IMisty and her family in New Zealand were the perfect match for this project and, with a 16-hour time difference, the timing was perfect as well. Chloe did a beautiful job of developing this lesson, and I had the honor of being invited to the class as she and the student connected with Misty and her family. The students and teachers were excited to participate in this real-life connection with students on the other side of the world. This activity showed that technology can be used in ways that redefine how learning can occur. And the beauty of this lesson is that it opens the doors to many other opportunities where Chloe and her mentor teacher see Skyping as accessible and useful tools to provide opportunities to their students beyond the classroom walls.

*Authors' note: Permission granted for use of video*

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### **Conclusion to Three Cases**

This issue of JEC focuses on the challenges and dilemmas of university, school and community partnerships, which have differing cultures, needs, and organizational systems. Although such partnerships are widely advocated by accrediting bodies, professional organizations, and state legislatures, they are complex and difficult to sustain. These cases are a model for how powerful professional learning opportunities can be provided in extended communities of practice that include teachers, teacher candidates, teacher educators, and district instructional specialists. The manner in which university professional leave incentives and a flexible district instructional coaching model were leveraged to enable these educators to *hang out and join in*, suggests how we might bridge the cultural and systemic differences that have so often jeopardized university-school partnerships by fostering strong personal relationships and professional networks. The three cases also provide models for how high-quality core practices and digital technologies might be used to support innovative, inquiry-based instruction that engages diverse learners and makes connections to family and community. All of these efforts contribute to our joint mission of working for social justice through student learning and family engagement.