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Global and Cultural Literacy

Introduction

In the 21st century, national and world scene seems to offer a panorama of significant challenges and events to encourage thoughtful consideration. From iPod to iPad change is incessant. These challenges and events include Y2K, U.S. elections, 9/11, Afghanistan, bin Laden, Columbia disaster, Martha Stewart to prison, California elections, S.E. Asian Tsunami, Pope Benedict XVI, Terry Schiavo, Hurricane Katrina, Mark Zuckerman, YouTube, Stem Cell research, Pluto (not a planet), Botox, Mike Phelps in Peking, Sara Who as vice president, Obama, Swine Flu, Japanese Nuclear meltdown, the Arab Spring,....

It is not difficult to envision the importance of providing ample opportunities for students to think, to compare, analyze, generalize, make decisions, and evaluate. Students' growth and learning in a social studies context is necessary in order to ensure that these students think for themselves, and contribute to a free enterprise and democratic society.

Global and Cultural and Literacy

Omiuota Ukpokoda in the November/December 2006 issue of Social Studies and the Young Learner echoed the thinking and language of Dr. James Becker in writing, "students of the twenty-first century need to cultivate transformative and reflective knowledge, intellectual skills, and democratic attitudes and values to successfully navigate diverse cultural, social, economic and political contexts."¹ Social

studies teachers are provided with a strategy to teach students to “to successfully navigate diverse cultural, social, economic and political contexts” as the teachers consider the content of this article.

Linda Bennett observed in the 20th Anniversary edition of Social Studies and the Young Learner that “At a time when social studies is being marginalized in the elementary curriculum due to budget cuts and short-sighted public policies,² it is vital that we have strong platform on which to showcase our best peer-reviewed work and to voice our hopes and concerns.³” The following article provides a method to enhance the social studies in the elementary school. Social studies teachers and leaders have expressed doubt and concern about the No Child Left Behind impact on social studies instruction:

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is increasingly alarmed by the erosion of the importance of social studies in the United States. This erosion, in large part, is a consequence of the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Since the introduction of NCLB, there has been a steady reduction in the amount of time spent in the teaching of social studies, with the most profound decline noticed in the elementary grades.(1) In addition, anecdotal information indicates that many American children are receiving little or no formal education in the core social studies disciplines: civics, economics, geography, and history. That such a situation has evolved is untenable in a nation that prides itself on its history, its system of government and its place as a leader in the global community.⁴

The goal of Fairborn Intermediate School in Fairborn, Ohio is to promote critical thinking proficiency throughout the content curriculum, and especially in global and cultural literacy. When students are challenged to utilize skills that require higher levels of thinking, they are more likely to solve problems in real life situations. Teachers throughout the school incorporate a variety of applicable situations in which students must use reasoning in order to compare, analyze, generalize, make decisions, and evaluate situations in math, science, language arts and social studies. The link between social studies and language arts is a key factor in exercising this higher order thinking.

Students enjoy reading aloud within the classroom and the school sets a high standard of reading at home. Through the school's technological advancements in the classroom and the use of hometown books, students are taught literacy techniques that advance their critical thinking skills in global and cultural literacy.

Collaborative Efforts

The Fairborn City School district has a healthy relationship with their local college, Wright State University. Recently, an education class for middle childhood teachers mastering in social studies education collaborated with teachers at Fairborn Intermediate. The collaboration was an effort to aid in creating lessons and activities that would aid students in their intermediate and middle school years to use higher level thinking skills. Two resources were created to support these teachers in their endeavor. One resource was a website comprised of hundreds of children's books that related directly to global and cultural literacy for all grade levels. The other resource was the creation of a "hometown book" that provided a variety of lessons and activities that could be adapted to various grade levels and Social Studies standards.

Technological Resources

Multiple activities were gleaned from the wiki website to aid students' thinking skills in Social Studies and Language Arts. One such activity used in a fourth grade classroom incorporated technology, an interactive read aloud about Alexander Graham Bell, and the construction of timelines. In the activity, the students listened to a read aloud book entitled *Alexander Graham Bell: An Inventive Life*. While listening to the story, student

noted important dates and events on post-it notes. Once the story was completed, the teacher used a Smart board to access a website that created timelines. The students used the information on their post-it notes to construct a timeline as a class. The students then analyzed the parts of a timeline and the purposes for a timeline. Once students grasped that understanding, they were given other books about inventors to research and create their own timelines. This activity led students through the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy with ease. Not only were the students using analysis and synthesis to research and create their own inventors and timelines, they were evaluating the information that was important enough to contribute to their final product.

Another activity garnered from the website⁵ involved the use of the children's book *Grandfather's Journey*⁶. The activity involves a "think/pair/share technique" where students are asked questions that are geared towards the feelings of the main character and underlying tensions felt between cultures. Once students have had time to collect their own thoughts, they are paired to share and validate their points with a partner. The student thinking was taken a step further when the class came together to discuss their views and reasons for the answers they presented. As a class, students discussed how an immigrant might feel coming to a completely new country, like United States, and how that might affect or change their cultural beliefs. They also discussed how someone might feel if they consider two different countries home, like the Grandfather and Grandson did. Not only were the students in this activity thinking about how the characters in the story felt, but they were relating them to people in their own lives who had similar stories and placing value on the efforts of immigrants in our society.

Your Local Hometown Book

At times, Fairborn Intermediate can be a hectic and slightly unfamiliar place for learning because of the high rate of students leaving or moving into the district each quarter. The teachers at Fairborn Intermediate, however, strive to provide the students with safe and conducive learning environments independent of the continuous changes within the school. This requires activities that break the ice between new groups of students and promote respect for each individual in the room.

Creating local hometown books are beneficial to the purpose of creating a safe and respectful classroom of students. The rapport between students greatly increases when utilizing this activity. Students are asked to write about their hometown, implementing the geographical and historical aspects of their city. These books include pages of pictures and explanations of the particular area of focus. When students are given this self-expression of their background and their hometown, they begin to show their pride of their heritage and awe for their classmates'. Students learn through these books the similarities they have to other students within the classroom that they otherwise would never had discovered.

Teachers can preface this activity with a picture book about a specific city or area of the country to show students. It is particularly helpful to create a model hometown book to use with students so that these students learn about global and cultural literacy. Students are curious about a teacher's life outside of the school day, and this presents a terrific

opportunity to share these “secrets” with students. The teachers have found that students think it is special when they share with them the memories of their own hometown.

Various Implementations

One reason to love the local hometown book project is its diverse cultural adaptability. An extension to this activity is to have students create a poem to preface their hometown books. This poem called, “Where I’m From,” gives the reader an idea about how the student feels about their childhood and hometown. Students who might find it difficult to create a hometown book, might easily create a poem that can help facilitate the construction of their books. Another form of poetry that can easily be integrated into this project is an acrostic poem. Students create an acrostic poem by using the letters of their hometown to create the lines of their poems. This activity aligns with the effort towards writing across the curriculum, in which students are writing in any given content area each day.

This activity requires students to think in a more creative means, which exercises a different portion of the brain. Students are given parameters in constructing their books; however, the finished products for each student book will vary due to the creativity and uniqueness of each student. For those students who are prone to more test anxiety or other stressors, this activity allows the student a more appropriate measure of assessing the work and understanding of the content material.

This project easily integrates other content area material including the mathematics and science concentration areas. The social studies local hometown book activity naturally

includes language arts elements because students are required to read and write in order to create these books. The book can be written with only factual information, or can be written using fictional elements.

Another teacher created a book about the city of Fairborn in which “Sammy Skyhawk” gives a tour of the city to the readers. On every page, students see Sammy Skyhawk giving information on another aspect of Fairborn. At one point, Sammy Skyhawk goes back in time using a time machine in order to present the historical aspects of the city to the readers. The skyhawk is Fairborn Schools’ mascot, and students enjoy learning about the city in which they currently live.

This teacher has also used Sammy Skyhawk and the hometown book about Fairborn to introduce the topic of research to students. In pairs, students are each given a separate page to research more information on in order to create a classroom book filled with factual information about Fairborn. Whether students have just moved into the city or lived there their entire lives, everyone learns something new and interesting about their city. This builds a community of collaboration and cooperation between students.

When implementing this project in the classroom, teachers can decide which parameters to place upon the given students. In some cases, teachers might want to require that students include science elements such as the landscape, wildlife, vegetation, or climate of their city. Others might want to include some mathematical concepts such as the given state of the economy or currency exchange. Other parameters might include construction elements such as creating an alphabet book about your hometown, poetry anthology, or

pop-up book. These books are best evaluated by using a pre-made rubric based upon these criteria.

In order to make the local hometown book activity an authentic assignment and assessment, teachers should consider binding these books. There are a variety of ways to bind these books. If the teacher has access to a laminator and binding machine, these books will be a long-lasting keepsake that teachers can someday show to their own children. A more student-friendly way to bind these books is using paper bags from a local grocery store. When folded in half, these bags take on a book appearance in which information, artifacts, and pictures can be pasted or written upon. Students can use ribbon or yarn to tie pages of the book together.

Conclusion: Fostering Thinking for the Future

As teachers at Fairborn City Schools and students from Wright State University's graduate program continue to collaborate, the furthering of higher order thinking skills will be transmitted to future students. Through the use of online literacy references and relatable hands-on activities, students' analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills are enforced at younger ages. The earlier the implementation of these "skills for thinking" begins, the sooner middle school teachers, high school teachers, and eventually employers, will see results. By allowing students to experience these higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, they will, hopefully, grasp concepts more clearly during introductory instruction of new material and begin to experiment with advanced rationale.

Notes

1. Omiuota Ukpokoda, "Essential Characteristics of a Culturally Conscientious Classroom," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 19, 2 (2006): 4.

2. A typical entry from today's news: "With the loss of one seventh and one eighth grade teaching position, two courses formerly taught all year—science and social studies—will be taught for just half the year. ... If the school department must further cut its budget to meet the finance committee's recommended below-level-funded budget, the hit list includes a second grade teacher, reducing three classrooms down to two, with a resultant hike in class size." (M. E. Jones, *Nashoba News* [Shirley, Massachusetts], July 4, 2008, www.nashobapublishing.com/ci_9786449).

3. Visit the Social Studies and Young Learner archives at www.ncss.members and read "Advocating for Social Studies: Becoming AGENTS for Change" by Tina L. Heafner, Katherine A. O'Connor, Eric C. Groce, Sandra Byrd, Amy J. Good, Sandra Oldendorf, Jeff Passe, and Tracy Rock, in *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, vol. 20, no. 1 (September/October 2007): 26-29.

4. National Council for the Social Studies, *Social Studies in the Era of No Child Left Behind: A Position Statement of National Council for the Social Studies* (Washington, DC: NCSS, 1997), <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/nclbera>.

5. <https://childrenslit-socialstudies.wikispaces.com/>

6. James Shiveley and Ronald G. Helms, *Using Children's Literature to teach the Ohio Social Studies Academic Content Standards*. (Columbus, OH: The Ohio Council for the Social Studies, 2008.)

5. National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum*

6. National Council for the Social Studies, *National Standards for Social Studies Teachers* (Washington, DC: NCSS, 2000).

7. National Council for the Social Studies, *Social Studies in the Era of No Child Left Behind: A Position Statement of National Council for the Social Studies* (Washington, DC: NCSS, 1997),

<http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/nclbera>