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CEP 816  
Instructional Dream

### **Technology and Culture**

There is no question that technology is a vital part of our everyday lives. Our culture is centered on technology, which has advanced our standards and way of life. Since technology is prominent in our lives, we should teach our children to be proficient in current forms of technology and relevant ways to use it in their own lives. Many schools struggle to provide the basic forms of technology to their students due to budget crises, lack of professional development, and sometimes teacher's apathy towards technology. However, if the world were perfect and there were funds available, faculty support, available resources and connections, and students' behavior was not an issue, my instructional dream would be to teach the students about cultures around the globe as a way to break down stereotypes using the various resources of the Web.

My instructional dream to teach culture to students of middle school age would involve the use of individual laptops for the students, the website of Museum of Online Museums (MoOM), Skype, blogs from the website blogger.com, and podcasts using the program called Audacity. I would start the unit towards the beginning of the year and explain to the students the importance of learning about other cultures and people, and how diversity enriches the world. The unit would begin with the students researching their own personal culture and traditions through online resources. During this part of the unit we will discuss the use of credible sources on the Web and how to perform searches using Google. After the students research their own cultural background and share them with the class, we will then move to learning about other cultures from around the world. When we start to discuss different cultures I will have the students do some preliminary research using MoOM. MoOM will allow them to virtually visit exhibits and museums around the United States and learn about the history of various cultures. The formal time frame of the culture unit will be about six to eight weeks, but will be an underlying theme throughout the year. Each week we will talk to about three different classrooms of

students in the same grade level using Skype and an interpreter. During each week we will focus on a cultural group. Talking to a couple different classes of the same group will allow the students to interact with diverse students of the same age from around the world. After each interaction and conversation with the classes, the students will write a blog entry on who they talked to and what they learned about the culture. Then the students will make a podcast that will be uploaded to the classroom blog about what surprised them about the culture and what they shared in common with the students. I want to talk with at least one cultural group from each continent as a way for the students to have first-hand experiences with people from all over the world.

In order to make this unit work, each technological aspect is important to the quality of learning and experiences for the students. The ability to have their own individual laptop is important when they converse with students from other cultures, because they can take the laptop and show them where they learn every day, move it around the classroom to give them different views or show them their favorite activity, and to give them privacy from the other conversations occurring around them. Also, the individual laptops make it easier for the students to write their blog entry and add to the podcast, rather than scheduling time in a computer lab and constrained to a time limit. Also, if necessary, the students can take their laptop home to do homework or research on their assignments throughout the unit.

The use of the website of Museum of Online Museums is important for the students to use, because it gives them the opportunity to visit museums around the United States in one place and at no cost. MoOM gives the students the information from the museum and makes it accessible to anyone at any time. Many of the prominent museums in the U.S., such as the Smithsonian, are available to virtually visit and learn about through MoOM. The students can use the website to visit exhibits from across the country and obtain research for their assignments. This will allow students to do their research and visit a museum that they may not have visited with their family, or the school may not

have had the time to go to as a field trip. MoOM will give the students the experience of going to the museums throughout America and provide them the opportunity to complete their research about different cultures that they will talk with later in the unit.

Skype is a vital tool in this unit about culture as a way to interact with people from around the world. I will have the students Skype with a student and an interpreter so that they can hold a conversation with the other student. At the start of our Skype conversations I will hold a whole class conversation with the other teacher and we will discuss the routines of their school day and what they are learning about in other subjects. After our introduction, the students will Skype from their laptops with an assigned student from the other class. Before we begin Skyping, I will explain to the students what I expect of their conversations and we will brainstorm as a group some questions we will ask. Skype is an amazing resource for the students to have an authentic conversation with a person of the culture we are studying. The students will talk about norms of their cultures, their daily life, and issues and topics about pop culture that students their age would talk about. These conversations will provide an invaluable experience for the students and their future interactions with people who differ from them. My goal is for this unit to break down stereotypes and barriers that the students may have against other cultural groups, which will make them a well-rounded individual.

The classroom blog will be used as a way for the students to journal their experiences and to reflect on what they have learned through their conversations and all the people they have met. I will use blogger.com and will make an entry each time we talk to a class to name the culture and name of the teacher, and give a prompt for the students to respond to. After each conversation the students will blog right away about their experiences while they are fresh in their minds. They will write about what they learned about the culture, what surprised them about the culture, and what their previously held beliefs were about the group of people. Also, I think it is important for the students to write about what they had in common with the student that they spoke to as a way to see a common ground with

someone who is half a world away and is of a different background. After we talk to the class we will then make a podcast about the experience. As a class we will pick a specific aspect to talk about, such as food, clothing, education, and many others, depending on the cultural group. After we decide on a topic to talk about, we will then brainstorm ideas about that topic that we want to include in the podcast, and discuss what we learned from the experience. For each culture a small group of students will do the podcast and upload it to the classroom blog. Parents and other classes in the school will have access to the classroom blog so that they can share in our experiences and they can see what we are doing in our classroom. The blogging and podcasting is an important element to the unit, because it gives the students the opportunity to reflect on their experience and learning, and it is a way for them to see what their peers learned and discussed with the other student.

This unit on culture is a theme that I would want to keep going throughout the school year, and continue to talk to classes of other cultures a couple times a month. Not only is it an invaluable educational experience, but also a social experience for the students to grow from. In the future, the students will have to work with people who come from different backgrounds, have different values and traditions. This experience would be valuable in the future if they had a job that required them to travel to different parts of the world, in which they could reflect and use for their future endeavors. The technology that will be used in the unit is something that they can use at home with family and friends, and possibly even use similar resources in their future work place. The technology also teaches them to be independent thinkers and problem solvers, which is extremely beneficial when they go to college or enter the workforce. A major goal of this unit would be to break down stereotypes of cultural groups, and for students to be problem solvers, and know how and where to find the resources to solve their problems; all of which can be achieved through the technology used in the unit.