

A World Bazaar: Learning about Community, Geography, and Economics

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Did you ever want to take your students to another country? Do you want them to really experience another place; another culture? My school did just that, in our own courtyard. The four sixth grade classes of Oak Tree Elementary “visited” the Khan al-Khalili in Cairo, Egypt; they bartered for goods in Nogales, Mexico; and tried spices new to them in Istanbul, Turkey. The students experienced what a bazaar was like in Calcutta, India and a swap meet in their own town. After the classes studied and learned about ancient and modern countries from different continents (South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe), they began an economics lesson they would never forget.

Teachers’ Initial Planning

In preparation for the month devoted to the unit on culture studies, our team of four teachers sat down and discussed, planned, outlined, and prepared for the World Bazaar. The bazaar would be a culminating activity that would entail in-depth lessons, lunch meetings with students, extra hours after school, and most of all, confident smiles and active learning (and teaching!) by students. Each teacher contributed to a timeline, background information needed to teach the unit, and lesson plans that walked each class through country research reports, and geographic studies of continents. Each class would

study a different continent, and within each class each student would study a country from that continent while the class as a whole studied cultures from the continent. We really wanted to immerse the students into modern and ancient cultures through reading, writing, researching, using maps, and seeing videos. We planned to involve each student in writing a report on a country and in class activities about cultures found in the continent they were studying. Each class would create political, physical, and thematic maps of their continent to display in the school halls. This component of the project focused on thematic strands **I CULTURE** and **III PEOPLE,**

PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS as cited in, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*¹. The students’ knowledge would be assessed through their written and oral reports and their maps and projects.

The team then spent a great deal of time organizing the economic components of the bazaar in which the students would participate. (**Table 1** shows how much time we spent on each step of the project.) We focused on strand **VI PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION, AND DISTRIBUTION**. Each class would have 5-6 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to run businesses that would produce crafts related to the cultures on the respective continent. A World Bazaar day would be held during which the crafts would be sold. One teacher was placed in charge of each aspect of the project: advising the student CEOs of class businesses, acquiring supplies used to create appropriate crafts that would be sold at the bazaar, supervising efforts to advertise the event, and planning the day designated for the World

Table 1. Time Frame for the Bazaar Project

Initial Planning (and Culture Studies).....	1 month	Presenting and “Selling” the Project	1 week
Selecting and Educating CEOs	2-3 class periods	Preparing for the Bazaar	1-2 class periods
Setting Up Each Business	1 week	World Bazaar Day	1 full day
Making the Business Products	2-3 Weeks	Evaluating the Project	1-2 class periods

Bazaar. We discussed concerns or questions in detail so that each team member had a similar understanding of the event and was confident in carrying out the assigned task.

Reaching Out

We recruited students' family members, the librarian, the school principal, and various community members to make this project possible. Although the students would produce the crafts and run their own businesses, our extended team would provide the structure for the project as well as the support and encouragement students needed to be successful.

Selecting and Educating the CEOs

Within each class five to six chief executive officers (CEOs) were hired through an application process. These CEOs were invited to a lunch meeting with a CEO from the community who educated the new recruits on the responsibilities of a business leader. We also gave these students a teacher-made handbook of useful tips and guidelines on how to run a successful business.

Setting Up Businesses

The CEOs then set up a meeting with their own teacher to organize how the businesses would be structured. At this meeting each teacher and his/her CEOs divided the students from the class among the businesses for that class, assigning an equal number to each business. Each CEO followed up by writing a note to each new employee that described why he or she was chosen as a business partner. This was an initial step toward establishing a positive work relationship among the students in that business. The employees of each business met and worked on creating a name, a logo, and a list of wares to make and sell. Next, each business created a poster and business cards for later use in promoting its products. This process created teams of students that promoted hard work and cooperation in a realistic learning environment.



Selling fruit at a street market in China (1991).

Making Products

Now, it was time to make the crafts that would be the businesses' products. We invited parents and staff members who had special craft talents (related to the products identified for the businesses) to hold mini-sessions during one week. Students signed up for sessions in which they were interested and began making crafts for their businesses. For many students, making crafts became a home project in which the family participated. Many family members thanked our team of teachers for incorporating the home focus because it provided an activity in which parents, siblings, and other family members could participate. This resulted in enjoyable "family activities" they normally would not have engaged in.

"Selling" the Project

A speaker's bureau, consisting of three to four students per class, presented the project first to the Oak Tree faculty and then to the rest of the student body. At a faculty meeting, students described the highlights of their studies of cul-

tures around the world by sharing what they had learned with the use of maps, pictures, and charts. They shared their experiences working in businesses and preparing for the World Bazaar, presenting the crafts they had made for sale at the World Bazaar. Then, they surveyed the teachers to determine how many might purchase each of the crafts they had brought to the meeting. The survey had three purposes: It educated the students about supply and demand; it provided an opportunity to gather data for a math lesson in graphing; and it gave these students the experience of making a presentation.

The students passed around a sign-up sheet so that every teacher could have a speaker's bureau representative present the project to his/her class. Student speakers described experiencing being part of a business, presented the crafts, and surveyed the students in their audience. In addition, the bureau educated younger students about exchange rates and bartering. At the World Bazaar, students planned to exchange one "dollar" for three British "pounds" at

an exchange table run by parent volunteers. Later, customers would barter for a price on craft items.

The Bazaar Arrives

Before the bazaar students counted their craft items and created a spreadsheet that showed an acceptable range of prices for each item. To construct the price range, students discussed what amount needed to be charged for an item to cover supplies and taxes. They also estimated a maximum price, which a buyer might be willing to pay. Letters were written to invite community members, district personnel, family, and friends. The students also set up and organized their business tables and divided up additional tasks that needed to be done before the big event.

On the day of the World Bazaar, the courtyard of Oak Tree Elementary was transformed into a bustling marketplace where craft items representing cultures from around the world were being sold., Music from various parts of the African continent could be heard, and smells of sweets and spices filled the air. It wasn't long before loud bartering and laughter were heard and the sellers, dressed in *galibeyas* and *kimonos*, were hard at work trying to make a profit. People from the community enthusiastically commented about the excitement, district central office staff expressed amazement at the learning they could see taking place, and family members almost outnumbered the student sellers. The entire school felt like it had traveled around the world. Students discussed the World Bazaar for weeks after the event.

Evaluating Our Project

During the week after the bazaar, students evaluated their own performance, their business success, and the World Bazaar in general. The students calculated profit, taxes, and price-per-item averages to compare and contrast businesses. Each student wrote a report explaining what he or she had learned about the continent and cultures studied, as well as what had been revealed

about the students themselves. Students described what they liked about the project and what they would do differently if they were to do it again. They shared their thoughts and suggestions in a class meeting.

Based on the discussions, the students decided they had learned a great deal about the cultures studied, world geography, economic principles, teamwork, and, above all, the importance of collaboration. This project focused on collaboration among three groups: teachers, students, and other community members. The project originated in Phoenix, Arizona, with one experienced teacher who had been to Egypt and me, a first-year teacher who wanted to make learning both meaningful and fun for my students. For teachers, the importance of collaboratively sharing ideas and welcoming new ideas was fundamental in this project. Every member of our team had a role and enthusiastically performed that role while educating students in a new way.


While “running a business,” students have learning experiences that gave purpose to the course content of geography and economics. They were introduced to the concept of collaboration, without which they could not be successful. Teachers modeled and redirected conversations to help students understand the importance of collaboration with different people with their own interests and priorities. By the end of the project, every student felt successful and had developed a bond with business partners based on collaboration.

The Wider Community

The community's involvement in this project was its most unique aspect. Guest speakers, family members with craft skills, and district staff became involved in ways that had not previously occurred. Although business leaders often are brought in to talk about their careers, rarely do they offer advice about an impending event. Family members who typically keep school involvement to parent-teacher conferences were in the classrooms interacting with stu-

dents while sharing their hobbies. The superintendents and principal strolled by much more frequently than usual, admitting that they enjoyed catching glimpses of the excitement and powerful learning that were taking place. The passion the teachers and students had for this project was contagious, bringing in community members as the project developed and on the day of the World Bazaar.

Conclusion

I think that successful collaboration is the key to being an effective elementary teacher. Discussing ideas with each other and working together during a project each year builds comraderie and excites both students and teachers about learning. Teachers who collaborate model the process of working together for their students, which helps build a community of learners throughout the school. If we want students to become productive, pro-active citizens, we need to give them the skills needed to do so. Collaboration calls upon skills needed in the work force and in all parts of our daily life, thus it should be an essential part of students' education. The World Bazaar is one way in which our teaching team collaborated while strengthening our curriculum. We continue to modify the project to make it more effective, improve the assessment pieces to align with our state's social studies standards, and bring in new people from the community.² 

Notes

1. National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (National Council for the Social Studies: Washington, DC, 1994).
2. I want to thank Mimi Norton for allowing a first-year teacher to experience Egypt and get a taste of what teaching can be, Kay Jackson for expanding my experiences to South America and Africa while emphasizing my purpose in teaching, and to the Arizona Geographic Alliance for providing resources and bringing together a group of teachers from across the state to share resources and ideas.

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