



CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Program Notes

Program Title: *Before and After the School Visit: A Pre and Post-Visit Materials Roundtable*

Location: MOCHA, The Museum of Children's Art, Oakland, California

Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2003

Presenters: Anne Jennings and Nicki Norman, Community Resources for Science
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Program Overview:

Community Resources for Science was kind enough to send us a copy of their presentation—while more detailed than we usually post here, we hope the information can be useful to you in developing materials for your institution that meet classroom teachers' needs.

Introduction

CRS is a nonprofit organization based here in Oakland that helps elementary teachers do the great science teaching they want to do by connecting them with the wealth of science teaching support resources that exist in our community. To do this, we manage a large database that keeps track of all the organizations we can find that provide field trips, in-class programs, assemblies, materials, etc. that support elementary science teaching in Alameda County. We do workshops and take requests from teachers to support them in planning and implementing their science curriculum – right down to making the field trip reservation phone calls for them!

We're delighted to be here today to participate in the discussion about pre- and post-field trip materials because we have lots of information, both about programs and from teachers, which we hope can be helpful to you as you think about how to design your education programs in ways that really connect with teachers' needs and interests.

During these uncertain economic times we know it's increasingly important to help teachers understand the ways your programs support their curriculum goals—particularly the teachers of the students you most want to reach, the students who probably don't have access to the experiences you offer outside of school. These teachers are increasingly constrained in their field trip decisions by structured curriculum, budget cuts, and high-stakes testing, so you want to make sure that your programs both advertise and produce the “most bang for the buck.”

We want to start today with some general background information about elementary public school teachers to set the context for your discussion. Also for today's presentation we did a quickie survey of some of our teacher members to get some specific input on their ideas about pre- and post- field trip materials that we think you'll find interesting. We'll finish with a few general suggestions from the teachers' perspective.

Demographic Data for Teachers and Students In Alameda County there are more than 5,500 (5568) teachers from 211 elementary (K-5) public schools, teaching nearly 150,000 students. The student population in Alameda County public schools is 30% White, 19% African American, 25% Latino, and 18% Asian. Nearly 1/3 of Alameda County teachers and schools (1,600 teachers from 66 schools) are from Oakland Unified School District, where 44% of the student body is African American, 30% Latino, and 16% is Asian. Overall, 30% of Alameda County's student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch; in Oakland the proportion is 49%. The number of English language learner (ELL) students is increasing, meaning that *most* teachers, particularly in urban districts, deal with issues around language acquisition in their classrooms.

Typically, teachers of grades K – 3 have 20 students in their classes, while teachers in grades 4 and 5 are in charge of around 30 kids. (It should be noted that anticipated cuts in educational funding may drive these numbers up in 2003.)

Curriculum Generalists Elementary teachers are expected to cover a wide range of curriculum with a constantly changing array of techniques and materials. Credentialing requirements for elementary teachers currently do not include specific, single-subject training, and much focus is placed on developmental instruction and the basics of teaching reading, writing, and computation.

While this “generalist” approach would seem to encourage an integrated approach to teaching the required subjects, standards are written subject by subject, and curriculum is formally adopted and renewed in cycles, in discrete and separate subject areas.

Pedagogy Challenges In their focus on teaching “the whole child,” elementary teachers everywhere are expected to be working to engage students with varied learning styles, create active learners, and build strong citizens. In our diverse, urban community teachers have the added roles of helping significant numbers of children learn English and facilitating a heterogeneous community of languages and cultures, further broadening the range of both social and scholastic challenges teachers undertake. Often the teachers with the most diverse classrooms also face the most limited budgets and classroom support structures.

Time Challenges Teachers have limited time for classroom planning and preparation to meet this broad teaching mandate, much less for the professional development to learn new content and pedagogy. Teachers face an amazing amount of administrative work related to various school, district and union requirements, covering everything from grading to ordering classroom repairs and buses. In addition, they process a tidal wave of information, only a tiny fraction of which is brochures and flyers from individual enrichment opportunities.

All teachers confront a slew of mandated programs like drug use prevention and conflict management curriculum that are usually structured as separate drop-in (or pull-out) programs. In addition, teachers in many under-performing schools in Alameda County are required to teach particular curriculum on strict schedules. These structures add further challenges to integrated teaching approaches and create additional time pressures.

Money The mean amount reported for classroom enrichment—field trips, in-class programs, “extra” materials, etc.—by CRS teachers in the past 5 years was \$172.

Budget constraints have a major impact on field trip selection. Teachers want to take their students on more field trips, but even when the program admission is free they are constrained by the costs of field trip transportation. Transportation costs are the largest expense for most field trips. While costs vary from district to district, a CRS survey conducted in 2000 showed the average cost of a field trip in a district that provides its own buses was \$287; for a district requiring charters the average was \$425. While involving parents in arranging carpools or collecting fees are options in many districts, parent participation is often least reliable in the schools most in need. Teachers in grades K and 1 have added logistical issues around field trips, both because their students are less mature and because new car seat requirements limit field trip transportation options.

Enrichment Choice Factors Most teachers hear about field trip opportunities through word of mouth or other teachers, with mailings and workshops as other exposures. They want to take field trips in order to provide the broadest range of experiences possible for their students. They often choose field trips because of their personal experience with or connection to a place, and while supporting their curriculum is a primary selection criterion, factors like cost, ease of transportation, appropriateness for more than one class, and description of amenities, play a serious role in how they make their decision.

Pre and Post Visit Materials

In the past couple of weeks we called a handful of CRS teacher members to ask them specific questions about their use of pre- and post- field trip materials. The information is very interesting in the context of the general information we just shared, and leads to some specific suggestions about how to frame materials and programs to be most useful.

Field Trip Preparation We asked teachers what kind of preparation they like to do before a field trip. The answers were quite varied, but almost every teacher wants to provide background information to his or her students before a trip. What’s interesting is that the background they focus on varies widely, from “teaching as much as possible on the subject” to “vocabulary” to what students can expect to do and see while they’re on the trip. Background on both the content and the logistics of the experience are very important to teachers.

While several teachers mentioned using materials provided by the field-trip destination, it’s interesting to note that a number of teachers do independent preparation using materials they’d put together themselves from a previous trip: a slide show acquired at a training (from Cal

Academy's Life Through Time), "secrets" about the exhibits, and explaining to kids "what to expect" about what they would see and/or do on the trip.

Experience with Pre-Visit Materials We asked teachers if they ever had received materials that were helpful from a field destination that had been helpful in preparing. While several teachers had never received helpful materials, most had some experience. They mentioned

- study guides
- background information
- classroom activities
- guidebooks
- videos
- and binders with lesson plans.

When we asked what had determined their usefulness, we got some very interesting responses. Teachers were impressed by

- materials that provided tie-ins across the curriculum and to standards
- materials that were "interesting" relative to the unit being taught
- materials that provided vocabulary, terminology, and pictures.

They were less thrilled when materials were

- in small print
- mostly teacher-background, or
- took lots of time to do.

Teachers were very articulate about wanting to know "exactly what to expect and where stuff was located;" and wanting a "simple, ready-to-go lesson plan format with clear student pages on white paper for copying" from pre-visit materials.

Classroom Follow-up We also asked teachers how they follow up or connect their field trip experiences with teaching. It was interesting to note that *most* teachers surveyed do follow-up in their language arts area: writing, books, poetry, reflections, discussion, reading books, journals, stories, quizzes.

Some do painting, drawing, and look at pictures, or make photos into a class book.

No teacher suggested that they do further research or experiments as classroom activities following a field trip.

However, creative teachers are exploring ways to engage students in learning technology through documenting field-trip experiences (Rita's story). And teachers are particularly interested in titles of books (fiction and non-fiction) that can extend the experience while supporting their literacy teaching.

Experience with Post-Visit Materials When asked if teachers had ever received materials from a field trip organization that were helpful for following up, almost every teacher responded "no." One teacher said "just evaluations" (!) and a couple mentioned activities, ongoing support

from the organization, and a bibliography. One teacher mentioned she sometimes purchases things from the gift shop at the destination to use in classroom follow-up.

Teachers' Dreams for Pre- and Post Visit Materials

Teachers had lots of good ideas when we asked them to imagine the most wonderful thing they could get from organizations to improve their teaching experience around a field trip:

Content-related suggestions

- Articulation of connections to standards (esp. science) in both materials and program
- Bilingual materials and things to help with ELD teaching
- Vocabulary and pictures that go along with words
- Classroom activities
 - pre-visit that “grab kids’ attention”
 - easy and SHORT
 - leveled (grade-appropriate)
 - black-line masters
- Lending boxes tied to concepts
- Slide show, video, or PowerPoint presentation that raises interesting questions based on remarkable facts or highpoints of visit

Logistics suggestions

- More communication in preparation
- Someone to come meet with teacher beforehand
- Phone call reminders
- “behind the scenes” info on field trip sites; historical background, people who work there, how exhibits are made
- use video to show where buses stop or public transit lets you off; include other interesting sights in the neighborhood, lunch opportunities, etc.

FYI Specific mention was made of a number of organizations around their pre-/post materials

- SF Symphony CD
- Cal Academy’s Life Through Time slide show
- Marine Mammal Center materials (small print, mostly teacher bg)
- Coloma (overnight) handbooks for parents and students
- Maritime Museum (overnight) guidebooks
- Junior Center for Arts and Science classroom activities
- Cal Performances
- Slide Ranch activity suggestions (vague and geared for upper grades)
- Exploratorium (over kids’ heads and dry)
- Monterey Bay Aquarium “passport” system
- Kids for the Bay video and printed material
- Yosemite Institute “fabulous” binder with lesson plans, bibliography, resources, connections etc.

Suggestions

Get teachers into your process!

- Invite teachers who've brought students on a field trip to help you identify both what would be helpful and how to communicate with their colleagues.
- Ask them to show you examples of stuff they like to use, and to help you develop grade-appropriate connections and activities
- Seriously consider how to help ELD teachers, whether with bilingual materials or support for developing academic vocabulary
- Prepare for newcomers with serious information about logistics, amenities, and access
- Remember the repeat visitors: what makes kids and teachers feel the place is "theirs," insider information, behind the scenes info, neighborhood and historical context...
- Help teachers become more creative about post-visit activities: what further explorations could be done in the classroom (in addition to reflection on the experience)?