CONNECTING COMMUNITIES:
The Importance of Culture In Digital World Language & ELL Instruction
Connecting Communities: The Importance of Culture in Digital World Language & ELL Instruction
Aline Germain-Rutherford, Ph.D.

Chief Learning Officer, Middlebury Interactive Languages
“Solutions to many of our ecological problems lie in an approach that celebrates, empowers, and nurtures the cultural, artistic, historical and spiritual resources of each local community and region. [...] Schools and other educational institutions can and should play a central role in this process. But for the most part they do not. Indeed, they have often contributed to the problem by educating young people to be mobile, rootless and autistic toward their place”.

(Laurie Lane-Zucker in Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities by David Sobel, 2004)
‘Place-Based’ Pedagogy

A term coined in the early 1990s by Laurie Lane-Zucker of The Orion Society and Dr. John Elder of Middlebury College.

“Place-based education might be characterized as the pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her homeground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place. [...]”

[It] challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively or actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it.”

(Laurie Lane-Zucker in Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities by David Sobel, 2004)
Third, fourth and fifth grade students at Vermont elementary school

Visited farms, participated in activities at several businesses and organizations in their own neighborhood.

After the students completed activities at each location, they received a stamp from each organization in their Legacy Card passport.

Students learn more about their community, develop a strong sense of place as they engage in activities at each location.

Businesses and organizations enjoy interacting with youth, and visits from students raise community awareness of the business.

The Legacy Card Project not only teaches students about their community, but makes that community stronger.
Place-based learning is ...

- Grounded in the particular attributes of a place
- Multigenerational and multicultural
- Supported by partnerships
- Project-based and investigation-focused
- Relevant
- Student focused
- Interdisciplinary
- Collaborative
- Reflective
- Expanding in scope
What research says on the impact of place-based learning...

- Increased student engagement and motivation
- Improved student academic achievement
- Improved student critical thinking skills
- Increased student engagement in their community
- Strong connection between communities and their schools
- Increased teacher engagement and peer-collaboration
- Increased teacher retention
Matthew Baughman
Principal,
Coventry Village School
The Importance of Place & Community

- A look at the importance of place and community in a foreign language context
We’re Learning What?

• Using local history and culture to motivate and engage students
• Building community support for programs
Connections and Appreciation

- Students communicating with extended family members
- Gaining awareness of diversity around them
- Understanding and connecting to their communities in new and tangible ways
• Connecting past, present, and heritage

• Making them more marketable in local economies

• Taking advantage of opportunities for enrichment
Kim Griffin, Ph.D.

Director,
Middlebury-Monterey Language Academy in Comillas, Spain
Comillas: Place

Comillas as Fishing Village

Comillas & Tourism
Comillas: History

Indianos, The King and Monuments
Comillas: Culture

Cultural Influences: Education, Art, Architecture
Comillas: Summer Academy

Language in Culture, Culture in Language
Comillas: People

PUBLIC SQUARES: Interaction, Immersion, Integration
2013 Summer English Language Academies

An Interactive Immersion Program for Middle School English Language Learners

- **Partnerships with local district departments and community resources**
- **Local area field trips aligned with project-based curriculum**
- **Personalized and localized curriculum to meet student needs and interests**
- **Professional development to support cross-content ELL strategies**
Indicators of Success – Year 1

- 92 percent of the students believed the program was very important in helping them build their English language skills
- 92.3 percent of parents indicated the program was very effective in helping their child to be better prepared for the following school year
- 100 percent of the summer teachers concluded the program was very or extremely important in supporting student success in school and career
- Overall, students demonstrated increased scores on Listening and Reading assessments, academic language skills and confidence in using English in school
- All students indicated they would be interested in attending the program during the following year
- A localized model will be implemented in funded programs in two additional MA sites this year and in CT
Approach

- The hands-on, task-based, collaborative curriculum
- Weekly project
- Interdisciplinary units of study culminate in a field trip
- Localized curriculum
- Aligned to Common Core State Standards and WIDA
- Family participation
- Community interaction
- Showing ELL student higher-education pathways through college visits

**GOAL:** Accelerate skill development and confidence in English to be better prepared for academic success
## Localized Thematic Units
### Sample Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Title</th>
<th>Localized and Global Curriculum</th>
<th>Collaborative and Hands-on</th>
<th>Field Trip</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The shoe of the future</td>
<td>History of shoe industry in area&lt;br&gt;Current sourcing of materials and manufacturing&lt;br&gt;Linked to priority content and language standards</td>
<td>Group design&lt;br&gt;Project “build”&lt;br&gt;Print advertisement&lt;br&gt;Video commercial</td>
<td>Local College</td>
<td>Exhibit of student work at community gallery&lt;br&gt;Parent event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common themes – localized field trips:

- Wetlands
- Extreme Weather
- Baseball

Localized thematic units based on area resources and history, e.g., transportation, manufacturing, local natural resources, community program extensions
Thank you!

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