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Dakota Resources

Putting History in the Hands of Children

“Read Chapter Four and pay close attention to the paragraph about tipis on page 142. Answer the questions at the end of the chapter. You’ll need to know this material for your unit test.” Would these words inspire you to rush home, complete your homework with enthusiasm, and share all the new information you had memorized? In the course of my work teaching education students at Black Hills State University (BHSU) in Spearfish, South Dakota, some student teachers have shared their observations and concerns about the lack of enthusiasm toward learning in their classrooms. One student teacher commented that lessons need to be short, entertaining, and interactive, or the students in his middle-school classroom would lose interest almost immediately. Others repeated similar stories. Taken together, the comments formed one overarching question: How do we get our students focused on a topic and get them excited about exploring the topic?

Today, education students at BHSU are developing interactive educational kits focusing on the diverse cultures of the Northern Great Plains that are designed to challenge and engage learners with interactive experiences appropriate for various age and ability levels. In addition to creating kits for loan to area classrooms and other groups, the BHSU students are partnering with the High Plains Western Heritage Center (HPWHC) in Spearfish to research and create educational kits that provide hands-on learning opportunities for exploration of the museum displays and resources. The HPWHC also benefits from this unique method of connecting university classes with local museums. Through this partnership, the center is expanding its educational connection to the community and schools, confident that the kits are based in sound educational theory and offer creative and critical thinking opportunities for museum visitors.

The kits directly correlate to the South Dakota Social Studies Standards established by the South Dakota Department of Education. A revision of the Social Studies Content Standards for kindergarten through the twelfth grade was approved in May of 2006. Applying input from students, teachers, and communities, the revision committee structured the social studies information and focus for each grade level. The standards are organized into five strands: United States History, World History, Geography, Civics, and Economics. Each strand is taught at every grade level with increasing rigor and focus. South Dakota history is taught within the context of United States history in the fourth grade.¹

The state standards provide a list of the topics and skills that need to be taught at specific grade levels and in specific subject areas. For example, teachers of South Dakota fourth-graders studying United States history are required to teach to the following standards, which are listed with supporting skills and examples:

4.US.2.1. Students are able to describe the impact of significant turning points on the development of the culture in South Dakota.

- Gold Rush
- Treaties with the Native Americans²
Example: Treaty of 1868 resulting in Red Cloud's War
- Controversy over statehood
- Native American wars
Examples: Red Cloud's War, Wounded Knee
- Establishment of religious colonies
Example: Hutterite colonies

4.US.2.2. Students are able to explain the effects of the Native American conflicts and establishment of reservations on the Native American culture.

1. South Dakota, Department of Education, "South Dakota Content Standards," <http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/>, accessed 6 Oct. 2014.

2. The term "Native American" is used in the South Dakota Department of Education Standards, but the term "American Indian" is used in this article to be consistent with the term used in the exhibits at the High Plains Western Heritage Center.

- Identify major reasons or events leading to the establishment of reservations in South Dakota.
Example: discovery of gold, homesteaders, Native American conflicts
- Describe the effects that the relocation of Native Americans had on their culture.
- Identify the locations of the nine major reservations in South Dakota.³

The South Dakota Department of Education standards also list the performance expectations for students at advanced, proficient, and basic levels:

Fourth grade students performing at the proficient level:

- explain factors affecting the growth and expansion of South Dakota, including environmental, economic, cultural, and population issues of concern to South Dakota;
- describe the impact of major events and notable South Dakotans on the development of South Dakota;
- explain ways that the Native American conflicts and establishment of reservations affected the Native American culture.⁴

Included in the state standards, as well, is the level of intellectual behavior important to learning developed in 1956 by Benjamin Bloom and referred to as Bloom's Taxonomy.⁵ The levels range from basic knowledge of the facts to the ability to evaluate and defend a point. Standard 4.US.2.1 cited above is an example of basic knowledge, the lowest level of learning in this model. Students are asked to address specific topics using facts they have learned. The next standard listed above, Standard 4.US.2.2, is an example of the comprehension level in the taxonomy model and is one step above the basic knowledge level. Students are asked to explain the information, incorporating the facts

3. South Dakota, Department of Education, "South Dakota Content Standards."

4. Ibid.

5. Richard C. Overbaugh and Lynn Schultz, *Bloom's Taxonomy*, http://ww2.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm, accessed 6 Oct. 2014.

learned at the basic knowledge level with their own explanation of the event.

In their junior year, education students at BHSU enroll in courses that prepare them with the content knowledge needed to work at specific grade levels or in specific subjects. The senior year is focused on methods courses: how to teach the content in specific grade levels or subject areas. The students are familiar with the state standards, as the content and methods courses require extensive lesson-plan development applying the standards to effective learning experiences for children.

All teachers in the state of South Dakota are also required to take South Dakota Indian Studies, generally in their junior or senior year. Even if a teacher is already certified to teach in another state, South Dakota requires him or her to complete these courses as part of the state certification process. Students enrolled in South Dakota Indian Studies at BHSU study and apply the integration of content based on the research of James Banks, a specialist in multicultural education and social studies education. His content integration model provides structure to develop more engaging, more interesting, and more meaningful experiential learning opportunities in the exploration of a topic. Banks identified four levels of content integration based on research in public schools. The four levels are:

Contributions Approach—Focuses on holidays, heroes, and discrete cultural elements;

Additive Approach—The structure of the curriculum is not changed, but content, themes, and perspectives are added;

Transformation Approach—The structure of the curriculum is changed to allow students to view the material from different and diverse perspectives;

Social Action Approach—Using the experiences from the transformation level, students make decisions on social issues and take action to solve problems and make changes.⁶

6. See James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds., *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Hoboken, N. J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

Working with students at the university level, professors model these different classroom management styles, uses of technology, development of curriculum, and other teaching techniques. Experiential learning is one technique that provides experiences outside of the classroom that apply theory to practice.⁷ Education students in the university classroom read about and discuss educational theories and methodology, but the opportunity to see that information in action takes the learning experience to a higher level. Students at BHSU observe and teach in K-12 classrooms through a series of practicum and student-teaching experiences. Developing and teaching many of their own lesson plans, they practice what they have been learning on campus and see and hear how their K-12 students respond in a classroom setting, which brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of this article: How do we get our students focused on a topic and get them excited about exploring the topic? How do teachers implement the required standards in a timely manner, meet the needs of the individual students, and turn the learning into an experience?

Applying the structure of Banks's model in developing education kits challenges the BHSU students to transform the curriculum by requiring the exploration of information through different perspectives. After researching and exploring various perspectives, the perspectives are shared in new and creative ways with other individuals and groups. The goal of the interactive kit is to motivate others not only to think and talk about the new information but to do something productive with it. I challenge my students to create a situation in which they hear "I never thought of that before!" on a regular basis in the classroom. When educators hear comments like this, they can be fairly certain that the information will be shared and discussed with peers, other teachers, and another important group—the folks at home.

"Treat research as a voyage of discovery"⁸ is one of my favorite quotations to share with the junior and senior education students in my

7. See Jeffrey A. Cantor, *Experiential Learning in Higher Education: Linking Classroom and Community*, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED404948.pdf> 1995, accessed 6 Oct. 2014.

8. Ricardo L. Garcia, *Teaching for Diversity: A Guide to Greater Understanding* (Bloomington, Ind.: Solution Tree Press. 2011), p. 56.

classes. Some words and phrases I use in class seem to trigger an almost automatic sense of doom and dread for many students. One of those words is “research.” I do require my students to research an American Indian topic, complete a paper, and then apply the research to an interactive project, underscoring the idea that research has a purpose far beyond a mere writing assignment.

Since the fall of 2008, students enrolled in South Dakota Indian Studies on the BHSU campus have been required to research and create educational kits using a format I designed for this class. Over the course of eight weeks, the students study the James Banks approach to transforming the curriculum through perspective, participate in field trips to study American Indian collections, research a specific topic in small groups, and develop an interactive educational kit. The kits are appropriate for use in classrooms, for home schooling, scouting groups, as summer activities, and in assisted living facilities—in short, anywhere a group of people would like to explore a new perspective on American Indian culture.

After exploring a variety of resources for coursework, including watching documentaries, reading books, visiting websites, and holding class discussions, the class goes on a field trip. Numerous sites have been visited, including The Journey Museum in Rapid City, Tatanka: Story of the Bison in Deadwood, the Vore Buffalo Jump in Wyoming, and the HPWHC in Spearfish. Using the information from the class resources and the information from the field trip, students generate a list of ideas they would like to explore further.

The students study and practice the James Banks approach to curriculum transformation as a large group in class, then divide into working groups of three or four individuals to discuss their specific areas of interest and choose a group topic for the educational kit. Each kit contains a five-to-seven-page research paper about a specific American Indian topic; an interactive component developed from the research paper that includes detailed instructions and materials to support that component; and a detailed suggestion for continued research and exploration.

The research paper provides background information about the topic. It is written on an adult level and contains enough information



Students in the South Dakota Indian Studies class at Black Hills State University work on a winter-count project for use in the museum and the classroom.

for the users to appreciate and understand the connection to the interactive component. The interactive component is designed for a specific ability, age, or grade level. For example, a beading kit may supply large beads for use by individuals with limited motor skills in kindergarten classes or for individuals in assisted living facilities. Detailed instructions are included in each kit along with a list of the materials in the kit. The suggestion for continued exploration encourages the learner to keep asking questions and sharing the information with others.

Topics developed for this assignment include: making arrows (one kit for beginners and one kit for advanced learners), storytelling, dance, beading, the Fort Laramie treaties, the importance of the horse, uses of the buffalo, tipi kits for both beginners and advanced learners,

and numerous other topics. More than forty kits for use by young children through adults have been created by the classes and are available for loan through the E. Y. Berry Library–Learning Center on the BHSU campus.

Each kit puts history in the hands of children as they explore many of the same objects children from the past used in their everyday lives. Samples of buffalo and deer hides, horns, antlers, quills, beading, games, and paints are used, often with the Lakota language, to explore an activity or a skill that was important and useful in the past. Children are encouraged to compare the past to their own lives and to the future. How are their lives different? How are they similar? What lessons can be learned from the past to enrich their lives today? In keeping with the South Dakota Department of Education standards and James Banks's methodology, critical-thinking skills and problem-solving skills are honed in activities like the debate designed for use with the Fort Laramie treaties kit. An alphabet book uses rhyme to teach a word, item, or concept from Lakota culture for each letter of the English alphabet (except for the letter "x," which does not exist in Lakota). The kit on the uses of the bison teaches the Lakota words for various parts of the animal and its many uses, from food and clothing to ceremonial and practical applications. In an exercise representing science and human creativity at its best, students are challenged to figure out the amazing use of the animal's eyeball. Activities such as these lead the learner into new areas of cultural perspective, respect, and understanding.

Students currently enrolled in South Dakota Indian Studies classes are contributing to a new project designed specifically for the HPWHC. Working in pairs, the BHSU students choose a specific American Indian item on display at the center and research the item with the goal of uncovering information that is not commonly known. From their research, the students compile the most intriguing facts and present them with a photograph of the displayed item in a booklet entitled "A Fast Fact Guide to American Indian Displays." As visitors to the HPWHC tour the various displays, they refer to the guide, which supplements the museum's artifact labels with deeper and more intriguing information about the specific items. The first class working on this project researched and designed lists of documented "fast

facts” and donated the compilation to the HPWHC. The booklet’s topics included The Fur Trade; Bows, Arrows, and Quiver; The Drum; The Winter Count; The Resourceful Buffalo; Grey Buffalo Wolf; Tobacco/Cansasa; The Bustle; Star Quilts; Moccasins; Headdress; Pipes and Fur Pelts. Each semester, “fast facts” on other topics are added to the display guide.

Peggy Ables, executive director of the HPWHC, calls the program “an excellent opportunity for students to acquire knowledge of the BHSU/Spearfish community and immediate area. As part of their undergraduate studies, the students become familiar with a regional historical resource, as well as a mutual opportunity for connecting the



Students from Black Hills State University set up an interactive project developed for visitors to the High Plains Western Heritage Center in Spearfish.

community and BHSU students. This is a gateway for building strong, productive relationships that will impact and enhance the education of all parties.”⁹

As the projects expand, the topics will be compiled into a memory card game of matching facts to images of items from the HPWHC collection. The topics will be part of a series of challenges on cards designed to initiate creative discussions after visitors leave the HPWHC, ensuring that the exploration of historical and contemporary ties will continue long after the site visit.

Developing such interactive kits is challenging work for educators and students alike, but it has proven to be a rewarding experience for the BHSU students and the Spearfish community. Each semester brings new ideas to the interpretation of the assignment, raising the quality bar for the next semester of classes. We are all grateful to the community for their support and proud to be an integral part of the learning and teaching community within the region. I encourage all those adventurers in the realm of information exploration to share their passion with others and put history in the hands of children, our future.

9. Ables to author, 15 Jan. 2013.

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On the covers: In this issue, Joe P. Kirby writes about Frederick Henry Morse, an artist who served time in the South Dakota Penitentiary and went on to paint the portraits of several prominent Sioux Falls residents such as former United States Senator Richard F. Pettigrew (front).

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