

PBI Project: Long Ago Versus Today with First and Third Grade Students

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ECI 546 New Literacies and Media

### Lesson Rationale

Kayla and I partnered together for our PBI project. As partners, we looked at the first and third grade standards to determine our focus of this project. In the first and third grades, both grades have a social studies unit about “Long Ago verses Today’s Life.” There are some differences among the objectives, but we decided to use this unit implement a PBI based learning project model.

Both teachers asked our classes “What was life like in the past?” From that starting point, both classes had great discussions about how life differed in the past verses today. From that point, our students came up with their own questions and they got into groups to research more information. Once the students were in their groups, they started researching, collaborating, and synthesizing to create a project to present.

The main research for this project was conducted using online resources. Students used Pebble Go, Discovery Education, Kid Rex, and some other search engines. Both classes collaborated with our school’s media specialist. Both media specialists did a mini lesson on note taking from information in the online readings, and they explained how to record the information into a graphic organizer. First grade students used a t-chart; whereas, the third grade students were able to use a Lotus. The media specialists also collaborated with both teachers; they showed us other online resources that our students could use to gather more information.

From a new literacies perspective, students were able to navigate all the different web pages to gather information. According to Leu’s article, *Seeing the Forest and not the Trees*, he states “We learn to read, and then we read to learn online” (2015, p. 139). In first grade, I had to conduct a mini-lesson to show my students how to get to the Pebble Go website. Once they got to the website, I had to show them how to type in the username and password. Then, the students had to navigate to the appropriate section of the website to find the “Long Ago” section. Once there, they had to find the

specific area that they were studying. This process was just to navigate the website. Then, the students had to navigate through multiple tabs in order to read and gather information. Once they finished reading a page, they had to determine where to write the information on their t-chart: “Long Ago” side or the “Today” side. After the research was completed, the students had to synthesize the information in order to understand what they just read. It was a very similar process for the third graders as well. According to Google’s definition of New Literacy, “New literacies generally refers to new forms of literacy made possible by digital technology developments.” Spires, Lee, and Tuner discuss the partnership of these skills as “bridging the gap between how students live and how they learn” (2008, p.2). Students today are required to have these online literacy skills, in order to implement and be successful with the demands of the technology used in schools. According to Maryanne Wolf’s article, *Balance Technology and Deep Reading to Create Biliterate Children*, she states that “We live in a culture in which digital skills are absolutely part of the repertoire needed for every child” (2014, p. 17). In order for our students to be successful with the first step of their PBI project, they needed to have, or be taught, these digital skills.

Our PBI project also fits the TPACK framework. The TPACK framework is that “sweet spot” that overlaps between content, pedagogy, and technology (Candace M, 2014). When Kayla and I were looking at our objectives, we knew this was the content that we had to teach. While looking at our objectives, we were thinking about the different ways students could use technologies to gain information. We picked the unit on “Long Ago verses Today”, because we knew our students would have many different areas that they could research. When you think about life long ago: their clothing, homes, school, expectations on children, food, daily life, and such; they are all areas that the students could use to develop questions and want to learn more. These are areas in which our students could develop their questions for their Problem Based Inquiry projects. The content that we needed to teach included objectives from Common Core social studies, grades 1 and 3: “1.H.1.1, Explain how and why

neighborhoods and communities change over time; 3.H.1.1, Explain key historical events that occurred in the local community and regions over time; and 3.H.2.1, Explain change over time through historical narratives (events, people, and places)” (Common Core). The pedagogy we needed to demonstrate so that our students could be successful with understanding the content was scaffolding, differentiation, using appropriate graphic organizers, and facilitating. Both Kayla and I had to ask appropriate questions to activate our students’ background knowledge on the topic. Once background knowledge was activated, both teachers had to facilitate and scaffold the conversation to guide students to create their own questions and groups. Once students had a direction, and a group, teachers then needed to provide an appropriate graphic organizer so that students could record their information. During the research phase, both teachers had to scaffold the project. We also had to use our teachers’ knowledge about our students to differentiate, so that each student would be successful. Some students could read a whole article and record facts on their t-chart and Lotus. Other students needed more support. “The heart of TPACK is meeting student needs” (Candace M, 2014). Some students needed the teacher to read with them, and to ask probing questions, in order for them be successful with recording information. Both teachers needed to provide appropriate technology. Both classes used computers. We used websites, PowerPoint, and created videos on iMovie. Kayla’s third grade class also conducted research on I-pads. My first graders used sentence strips to synthesize information. The use of our graphic organizers was also technology that both classes needed. Both classes utilized the assistance of our media specialists. The media specialists were able to provide support with content, pedagogy, and technology. One part of our project was to show our classes how communication has changed over time. Kayla and I assigned pen pals between our students. Students wrote letters to one another. We then sent those letters from Oak Grove Elementary school to AB Combs Elementary through the USPS. To conclude our unit, we used Skype to meet our pen pals and to show our classes how easy it is to communicate with people today.

Our lesson also connects with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Our students needed to use higher order thinking skills in order to be successful with the PBI project. Our lesson started out with lower order thinking skills. First, our students needed to understand that the past is different from today. Then, we had the students activate their background knowledge to remember what they already know about how the past was different from today. From there, students had to apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. Students were not just given a question to research, but were given background knowledge and the opportunity to choose a question of their choice to research. The students had to apply what information they already knew from their schema in order to share with the class. The students then had to analyze information learned from online resources. They had to determine what information was going to be helpful in answering their question that they wanted to research. From analyzing the information that the students learned from online resources, they had to evaluate the research to pull important information and to synthesize what they learned. Then, the students had to use their research to create a presentation to share with the class. They had to organize the information in a way that others would understand. They incorporated visuals, interactive websites, and personal experiences.

Both classes used new tools to research their questions and to create presentations. In first grade, just using the internet is a new tool. The first graders had a lot of fun reading information from Pebble Go. One first grade group used PowerPoint to create a presentation. They had support from the teacher to search for images and to create the presentation. The students told the teacher what to write, what pictures to use, and where to put everything. The teacher was just facilitating and using the laptop controls for the students. Both first and third classes made videos on iMovie. Both groups had a great time rehearsing what they were going to say in the video and practicing their lines. They also loved editing their videos to make it just right. The third grade students used Board Builder on Discovery Ed. Board builder is Discovery Ed's version of PowerPoint. Student using board builder can add videos,

pictures, and sticky notes that have text. The third graders were more independent with Board Builder than the first graders were with PowerPoint. If the teacher did not facilitate the computer, the first graders would not have been able to create their presentation. Both classes loved using Skype. Both teachers projected our computer screens onto our Smartboards, so that all students could see and participate. All the students were introduced to their pen pals. The classes got to ask each other questions. The first graders were fascinated with the third grade room. The third graders wanted to know more about our room. The first graders explained to the third graders that they were "tracking-out" and moving rooms. The third graders are on a traditional schedule, so they did not know what it meant to "track-out." One of the first graders explained that they do not have school for the next three weeks. The third graders were very jealous. The classes also wanted to know: how many students were in each class, what they were for Halloween, and information about class pets. It was a very neat way to conclude our PBI project.

Our students learned a lot using the PBI model. Students came up with their own wonder questions. Both classes were successful with their research. Both classes came up with creative projects to teach each other. The groups in both classes taught their peers about transportation, games, food, and clothing. The students facilitated their learning. Using all the aspects from PBI, TPACK, revised Bloom's taxonomy, literacy theories, and new tools led our students to a new level of understanding and mastery of how the past is different than today.

### **Lesson Implementation**

Our lesson is one that had to be implemented in a way that both younger elementary students could grasp onto the concept and come up with a compelling question to research, while the older students would also hear the topic and feel a pull to the research being done. The topic was chosen because it could reach both younger and older students; the key was scaffolding. We introduced the

idea of change over time through visual images. We showed the students a PowerPoint presentation of key “pieces” of life today as we know it, with time to discuss with a neighbor. For example, students were shown a slide about “transportation” with pictures of a car, train, and airplane to represent various modes of transportation in our world today. Our key pieces of life for discussion included: transportation, education, household appliances, work, leisure time, and games. Students were then left with a compelling question: “Did each of these pieces of life always exist as we know them today?” Students were then allowed to discuss the idea of change with a scaffolded list of topics that had just been visually presented, without being limited to these visual images or topics.

After the students had time to process the ideas of the visual images and topics placed before them for thought, students were allowed to choose groups of two or three. Then, they began the actual work of formulating a question of study for our “change over time” unit. Students were given a “guiding” handout that leads them through points of discussion within their group. Their “guiding” included: “What are some potential topics that you could research about the past that you think have changed over time? You do not need to know HOW they changed.” Once students brainstormed ideas, they were able to write two questions for research that interested them about the past. The groups then met with the teacher, or an adult in the room, to narrow their questions into a question that pertained to the topic and that could be answered through research.

In the lower grades, this question-writing process came after much scaffolding and modeling in order to write a complete question that could be answered with research. In both grades, the process of brainstorming topics and writing questions was done after the modeling of an overarching topic of study; then, narrowing it into a smaller topic of interest to research; and finally, narrowing it even further into a specific question of interest or problem to research and explore.

Once the students came up with their question of research, they were able to begin the actual research portion of the project. This took on a different look in the first grade versus the third grade. In first grade, students were given a T-Chart to fill in so that they could compare “then” and “now” representations of their question. They could research a specific area of their question, by pairing what it looks like now to what it looked like in colonial times. In third grade, the students came up with broader questions and they were able to research any question of the past. They then filled in a Lotus graphic organizer regarding the different topics about their question. In the center of their Lotus, they wrote their question as a guiding thought and, surrounding their question, they wrote more specific areas that they wanted to look up. For example, a student questioned “How have clothes changed over time?” They filled their surrounding boxes with specific areas of research around this topic: Colonial Clothing, Clothes in the 1900’s, Clothes in 21<sup>st</sup> century, etc. Whatever topics that were interesting to them within their guiding question that enhanced their research filled their lotus. The students, in the first and third grades, researched using teacher chosen websites and books such as Discovery Education, Kidrex.org, PebbleGo, and other books relating to student topics.

Finally, once students researched, they were able to choose a method of presenting to the class. The students were encouraged to choose a new tool that they have been taught in class this year. The tools ranged from iMovie to Discovery Ed’s Board Builder. The students discussed with their group members, and then chose the presentation tool. Then, the students discussed how they wanted to use the tool to present to the other groups in the class. With the teachers’ help, the media specialists’ help, and parental help, the students were able to utilize multiple technologies in the classroom to present to the other groups. The students were required to share the question that they were researching, and to answer their question using the tool that they chose.

### **Challenges & Success**



While implementing the PBI model in both the first and third grade, there were many successes to celebrate within the classroom and with student learning. By scaffolding, the students were able to develop appropriate questions that made the standards more kid friendly. By pre-teaching through modeling the PBI process and the research process, our students, in both grade levels, had great successes in asking questions about what life looked like in the past, narrowing their questions to one specific research question, and even researching and presenting. Through the careful teacher choice in research tools and the recording tools in both grades, the students were able to successfully navigate the research portion of the project with help. Another key success within the project was the communication from class to class. The students were able to communicate with one another through becoming pen pals. The students learned about the mail system. They compared the time that it took to get a letter via written methods (in the past), versus current methods of communication (Skype, phone, social media). This communication and comparison method was wildly successful in that it was hands on for both grade levels as they were researching various topics of how life has changed over time. It was also successful in that it gave students motivation to conduct research so that they could talk to another learner in another school about their research. Finally, the greatest success felt with the project was student self-awareness and pride in learning. When the students developed their own questions, created their own presentation method, and followed their project through to the end, there was a new sense of excitement and need for their research and learning. The students had self-investment in their questions, and they worked diligently to come up with answers to those questions.

While the PBI project had many successes, it did have a few challenges. Technology is a great resource, but it was also troublesome at times. In both classrooms, the students had to work around technology that didn't work, make the most of the little technology that was available, or limit certain presentation choices based on the number of technology items in the classroom. This was a challenge. While this project does promote 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, those skills are hindered by the technology

limitations that exist in the different classrooms. A second challenge, especially for the younger students and for struggling readers in the third grade classroom, was providing authentic research opportunities and materials that are at the reading level of the individual student. While there are books and articles available that were pulled for these students at times, allowing students to choose their own question made finding just the right resources challenging. Texts on a first grade level, which were needed in both classrooms, were often unavailable.

### **Collaboration**

The collaboration process was very smooth on this project. Both teachers were willing to meet up regularly, split work evenly, come prepared, and work outside of scheduled time together. We learned that we both have high expectations for each other when it comes to project work. This made collaborating on this project seamless, as we had the same standards for work. It was very easy to split the tasks and to bring them back. There was a very strong sense of trust that was developed within the meeting time. The first time we met, we made a timeline for how the project would be implemented within our classrooms, as well as what needed to be filmed and what pictures needed to be taken in order to support the video element of our project. Through both parties working toward our video goal, we were able to split the written portion of the paper and send the details about the project to one another to support this writing process. By meeting and mapping out an outline of the paper, both parties felt comfortable with the flow of the paper, the details held therein, and we felt confident that the experiences from one another's classrooms would be well represented within the paper and video. That style truly helped us to make a great project for our students and for our class.

### Abstract

Google definition of Inquiry based learning: "Google." *Google*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2015.

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