



Snapshot of Technology Uses Within the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) — Spring 2009

Introduction

In Fall 2007, InSites began a three-year study for the Freeman Foundation. It is about the use of technology in Asia-focused professional development programs for K-12 educators sponsored by the Foundation. The study is designed to facilitate learning about technology uses, evaluating options, and stimulate ongoing conversations among program leaders and with the Foundation.

Program leaders are determining the feasibility of leveraging technology to enhance four core program features—rich content about Asia, personalization for participants, wise time/money investments, and overall sustainability of the fundamentals of their work.

InSites' study about technology applications involves multiple professional development programs for K-12 educators funded by the Freeman Foundation. The largest of these by far, the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA), is the focus of this report. This is one of several reports from this larger study. See <http://www.insites.org> for the full set of materials available from the study thus far. Further reports will be prepared during the remainder of the study.

This interim report addresses the progress made by sites that are testing alternative uses of technology. Future reports will contrast the use of alternative seminar formats from the point of view of participants and look at costs of alternative uses of technology.

The content of this report was derived from surveys and interviews of NCTA program leaders and tech-savvy program alumni in Fall 2007 and 2008. We also met with about 30 NCTA program and seminar leaders individually and in groups during the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting in March 2008 and 2009 and the Asia in the Curriculum Symposium in September 2008 to discuss and receive feedback on reports we had prepared.

During 2009 and 2010, InSites is continuing to follow how NCTA sites are integrating digital and online technologies into their professional development programs. Our data collection includes conducting participant surveys in spring and fall 2009 that will provide teachers' perspectives on NCTA's use of technology in these various activities as well as technology resources available in their schools. The participants include ones who took the NCTA seminar using alternative formats to allow comparison of different approaches. Cost issues will be another important focus during the final year of the study.

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Available Reports from Study of Technology Uses

The reports available thus far at www.insites.org include:

- reports on the perspectives of program leaders and tech-savvy alumni
- trends in technology use among program leaders
- case studies about an online discussion forum, alternative seminar formats, and tech-enhanced study tour programs
- updated glossary of technology terms with examples from Freeman programs
- list of **websites** recommended by program leaders

NCTA Background

The National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA), funded by the Freeman Foundation, is a multi-year initiative to encourage and facilitate teaching and learning about Asia in world history, geography, social studies, and literature courses in the U.S. Launched in October 1998, this nationwide program is a collaboration of the East Asian Studies programs of seven national institutions -- Columbia University, Five College Center for East Asian Studies at Smith College, Indiana University, the University of Colorado, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Southern California, and the University of Washington. (from www.nctasia.org.)

In the first ten years, NCTA reached approximately 10,000 participants with professional development programs about Asia serving teachers (and, in turn, their students) in 46 states. For further information visit the NCTA website at www.nctasia.org.

NCTA Approach to Exploring Technology Use

As NCTA program and seminar leaders explore technology uses, they are staying within the core activities of NCTA— seminars, study tour programs, and enrichment activities. High-quality content continues to be a priority for NCTA and a hallmark of their seminars and other activities, whether the content is provided online or face-to-face. NCTA national directors

are consulting with each other and discussing ways to ensure and enhance the quality of their programs and activities to foster sustained attention to teaching and learning about Asia in U.S. elementary and secondary schools.

Most of the NCTA program and seminar leaders are first and foremost teachers and academics who, like many other professionals, are exploring technology use due to multiple external pressures even though it is not their primary area of expertise. Leaders are learning as they go, seeking information within their institutions and beyond, and working on how to wisely incorporate technology into their activities. Rather than prescribing technology uses to their seminar leaders, national leaders encourage seminar leaders to explore technology options that interest them and support NCTA's purpose. They also keep in mind that technology use is just one way to enhance NCTA's work..

As we observe the patterns of use of technology within NCTA, it appears that technology is affecting not only the programs of NCTA but also the infrastructure and general operation of NCTA. The next two sections address these two areas of impact.

Technology Use in NCTA Programmatic Activities

The major lessons learned thus far relate to features of the programs in NCTA's three core programmatic areas—seminars, study tour programs, and enrichment activities. Also, as leaders work with technology, their perspectives on technology use are evolving. Several seminar and program leaders report taking a positive view of technology as they become familiar with specific technological tools. Others are shifting their thinking about where cost savings are possible. Some are less optimistic about potential savings in cost and time.¹ Whatever the orientation, leaders' opinions are now more grounded in a deeper understanding and experience with technology.

¹ We will be learning more about the changes in thinking about technology through surveys and interviews in Fall/Winter 2009-10.

Seminars

Technology is bringing changes in seminars along a continuum from accessing and sharing resources online while staying within a face-to-face seminar to offering seminars via alternative formats that are predominantly online. The first requires few adjustments in the basic seminar approach. The second entails significant changes in the seminar format and operation.

Using technologies in pedagogically sound ways at any point along the continuum helps teachers learn about technology use as well as content about Asia. Learning about technology that supports pedagogical goals can be an important outcome for teachers because it enhances their ability to make wise choices about how to generally use the many available online resources for K-12 students and teachers. Such use is of growing interest to school districts. Alumni indicate that they feel it is beneficial to participate in professional development in which they learn multiple sets of skills and knowledge, for example, Asia content and technology application.

Accessing and Sharing Resources Online

The most common use of technology in seminars is accessing online resources about Asia. Nearly all seminar leaders are making use of online resources about Asia and helping teachers locate those that are useful, credible, and reliable. (See report entitled *Websites used in NCTA Programs*.²)

Another popular use is accessing online videos for presentation during seminars. Popular websites such as www.youtube.com are sources that leaders can use in seminars and teachers can, in turn, use in their classrooms. Leaders also are using technology to share resource documents electronically (e.g., as attachments to emails or posting on their websites). Technology provides ways to organize emails for quicker and easier communication, store past communications in an ordered way, and interact with others via listservs. The uses can increase teacher-to-teacher interaction and relationships.

The discussion boards worked very well for the Japan summer course; so much so, we have expanded to an online workspace that will include a discussion board and other web tools like polling and web Q software.
— NCTA program leader

Offering Seminars via Alternative Formats

Several NCTA leaders are going well beyond accessing materials online. They are exploring seminar format options that involve variations of hybrid online and face-to-face seminars. These options allow seminar leaders to tailor their offering for their particular situation and that of their participants. This increasingly rapid expansion has been stimulated in part by access to their university's course management systems.

Online course management systems (e.g., Blackboard/Moodle) are tools used by universities and others to facilitate online courses. Seminar leaders are using them to engage seminar participants in discussion, assessment, sharing of materials, seminar organization, and planning. Course management systems typically provide space for:

- links to related web materials (e.g. online videos, websites for teaching about Asia)
- documents (assignments from participants; articles or images from seminar leaders);
- discussion boards (asynchronous discussions for participants); and
- chats (real time discussions for participants).

NCTA leaders are seeking a healthy mix of face-to-face seminars; online seminars or modules; and hybrid seminars (various combinations of online and face-to-face features). Some leaders are exploring ways to use technology to economically enhance their reach to remote areas of the country. For example, the Kansas seminar leaders held a blended seminar in an area of South Dakota previously underserved by NCTA. After an initial face-to-face session, they conducted the rest of the seminar online.

² All reports referenced in this report are available at www.insites.org.

Other leaders are exploring ways to use videoconferencing and other technologies to achieve cost reductions and/or expanded reach by bringing the seminar to multiple sites at the same time. In Spring 2009, the Georgia seminar leader conducted a seminar using both videoconferencing and Wimba, a college-wide online learning tool that allows participants to talk to one another through online audio connections in real time. By using these technologies, the leader was able to link two sites from the University of Georgia. (See the preliminary case study report titled *Alternative Seminar Formats* for details about the work being done by the Georgia and Kansas NCTA partner sites. The report also briefly describes the steps being taken by other sites to explore alternative seminar formats.)

Study Tour Programs

Leaders are exploring various ways to use technology to enhance study tour programs. There are major differences in their approaches because:

- Programs are emphasizing **different and multiple purposes**.
- There are **many possible applications** of the technology.
- Some programs are interested in using technology to **strengthen connections** between U.S. and Asian students and teachers during the study tour programs while others are using the study tour program as the jumping off point for **future electronic connections** between U.S. and Asian students and teachers.

The sites and program participants are taking varying approaches to using technology in the study tour programs, for example:

- using **video conferencing** to connect study tour participants with teachers in Asia prior to travel;
- **teaching classes electronically** from Asia; and

- using **email or blogs** to communicate with students and schools.

These explorations are in the early stages of development. Note that some approaches were possible because one of the study tour groups traveled during the school year instead of summer which is the typical travel time for NCTA study tour programs. (See *Tech-Enhanced Study Tour Programs*, the case study about study tours.) Next year, we will collect additional information from participants who use various technologies to continue relationships with Asian teachers and students after the study tour travel.

Several patterns are already evident. First of all, it is not an easy task to maintain connections between U.S. and Asian teachers/schools after the travel portion of the study tour program. One of the major challenges is finding Asian teachers who are willing to invest the time to build the connections. Because of the strong focus in Asia on preparing students for national examinations, many Asian teachers are not willing to participate. Increasingly, this issue is also affecting U.S. teachers. NCTA leaders are exploring other options such as working through existing programs that place American teachers in Asian schools on a temporary basis. These American teachers are likely to have more flexibility to participate while they are in Asia.

Secondly, study tour program leaders and participants are discovering and developing a wide range of connections between U.S. and Asian teachers and students that vary considerably in intensity, purpose, and cost. They range from school-to-school exchanges to an American teacher traveling in Asia and communicating with her students via a blog and a teacher teaching a class from Asia while on the study tour program. This wide range of explorations can open up new ideas of how to maximize the resources that are allocated to study tour programs.

Third, program leaders and teachers are exploring ways to take advantage of programs of other organizations that provide connections with

teachers in various parts of the world including Asia. Programs such as iEARN³ and One World Classroom⁴ facilitate connections with teachers in other countries and thus help to address the difficulty of finding willing teachers in Asia to connect to.

All in all, the work in this area is spurring a wide range of explorations (see sidebar) and wholly new ways of building relationships between U.S. and Asian teachers and students may emerge.

Enrichment Activities

The NCTA leaders are also developing ways to enhance and expand enrichment activities through the use of technology. Two types of activities currently are receiving attention: online forums and online modules.

Online Forums

Online discussion forums allow teachers to seek information of particular relevance to their teaching from other teachers, Asia experts, and NCTA leaders. Forums are used as (a) part of seminars; (b) supplement to seminars; (c) extended support for teachers; and/or (d) means to bring in new teachers.

The use of online discussion forums has met with mixed success thus far. Through a case study, we are following the work of one forum that has met with considerable success to better understand its essential features. (For details about the case study, see “Asia in My Classroom” Online Forum.)

We are conducting a survey of participants in the Asia in My Classroom forum to gain further

3 “iEARN (International Education and Resource Network) is the world’s largest non-profit global network that enables teachers and youth to use the Internet and other technologies to collaborate on projects that enhance learning and make a difference in the world.” (from <http://iearn.org>)

4 “OneWorld Classrooms is a nonprofit organization that builds bridges of learning between the classrooms of the world. We offer FREE online travel and a variety of opportunities for K-12 classrooms to interact with overseas partners.” (from <http://www.ccproject.org>)

Technology-Enhanced connections between U.S. and Asian Teachers and Students

- pre-travel video conferencing with teachers in Asia in order to enhance in-person relationships during the visit
- blogging during travel to send information, reflections, and pictures back to the home school during travel. Blogging by teachers provides their students with current information and an opportunity to ask questions about Asia
- engaging in organized programs such as the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN) that facilitate connections between classrooms around the globe to build student-to-student connections after travel
- developing individual connections with teachers in Asia to do joint projects (e.g., studying the same topic from the perspective of each country)
- having students share pictures and reflections on their daily life
- using connections to encourage colleagues to develop their own connections and/or to prepare for school-to-school exchange programs

insights into what makes for an effective forum and what its benefits are for teachers and students. Although InSites continues to collect survey responses from forum users, preliminary data suggest that during the seminars, a large percentage of seminar participants use the forum to “a moderate or great amount” for the following activities:

- learn about their peers’ teaching experiences regarding Asia content,
- find out about Asia-related events and opportunities in their area,
- share their own knowledge about Asia,
- reflect on their learning about Asia, and
- reflect on their teaching about Asia.

Following their enrollment in the NCTA seminar, many respondents visited the forum after the final meeting and did so to build their content knowledge about Asia. Several keys to success are evident from this example (see sidebar).

Ways to Enhance Online Forums

- Monitor forums to see when momentum is lagging and stimulate engagement through provocative content/questions from Asia experts.
- Continue an influx of new participants, who can re-ignite the communication about Asia and sustain interest.
- Direct and encourage thoughtful questions, responses, and comments to be posted to the forum so that the larger community might benefit from one-on-one interactions and communications.
- Allow subgroups to form organically (e.g. film buffs, travelers advising future travelers).
- Store discussion threads in searchable format to serve as a digital library of teacher-recommended materials.
- Require seminar participants to participate in the forum (e.g. post messages once a week during the seminar) to build their comfort and skill with the technology.

Online Modules

As the multiple activities related to technology combine in new ways, various types of online modules or discrete teaching units are likely to emerge. For example, leaders are developing teaching units in their specialties that can be accessed by other seminar leaders. NCTA is also exploring the development of videos about unique people and situations that can benefit all seminar leaders. For example, one NCTA leader is videotaping interviews with surviving Japanese WWII veterans. These videotapes could be used in seminars and in classrooms.

Ideas that are surfacing include:

- creating short online learning modules that could be mixed and matched to fit an individual teacher or school situation;
- preparing a prepackaged online unit that teachers could take directly into their classroom;
- developing online modules that could be used in combination with local events (e.g., mini-courses related to Asian art or religion).

Conversations are starting about using these discrete teaching units to help enrich NCTA's offerings and build broader connections among teachers and leaders across the country. (See *Alternative Seminar Formats* case study.)

Technology's Impact on NCTA as an Organization

We started this study of professional development programs' exploration of technology use for pedagogical purposes with a focus on its application within programmatic activities. It is becoming apparent that the impact of technology has a significant organizational impact as well. Here are preliminary indicators of possible long-term effects for NCTA organizationally.

Shifting Roles and Goals

Roles and Goals of NCTA National Sites

The roles of the national coordinating sites are changing as technology permeates the field of education and NCTA explores new ways to do its work. When helping seminar leaders conduct seminars and determine enrichment options, the national directors take on an additional set of tasks. For example, national directors are helping seminar leaders make choices about what changes are most cost effective and valuable to participants. They are providing up-to-date information about appropriate applications of technology and new online resources about Asia-focused content. In some cases, the national directors are providing training for their seminar leaders in how to use course management systems and other technologies. They are having conversations about when and how to bring seminars to hard-to-reach areas and thus provide equity of access to their programs.

Shifts in Seminar Leader Roles

A major challenge for some NCTA seminar leaders is to know if they will be teaching a seminar long enough and frequently enough to make it worthwhile to convert their materials to an electronic format.

Technology is also changing individual seminar leaders' roles in other ways. For example, a seminar leader in one state has been brought into a seminar session in another state via video-conferencing. Three leaders from NCTA sites in Texas plan to use video-conferencing rather than incurring the expense of flying to each other's seminar as they have in the past. NCTA leaders at Columbia University are developing short online modules. Teachers may be able to take these modules to build up the equivalent of the usual 30-hour NCTA seminar. Teaching in this way shifts the seminar leaders' roles, and allows for creative redevelopment of NCTA seminar content into new configurations of units.

Shifting Connections among Program and Seminar Leaders

Seminar leaders are learning and developing technology applications in small pockets within each national site. They refine these processes in these small pockets and informally share what they learn among seminar leaders within one national site. Over time, as technological applications are more fully tested, it becomes important to share this learning and resources among seminar leaders across national sites for cost effectiveness and to share unique resources.

Currently, there are few opportunities for the seminar leaders nationally to meet face-to-face or have major online connections. Technology may supply a way to link seminar leaders across sites so they can learn directly from one another about ways to enhance and sustain their work. This may be a place where additional resources are needed (e.g., to fund face-to-face meetings, technology systems or tools, or technology support). Here, too, as with seminars, the blend of face-to-face and technology-based interaction is important to consider.

Shifting Roles of Alumni

From its early years, NCTA has involved selected alumni in leading NCTA seminars, presenting at conferences, and supporting other teachers in learning about Asia. It is likely that tech-savvy teachers will become an especially important resource within the consortium in the future. We will learn more about this topic through the teacher survey that is now underway.

Partners and Connections

Because of technological possibilities and economic realities, we expect to see increased attention to partnerships and connections with other programs and resources over the remainder of this study. In regard to partners and connections, a note about one particular relationship: Most NCTA sites and seminar leaders are located in universities. The nature of university support for helping with technological options is varied and spotty. Some seminar leaders have free access to technology support and online course management systems while others do not. In addition, some universities have a culture that promotes faculty technology use, while others may not. Also, when it comes to university priorities for fundraising and redistribution of funds during this economic downturn, teacher professional development and outreach are not high priorities.

Resources

We are working from the assumption that NCTA funding will not be expanding and, given the economic times, may be reduced. Based on conversations with NCTA leaders about other funding options available to them, it does not seem likely that they will find other funding to support NCTA as a structure.

If NCTA is to exist as an overarching structure and set of relationships, the Freeman Foundation funding is essential. It is probable that some sites can find periodic additional funding for specific programmatic activities. However, outside funding would not be well leveraged to support

professional development if the overarching infrastructure of NCTA ceased to exist.

As technological applications within NCTA expand, the value of this unique consortium becomes even more evident. Successful networks and consortia are grounded in personal relationships. Over the past 10 years, NCTA has built a remarkable web of relationships that can multiply the impact of flexible, technology-based professional development for teachers.

Allocation of Resources

When this study began, there was a hope that technology use could reduce costs for NCTA. Preliminary results of the study suggest that technology use involves a complex set of trade-offs of reducing costs and building and enhancing the quality and reach of NCTA activities. It allows NCTA to build a stronger network among the locations to support attention to Asia in K-12 schools and reach rural areas but does not necessarily reduce costs. On the other hand, some cost savings may be possible. For example, some sites are experiencing cost savings by referring teachers to online resources instead of providing teachers with funds to purchase books for their school. There are indications that once online modules are developed (which involve initial investment of funds), cost savings can be experienced. As seminars and online modules advance in being shared nationally, cost reductions per participant may occur. During the remainder of the study we will look more specifically at costs involved in the alternative approaches. There is much yet to be learned about this important issue.

Purpose-Driven Redesign

There is a growing array of possibilities of how NCTA might mix and match its resources to create effective offerings for teachers. Figure 1 diagrams a framework for thinking about NCTA sustainability. It illustrates the expanded resources now available after ten years of op-

eration as well as the expansion of desired outcomes as NCTA enhances and reconfigures its core activities. The diagram lays out the many options for combining resources, activities, and desired outcomes to meet the overall goal of a sustained presence of Asia in the vast majority of U.S. schools. The diagram shows:

- **resources** available to NCTA, including the people/organizations involved in NCTA, technology-based resources, potential NCTA participants, and funding support;
- **programmatic activities**, including seminars, study tour programs, and enrichment activities;
- **intended outcomes** of NCTA efforts, including providing teachers with rich content about Asia, personalized interactions with teachers, equitable attention to various communities NCTA serves (e.g., suburban, urban, rural), wise investments of time/money, and overall sustainability of programmatic efforts.
- **long-lasting impact** desired by NCTA—the sustained presence of Asia in U.S. schools.

The framework is intended to help lay out the possibilities of how to mix resources and programmatic activities to achieve the intended outcomes in new ways. Importantly, the intended outcomes include the overall sustainability of the work at several levels: student interest; national momentum; teacher/interest commitment; NCTA programs and sites; and attention by leaders in schools, districts, communities, and states.

This visual summary of the categories and elements of NCTA is intended to prompt rethinking of ways to create alternative configurations of resources, programmatic activities, and desired outcomes within and/or across national sites to bring about desired outcomes and the long-lasting impact—the sustained presence of Asia in U.S. schools.

Concluding Comments

After more than ten years of NCTA, we can see the effects of this organization are deep and far-reaching. The NCTA infrastructure with its united basic goals and structure is a powerful platform for the continued evolution of approaches and the sharing of ideas among this large group of Asia experts. Technology for pedagogical uses is just one element in the efforts of NCTA, but it is permeating and affecting the work in large and small ways. NCTA directors and leaders are to be congratulated for being willing to explore the territory and provide insights that can help other Asianists who are facing similar challenges.

This interim report highlights the ways leaders are using technology pedagogically to make changes in their seminars, study tour programs, and enrichment activities. As the leaders of NCTA know, technology is not an end in itself, but a potential spur to innovation and creativity if properly used. Within the framework of NCTA's core activities, technology opens up possibilities for innovative changes to foster sustainability.

Given the economic conditions in the country, reducing costs are a major issue. Leaders have learned that exploring the use of technology requires investments in time and money. Yet they also are seeing long-term possibilities for savings by leveraging the resources of several sites and the connections in a nation-wide organization. Their ability to do so is enhanced by knowing as much as possible about the amount and timeframe for continued funding of the structure and programs of NCTA.

Implementing technology has shifted the roles of leaders of NCTA. It is affecting relationships with partners, seminar leaders, and alumni. In the final year of this study we will look in greater depth at if, how, and at what cost technology can help NCTA achieve its goal of a sustained presence for Asia in U.S. schools.

We look forward to continuing our study and welcome your comments, suggestions, and questions about this report and the broader study. Please send them to kwyckoff@insites.org.

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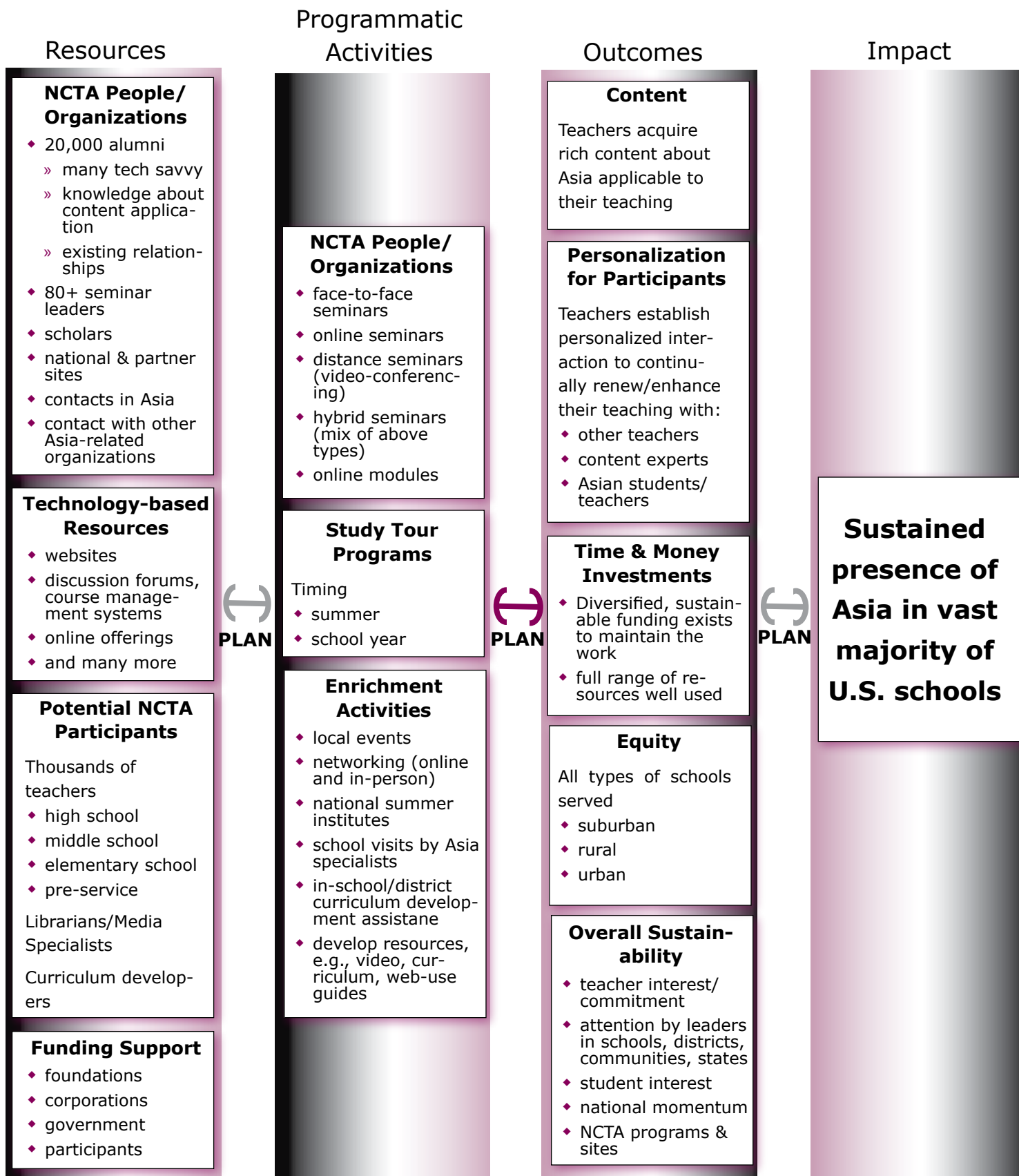


Figure 1. Framework for Configuring NCTA Resources, Activities and Outcomes