

Case Study One
Middle School Series

BAKER MIDDLE SCHOOL:
MEDIA SPECIALIST
PROMOTES ASIAN STUDIES
SCHOOLWIDE

INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

This school-based case study is one of 16 prepared by InSites, a nonprofit research organization. This case study is part of an evaluation of the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) and offers you an opportunity to study educators engaged in the work of promoting Asia in classrooms and schools. Understanding their experiences, impressions, and methods in teaching about Asia can help you determine how to foster attention to Asia in the context of your unique educational setting.

ABOUT THE NCTA EVALUATION

Launched in 1998, NCTA is funded by the Freeman Foundation whose major objective is to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the United States and the countries of East Asia through educational endeavors. NCTA deepens teachers' knowledge about the literature, cultures, history, and art of China, Japan, and Korea. Teachers are drawn to participate in NCTA by receiving resource materials, presentations by Asia experts, stipends, and opportunities to participate in study tours and other enrichment activities. Since 1998, more than 3,500 teachers in 42 states have participated in the seminars. For more information about NCTA, visit www.nctasia.org.

In 2002, NCTA and the Freeman Foundation asked InSites to evaluate its work. The case studies are one of several products in the evaluation. For more information about the evaluation, see www.insites.org/ncta.

BASIS FOR CASE STUDIES

As part of the evaluation, InSites gathered information from teachers participating in NCTA seminars. This information was gathered in the spring of 2003 and serves as the foundation for the case studies. The schools represented vary in geographic region, type of school and community, number of NCTA teachers in the school, and teacher subject areas. To disguise

identities, InSites replaced the names of people, places, and schools with pseudonyms and altered some peripheral facts. In addition, InSites edited some quotations for clarity and length.

USING THE CASE STUDIES

The case studies show teachers engaged in teaching about Asia and promoting the presence of Asian studies in their schools. Seminar leaders can use them to encourage NCTA participants to consider their role in fostering a sustained presence for Asian studies. However, even if you're an educator who hasn't been involved in NCTA, you can benefit from the case studies. Whether you're a teacher, an administrator, a professional development provider, or a policymaker interested in bringing knowledge of Asia to American students, the case studies can help you generate ideas for fostering a presence for Asian studies in classrooms and schools.

STRUCTURE OF THE CASE STUDIES

Each case study begins with a vignette that introduces the central characters and focus of the case study. The case study then presents information about the school, district, and/or state, and a brief description of the NCTA seminar. Impact of the NCTA Seminar details how NCTA participants have used what they learned in their classrooms and schools. Next Steps presents multiple views about promoting a sustained presence for Asian studies at the school. Discussion Questions focuses on key points in the case study and helps you consider how these issues relate to your own educational setting.

CROSS-CASE EXAMINATION

You can conduct a cross-site examination of features in these case studies by logging onto www.insites.org/ncta. Information is presented by school and organized into three categories: context, seminars, and NCTA teachers.

BAKER MIDDLE SCHOOL: MEDIA SPECIALIST PROMOTES ASIAN STUDIES SCHOOLWIDE

VIGNETTE

Can the media specialist continue to build interest in Asia and tap into the school's collaborative structures to make Asian studies a core component of the curriculum?

When **CLAIRE ALVIOR** became the media specialist at Baker Middle School, she brought nearly 30 years of experience to the position and deep-rooted connections in the region. She also brought with her a vision of the media center as the educational center of the school and herself as an instructional leader. “I’ve always seen myself as a resource person...I find the teachers or they find me.”

Before Claire took the position at Baker, she had attended a 30-hour seminar about Asia offered by the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA). She was eager to share the knowledge she had gained at the seminar. At Baker, she found a congenial atmosphere for her style and ideas. The school had strong leadership, an enrichment coordinator, and a well-educated and stable faculty, as well as proactive parents and positive structures for collaboration. The sixth-grade curriculum included a strong focus on teaching about ancient China. In the last few years, the U.S and China exchange program brought a Chinese exchange teacher to the district.

In the first six months in her new position, Claire stocked the media center with books and other resources about Asia. She also created displays featuring artifacts from Asian countries and helped organize special events related to Asia. Seeing an opportunity to share firsthand Asian experiences and content, Claire established a space in the resource area for the Chinese exchange teacher to hold “office hours” at the middle school. Teachers throughout the school remarked on the positive changes that had taken place in the media center, and many shared a new enthusiasm about opportunities to build Asian studies into their curriculum.



Baker Middle School

Baker Middle School is located in the heart of a small town. As part of the Baker Regional School District, the middle school serves students from nearby towns. All together, the middle school enrolls approximately 600 students spanning grades six through eight. The study of ancient cultures, especially the Chinese culture, is a core part of the sixth-grade social studies curriculum.

BAKER MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ITS COMMUNITY

Baker Middle School has a stable, positive school climate. The district and the school both have low teacher turnover rates. Many of the teachers possess graduate degrees. Teachers describe the school (and district) as an excellent place to work and the school's leadership as strong and supportive.

The community is surrounded by mountains and freshwater lakes. The recreational lakes and ski resort attract tourists to the area year-round. The town is also home to a liberal arts college, which enhances the cultural activities available to residents of the surrounding community.

The district, which serves approximately 2,500 students, emphasizes reaching the needs of all learners and pursues multiple approaches to learning and opportunities for enrichment. The district is undergoing a curriculum review to ensure that all curricula across grade levels are aligned with the state standards and the state assessment program. Although the district schools are generally seen to be high performing with 20 percent of the student population involved in gifted and talented programs or accelerated learning programs, the district and school leaders hope to become even better.

Professional development within the district has shifted from one-day workshops to four-day intensive institutes. In the past, the district offered teachers a choice among various one-day programs. Recently, the district decided to require teachers to choose between a four-day intensive institute at the beginning of the year or one at the end of the year. This shift reflects the district's belief that the institutes give teachers better opportunities to learn, reflect, apply, and refine their new knowledge and practice.



Professional Development within the District

The state requires every district to have a professional development master plan that tells teachers how they can acquire credit. The district has identified seven priority areas around which all professional learning and other activities must be built. These priorities include assessment, technology, choice theory, cooperative learning, curriculum integration, learning theories, and reading and writing across the curriculum.

Middle school teachers at Baker work in collaborative grade-level teams to plan curriculum and share best practices. There are two teams per grade. The teachers in each team share a common planning time and meet at least once weekly to discuss common learning goals and activities to integrate various themes, curriculum strands, and activities across the curriculum.

Each team has its own “culture,” a working style largely dependent upon the team members’ teaching styles. Since the school lets each team set its own goals for the school year, the level of integration across subject areas varies from team to team. For example, some sixth-grade teams have begun to weave Asian studies into many subject areas across the curriculum. Conversely, some teams have resisted efforts to integrate Asian curriculum due to individual teachers’ preferences or the lack of a full-time social studies teacher on the team.

In response to parents’ interests in including more fine arts and other enrichment activities, the district hired an enrichment coordinator who often makes connections with Asia-related guest speakers and performers, and arranges field trips to museums, theaters, and other events. For example, all sixth-grade students in the school attended a traditional Chinese dance performance in the school gymnasium. This performance gave students both a direct cultural experience and content about Chinese culture.

The district has hosted an exchange program with China for high school students and teachers. Before **CLAIRE ALVIOR** took the media specialist position at Baker, the Chinese exchange teachers were based at the high school and only came to the middle school on invitation. Claire set up a schedule and place in the media center for the current exchange teacher so that middle school students and teachers could visit and talk with her about her life and culture in China. Although the district has hosted several Chinese exchange teachers over the past few years, this is the first time that one has regularly scheduled hours in the middle school.



NCTA Seminar Leader

The seminar leader believes that students may learn more when teachers approach a subject indirectly through age-appropriate texts. “So in every course you could be doing Asia without intentionally doing Asia — just slip it into the literature. More and more teachers are finding that it is the way in.... It’s a matter of exposing teachers to different texts that are age-appropriate.” She encourages seminar participants to work closely with their school media specialists to coordinate the purchase and access to resources about Asia for the whole school.

NATURE OF NCTA SEMINAR

CLAIRE ALVIOR, Baker’s media specialist, attended the NCTA seminar while serving as the media specialist of another school in the region. **LORI DECKER**, a sixth-grade language arts teacher, who is currently taking the seminar, learned about it through Claire. Both are highly appreciative of the amount of resources and rich content that was provided. Besides the “wonderful” materials, Claire says the seminar yielded intangible benefits: “I think what a teacher takes back for herself also enriches her teaching...a real joy of learning...that love and enthusiasm can’t be divorced from her teaching.”

The NCTA seminar leader, **LORETTA RIVERS**, serves as education coordinator for the State Humanities Center. Besides organizing the NCTA seminars, she also works as an outreach coordinator for another educational program. Through these programs, she has numerous contacts with Asian specialists and demonstrates skills in networking with key school leaders.

Using the information teachers provide on their applications, Loretta plans ahead to try to meet their curriculum needs. “I try to start with ‘What do teachers most need to know?’ I do a lot of handouts.” Over the years, Loretta has learned that most of the participants seek rich content about Asia and prefer to do the pedagogical aspects on their own. She sends out a newsletter that keeps participants up-to-date on what others have been doing in their classrooms as well as new learning opportunities related to Asia.



Media Specialist's Role in Bringing Asia to Teachers


The principal recognizes Claire's role in helping teachers make connections to Asia and wants to see it expanded. "Teachers will take opportunities if they know about them, like having the Chinese teacher come here. Claire put out a call for [Asian studies] and a lot of teachers responded. I think what we need to do is create the opportunities."

IMPACT OF THE NCTA SEMINAR

Hiring CLAIRE ALVIOR as media specialist has opened new doors for Asian studies within the school. She has established a resource base, made connections with teachers' to enhance their curricula, and inspired other teachers to participate in NCTA. She has also helped coordinate the Chinese exchange teacher's schedule so that other teachers can make the most of her time. Claire's efforts have added depth to the resources available to teachers who have Asia-related curricula. Now, those teachers can speak knowledgeably about Asia and easily access related resources. Claire says, "I think if you start with the premise that this (the media center) is the core of the school, then everything flows out (from there)."

With a delicate touch, Claire has been able to tap into individual teachers' particular interests, draw them out, and make meaningful connections to Asia. For example, Claire helped facilitate a speaking engagement by the Chinese exchange teacher in an eighth-grade language arts class. She also recruited a Japanese guest who came to the class to teach the students about haiku, incorporating his knowledge from his native country. Commenting on the Japanese guest speaker, a language arts teacher says, "With the (haiku) lesson, he made sure that it showed emotion and some of the conventionalities of the form. (The students) did a beautiful, beautiful job of this for the most part. It was a great experience for them."

LORI DECKER, who is currently taking the NCTA seminar, was personally interested in world religions and philosophies and wanted to introduce an Eastern perspective on these topics to her students as a way to expose them to different points of view. As a language arts teacher in one of the teams that makes curriculum integration a priority, Lori is aware of the ancient civilizations component in the social studies curriculum and is actively seeking to support that learning through her language arts teaching. Although she is only a few months into the NCTA seminar, Lori plans to bring in several resources from the seminar to an "Ancient Cultures Fair."



“We’re attempting to expose our students and our staff to a wider range of thoughts and ideas beyond (our state) and this school district... anything we can do to open the eyes of our students.” — *district superintendent*

Both Claire and Lori are becoming recognized as Asian resources. Students and fellow teachers approach them to find out more about Asia and learn about resources. Increasingly, teachers are trying out different kinds of activities in their classroom related to Asia. For example, the Chinese exchange teacher has prepared special presentations and team teachers have planned links to their classroom. Other teachers are combining field trips and fine arts enrichment activities coordinated by the enrichment coordinator (such as a field trip to see the Beijing Opera). The NCTA training is an important component of the options available to these teachers. Together, these options are slowly influencing a coherent approach and strategic thinking around ways to make Asian studies a more integral component of the school curriculum.



Key Points

- ❖ Seminar leader encourages role of media specialist in promoting Asian studies.
- ❖ Media specialist fosters interest in Asian studies.
- ❖ Integration of Asian content varies, depending on interest of team members.
- ❖ Supportive environment for spread of Asian studies, including sixth-grade curriculum with emphasis on ancient China.

NEXT STEPS

CLAIRE ALVIOR, the media specialist, hopes to make Asian studies a vibrant, living stream — something that teachers and students within the school can contribute to and draw from — something that inspires everyone to learn. She has already influenced one other teacher to take the NCTA seminar and at least two more are interested. In addition, she is actively learning more about the work that goes on within each of the teams so that she can make timely, relevant suggestions for resources and activities related to Asia.

As the school and district undergo a comprehensive curriculum review to ensure alignment with the state curriculum frameworks, teachers can begin to identify opportunities for Asia to be brought into the curriculum. The school principal has articulated some ideas to extend the curriculum to have a more global influence: “I think we could continue what we’re doing now in social studies. In eighth grade, what we want to do is look at the modern era from a world perspective rather than an American perspective. In the seventh grade, I would like to see us continue this understanding of diversity, taking differences and using them in positive ways instead of negative. In the sixth grade, we would like to continue what we’re doing in ancient cultures so we can understand how we got to where we are today. Throughout the school, (there would be) opportunities on a regular basis for people to see other ideas, thoughts, artwork, and music.

In recent years, more of the school’s teachers have developed personal connections to Asia in some way. Whether it is knowing the host families of the Chinese exchange teachers, having children in school participating in a trip to China, being related to an Asian family member, or participating in one of the Asian seminars, there are more middle school teachers with stories to relate about Asia. There is no doubt that their interest in the topic and understanding of that part of the world has increased. In addition to the explicit curriculum focus in the sixth grade, a growing number of teachers are making connections to Asia-related content, thus building up new traditions among teachers and their general practice.

“I think the time has come when we should be paying attention to Asia. It’s an awareness factor.” — *middle school teacher*

Some teachers note that social studies is not their main topic, and that they would gravitate toward professional development that served their primary subject areas. They also point out that curriculum integration can be challenging because they do not always have the same students for both social studies and their primary subject area. For example, a mathematics teacher explains that she has incorporated some origami activities into mathematics learning, but this has not been a central part of her teaching. While she appreciates the opportunity to work and plan collaboratively with fellow teachers in teams, she admits that very often other planning priorities or needs take precedence and the actual collaborative planning for an integrated curriculum is minimal.

Most recently, a new idea for offering a four-day intensive professional development program focused on Asian studies has begun to surface. With an increased number of teachers with a new interest in learning more about Asia and a desire to share that knowledge with their students, the school and district leaders are open to the idea as long as the professional development fits in with the district’s seven priorities. Plans are under way to develop this on-site, four-day institute about Asia as a professional learning opportunity.



For more information about other seminars and participants, see www.insites.org/ncta.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Supporting Information

Two reports from the NCTA evaluation provide helpful information for addressing the discussion questions.

Teaching about Asia in American Schools: Keys to Success presents findings about the impact of NCTA seminars on teachers, classrooms, and schools. It also describes factors that affect the sustained presence of Asia in schools and classrooms.

Teaching about Asia in American Schools: Tips for Seminar Leaders provides information about how seminar leaders design seminars to both increase teachers' content knowledge and help them foster a sustained presence for Asia.

Both reports are available at www.nctasia.org and www.insites.org/ncta.

1. What evidence do you see that NCTA teachers at this school are getting serious content about Asia into their classrooms? How satisfied are you with the level of serious content about Asia that they are getting into their classrooms? What factors challenge their ability to infuse Asia into their classroom curriculum? What factors support it?
2. How are NCTA teachers sharing what they know about Asia with colleagues? What other formal and informal strategies would you encourage these NCTA teachers to use to bring greater attention to Asia in their school curriculum?
3. One of the goals of NCTA is fostering a sustained presence or permanent place for Asia in schools and classrooms. How successful have NCTA seminar participants been in reaching that goal in this school? (See **KEYS TO SUCCESS** — www.insites.org/ncta — for more information on factors that are necessary or make a contribution toward reaching this goal.)
4. What strategies for recruiting additional teachers for future NCTA seminars could be used in this school or area to help ensure a sustained presence for Asian studies? (See **TIPS FOR SEMINAR LEADERS** — www.insites.org/ncta — for some practical information relating to seminar activities, including recruitment.)
5. Consider the conditions for supporting a sustained presence for Asia in the curriculum of schools described in **KEYS TO SUCCESS** and this discussion of Baker. To what extent do you think there is a sustained presence for Asia in your school?
6. What Asia-related initiatives and interests in your own community might enhance the teaching of Asian content in your school? (For example, is there a consulate, museum, business, university, community college, or organization of native Asians that could be engaged?)
7. What practical and feasible actions might you and your colleagues undertake to foster a greater long-term presence for Asia in your school and its curriculum?

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About the Case Studies Series

This case study is one in a series of 16. The full set of case studies is listed below. You can access them at www.insites.org/ncta.

Middle School Case Studies

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3. Emery Middle School: Team Plans to Use Asian Studies to Reform Curriculum at Low-Performing School
4. Hardin Middle School: Teachers Infuse Asia in Art, Geography, and History Classes
5. Hay Edwards Middle School: Teachers Bring Asian Studies to Rural School in Transition
6. Kaiser Middle School: Lone Teacher Mobilizes Interest in Asia
7. Wadsworth Middle School: Cross-Disciplinary Team Develops Strong Asian Curriculum

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1. Alternative School: Teachers Organize School Year Around Asian Theme
2. Beye High School: Teachers Fit Asia into Standards-Driven Curriculum
3. Evans High School: China Exchange Program Stems from NCTA Seminar
4. Jefferson High School: On-Site Seminar Enriches Asian Content in High-Performing School
5. Lincoln High School: Interconnected Initiatives Expand Presence of Asia
6. Meridian High School: Teachers Implement Asian Studies in Multiple Disciplines
7. Montview High School: Teachers Include Asia in Revised English and Social Studies Curriculum
8. Saunders High School: Critical Mass of Teachers Increases Asian Studies at Private School
9. South Lake District High School: District Collaboration Magnifies NCTA's

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For further information about the NCTA evaluation, see www.insites.org/ncta.

For information about the NCTA program and the five national coordinating sites, see www.nctasia.org.