



A FIELD GUIDE TO **TEACHING ABROAD**

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Forward

In April 2014, I traveled to Morocco to teach English as part of my three-month sabbatical. I was filled with hope and ambition, eager to immerse myself in this unique opportunity. Equally, I was hopeful to impart to (or share with?) students and teachers in schools abroad the many skills and approaches of the modern American educational system.

In the ever-evolving global community of the twenty-first century the value of this human contact has become more important than ever. Spending time abroad naturally enhances linguistic skills, but also offers other valuable benefits, whether these are learning how to manage people, understanding how to operate in a different cultural context, or acquiring new communication and presentation skills.

I quickly realized just how unprepared I was for this experience, despite my many weeks of research and my educational leadership training and background; in the end I felt as though I fell short. It is for this reason I wanted to create a teaching and resource guide that would provide a realistic view of some of the challenges of teaching abroad and share some important lessons I learned along the way.

My goal is to give both the novice and seasoned professional a general overview of the processes of teaching, highlight some key points (in the form of key take-aways) accompanied by specific resources to get started. Though far from complete, it is a practical and easy to use guide designed to support, inform and help develop-one's own individual teaching methods. Hopefully, it will also contribute to a fulfilling and enjoyable teaching experience – regardless of background or personal goals.

Sincerely-



Kirk Widra M.Ed.



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Volunteering: What will you be doing?

Although the governments of many developing nations are working hard to improve literacy and promote professional development through various public and private initiatives, a large percentage of children, teenagers and adults alike are not given the chance to acquire marketable skills. They are aware that speaking a second language will enable them to further their education and make them more marketable in terms of employment. As a volunteer, and depending on your interests and qualifications, you will have the opportunity to work on a wide array of educational initiatives some of which may include working with students (at all levels) providing instruction in English, running small workshops on educational and assessment techniques, assisting local teachers in curriculum development and organizing educational games and activities.

The reality is, although these opportunities exist, it is largely dependent on the country you volunteer in and your host organization as to what you will in fact be working on, at what level and how that aligns with your interests and skills. In many cases it can be more about availability rather than compatibility. It is important to be flexible and use your creativity to make the best of things if placement and circumstances don't meet your needs or expectations. It is important to ask as many questions as you can upfront and gather enough information to allow you to prepare for your time abroad. This includes reaching out to past and present volunteers to ask for feedback about their experiences wherever possible. In the end your experience, positive or negative, is largely a matter of perspective. Here are some typical comments I have heard from volunteers.

- “I work with the other teacher and we alternate each lesson and it works ok but she doesn't seem to want to collaborate on things really, she just assumes I know what her objectives are, not to mention she teaches in her language and I in mine.”
- “I take the whole class for discussions while the teacher marks books at the back of the class.”
- “I teach whole classes completely on my own and am left to my own devices, that is if the students bother to show up for class. Many times I have to go round them up.”
- “I am shared by all English teachers who give me little notice as to when they will need me in their lessons. Often they just wave me over and I am expected to take up where they leave off.”
- “I am always in classes with teachers who sometimes refer to me for help with pronunciation or explanations of difficult vocabulary. I am not allowed to run activities myself and get a bit bored.”
- “For whatever reason I was put in a school for special needs kids, that is not my background and I felt useless. When I asked to change assignments they simply said the others wouldn't be available until later.”



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Understanding the process of education and educators

Sadly many educators in developing countries, and in many developed countries for that matter, rely on antiquated methods of teaching which simply have little impact in terms of educating students. Many still confuse memorization for education. It must be understood that education is a multilayered reciprocal process requiring a carefully planned holistic approach that must be supported by the extended community if it is has any hope of success. So to some extent, the comments by students, highlighted in the previous section, should come as no surprise.

The main goal of education should be thought of as helping students to understand their unique learning style and by extension allowing them to create their own relationship to the process of learning itself. By challenging them to abstract what they know to other spheres of knowledge and interest, you move the student from cursory knowledge to a deeper understanding of the learning process.

Key Take Away(s)

Memorization vs. Education

- The process of education is often misunderstood in that it stresses repetitive rote methods of memorization to build a knowledge base to prepare students for taking tests. This method is not student centered and not particularly effective, as the goal becomes to simply remember the required information for the test and nothing more.
- Education must have a student-centered approach, be based on what the student wants and or needs to know and be expressed to the students in as many modalities as possible. This way the student can slowly begin to learn their way and use that knowledge to gain an understanding of their personal process.

Effective teaching methods include

- Work with other teachers to develop lessons, curriculums, and course content that reflect and compliment each other.
- Discuss with other teachers what their objectives are and how they assess the success or failure of that approach.

Resources

- Resource / Reference:
http://www.ted.com/conversations/10879/does_education_teach_us_to_mem.html



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Modalities of learning

The theory of multiple intelligences is a theory of intelligence that differentiates it into specific (primarily sensory) "modalities", rather than seeing intelligence as dominated by a single general ability. Howard Gardner first proposed this model in his 1983 book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. The academic community, as a way to frame and deliver information to students, has since adopted Gardner's theory. This approach is often referred to as a student-centric approach, which differs greatly from traditional methods in that it offers students a variety of ways to view and experience information, and then challenges them to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter in their own unique way.

Gardner chose eight abilities that he held to meet these criteria: musical–rhythmic, visual–spatial, verbal–linguistic, logical–mathematical, bodily–kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. It is important to note that Gardner opposes the idea of labeling learners to a specific intelligence. Each individual utilizes his or her own unique blend of all the intelligences and, in the end, theory of multiple intelligences should "empower learners", not restrict them to one modality of learning. The following is a breakdown of Gardner's intelligences.

Musical–rhythmic and harmonic

- This area has to do with sensitivity to sounds, rhythms, tones, and music. People with a high musical intelligence normally have good pitch and may even have absolute pitch, are able to sing, play musical instruments, and compose music. Since there is a strong auditory component to this intelligence, those who are strongest in it may learn best via lecture. They will sometimes use songs or rhythms to learn. They have sensitivity to rhythm, pitch, meter, tone, melody or timbre.

Visual–spatial

- This area deals with spatial judgment and the ability to visualize with the mind's eye. Spatial ability is one of the three factors beneath 'g' in the hierarchical model of intelligence.

Verbal–linguistic

- People with high verbal-linguistic intelligence display a facility with words and languages. They are typically good at reading, writing, telling stories and memorizing words along with dates.

Logical–mathematical

- This area has to do with logic, abstractions, reasoning, numbers and critical thinking. This also has to do with having the capacity to understand the underlying principles of some kind of causal system. Logical reasoning is closely linked to fluid intelligence and to general intelligence also known as the 'g' factor.

Bodily–kinesthetic

- The core elements of the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence are control of one's bodily motions and the capacity to handle objects skillfully. Gardner elaborates to say that this also includes a sense of timing, a clear sense of the goal of a physical action, along with the ability to train responses.
- People who have bodily-kinesthetic intelligence should learn better by involving muscular movement (e.g. getting up and moving around into the learning experience), and be generally good at physical activities such as sports, dance, acting, and making things.

Interpersonal

- This area has to do with interaction with others. In theory, individuals who have high interpersonal intelligence are characterized by their sensitivity to others' moods, feelings, temperaments and motivations, and their ability to cooperate in order to work as part of a group. According to Gardner in *How Are Kids Smart: Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, "Inter- and Intra-personal intelligence is often misunderstood with being extroverted or liking other people..." Those with this intelligence communicate effectively and empathize easily with others, and may be either leaders or followers. They typically learn best by working with others and often enjoy discussion and debate.

Intrapersonal

- This area has to do with introspective and self-reflective capacities. This refers to having a deep understanding of the self; what one's strengths/weaknesses are, what makes one unique, being able to predict one's own reactions/emotions.

Naturalistic

- This area has to do with nurturing and relating information to one's natural surroundings. Examples include classifying natural forms such as animal and plant species and rocks and mountain types. This ability was clearly of value in our evolutionary past as hunters, gatherers, and farmers; it continues to be central in such roles as botanist or chef. This sort of ecological receptiveness is deeply rooted in a "sensitive, ethical, and holistic understanding" of the world and its complexities – including the role of humanity within the greater ecosystem.

Existential

- Some proponents of multiple intelligence theory proposed spiritual or religious intelligence as a possible additional type. Gardner did not want to commit to a spiritual intelligence, but suggested that an "existential" intelligence may be a useful construct. The hypothesis of an existential intelligence has been further explored by educational researchers.

The question naturally arises - how can I use this information to help me be a better teacher? It is your job to present information in as many modalities as possible to afford students the opportunity to relate to it and then challenge them to demonstrate that knowledge to you in their own terms.

- Everyone has his or her own unique way of learning. Your job is to help students discover that by presenting information in multiple ways to address each of their potential learning styles.
- Education must have a student-centered approach and be based on what the student wants and or needs to know and be expressed to the students in as many modalities as possible.
- Gardner chose eight abilities that he held to meet these criteria: musical–rhythmic, visual–spatial, verbal–linguistic, logical–mathematical, bodily–kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic.

- Resource / Reference: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED334488>
- Resource / Reference: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_multiple_intelligences

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Creating a culture and community around learning

Creating a culture and community of learning is very important but, unfortunately, it is one of the hardest things to do, as it requires a commitment from everyone involved. This approach, often referred to as *invitational education*, is a theory of practice designed to create a total school environment that intentionally summons people to realize their full potential. Its purpose is to make schooling a more exciting, satisfying and enriching experience for everyone involved in the educative process. Its method is to offer a guiding theory, a common language of improvement and a practical means to accomplish its stated purpose.

This approach is in alignment with Gardner's theories as he argues intelligence is categorized into three primary or overarching goals, those of which are formulated by the abilities.

- The ability to create an effective product or offer a service that is valued in a culture.
- Provide a set of skills that make it possible for a person to solve problems in life.
- The potential for finding or creating solutions for problems, which involves gathering new knowledge and creating a deeper level of understanding and ability of abstraction.

Key Take Away(s)

Creating a Culture of Learning

- Creating a culture around learning is very important. Teachers must model the behavior they desire from their children. If the goal is to teach them English, then the teachers themselves must speak English.
- Mentoring (using older students to teach younger students) allows opportunities for students to see how other students have progressed and also creates a sense of empowerment and accomplishment.
- By actively involving the entire community in accomplishing your desired goal, you begin to create a culture of learning that is student centered.
- This approach is challenging, but even on the classroom level, can be highly effective.

Resources

- Key word search: Invitational Education, Purkey, William Watson, The International Alliance for Invitational Education
- Resource / Reference: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED334488>



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Lesson Planning and Curriculum Development

The word curriculum generally refers to a series of courses that help learners achieve specific academic or occupational goals. A curriculum often consists of general learning objectives and a list of courses and resources. Some curricula are more like lesson plans, containing detailed information about how to teach a course, complete with discussion questions and specific activities for learners. Here are some strategies for developing a curriculum.

- **Define the objective of the curriculum.** What are the main objectives? What needs to be provided by the student to demonstrate specific skills or knowledge necessary for completion of the course or module? Being specific about the curriculum objective will assist with its development.
- **Choose an appropriate title.** Depending on the learning objective, titling the curriculum may be a straightforward process or one that requires greater thought. The title you choose should assist students in furthering their understanding of the content, but use caution as special attention to cultural sensitivity may be required.
- **Define a scope and sequence.** This is an outline of key skills and information that students need to achieve the main curriculum objectives. Keep it simple and straight-forward as many students take things in a very literal way.
- **Determine the teaching approach.** Remember Gardner here. Depending on the topic and objective, information might best be conveyed in a simple lecture format. In other cases, providing a combination of methods such as written materials, holding discussion sessions and offering hands-on practice might be the most appropriate teaching methods.
 - Include discussion questions. In a curriculum that serves more as a script for teachers, detailed discussion questions provide greater direction. Provide students a chance to articulate their point of view.
 - Allow room for flexibility to meet learners' needs. A student-centered curriculum must prioritize the needs of learners. Sometimes needs are indiscernible until a teacher has worked closely with a group of students across a period of time. In some cases, it is better to provide general directions and allow teachers to fill in the details and revise the curriculum as needed. This also helps teachers better identify their students' particular learning style and preferences.

- **Include an assessment component.** Determining how to assess the knowledge of learners is dependent on the main curriculum objective. If students are preparing for a standardized test for example, implementing practice tests is an effective way to prepare students for the testing process and identify weaker skills and knowledge areas simultaneously. If the learning objective is enrichment or life skills development, assessments may be more informal, consisting of class discussions, essays, one-on-one meetings or a combination thereof.
- **Use a form of curriculum evaluation.** Gathering statistics of passing rates is helpful for gauging overall effectiveness in multiple areas. In more abstract subjects, such as the arts or personal development, watch for patterns of student attendance and participation. Special attention to participation and engagement can reveal curriculum strengths and weaknesses. In any case, study your students carefully as they will reflect what is working and what is not.

Key Take Away(s)

The most important thing to remember is regardless of content, lesson plan and curriculums must reflect the school objectives, goals and culture. The questions you need to answer are;

- Why the curriculum design framework is logical?
- How effective is the curriculum design in meeting the objectives and goals of the school? Why?
- Are the resources identified adequate to meet the needs of your curriculum?
- Are these aligned properly with the objectives of the department and the mission of the school?
- How standards will be integrated within the proposed curriculum (if applicable).

Resources

- <http://www.wikihow.com/Develop-a-Curriculum>
- <http://www.education.umd.edu/EDPL/courses/EDPL635Hultgren.pdf>
- <http://cndls.georgetown.edu/support/course-design/>
- <http://www.globalvillageschool.org/high-school-sample.html#humanrights>
- http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/abepds/the_characteristics_and_concerns_of_abe_teachers-reports_no_26.pdf
- <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/1999/02.11/eating.html>

Sample Tools

Creating teaching aids and tools is often very challenging, however, even the simplest of solutions can be highly effective. In this section we will look at some simple ideas that incorporate Gardner's intelligences and offer the students multiple ways to experience information.

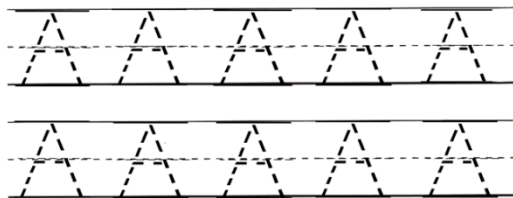
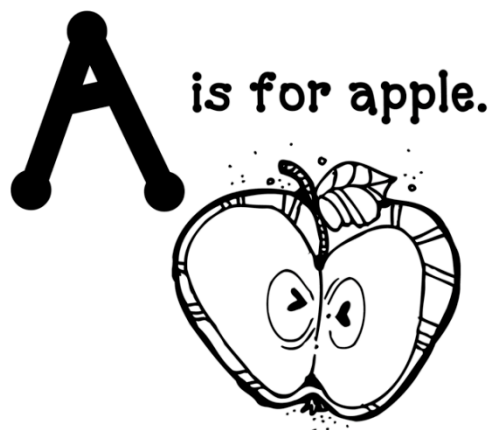
Multi-Dimensional Learning Development Tools

- Students should be furnished with study guides and learning tools that provide a frame of reference and reinforce classroom instruction. Trying to teach someone another language, without using the lens of their current language, gives them nothing to relate to.

Here is an example of a tool that illustrates both the English and Arabic forms of a letter; though incomplete, it shows the connection and-gives the student something to relate too.

ا	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز	س	ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ	ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	ه	و	ي
y	w	h	n	m	l	k	q	f	gh	ʔ	ṭ	ḍ	ṣ	sh	s	z	r	dh	d	kh	ḥ	j	th	t	b	ā	

- From here students can begin to build on this information to gain more knowledge and make the needed connections to move toward understanding.



A **mnemonic device** is any learning technique that aids students in information retention. The idea is for the mnemonic to translate information into a form that the brain can retain better than its original form for later recall from long-term memory. Typically mnemonics are often in auditory form, such as short poems,

acronyms, or memorable phrases, but mnemonics can also be used for other types of information and in visual or kinesthetic forms. Their use is based on the observation that the human mind more easily remembers spatial, personal, surprising, physical, sexual, humorous, or otherwise 'relatable' information, rather than more abstract or impersonal forms of information, which parallels the theories of Gardner.

For example D.E.S.I.G.N which stands for Define, Explore, Select, Illustrate, Generate, and Note is a tool that allows students to have a cyclic process to use to better focus their efforts; it affords an opportunity for both, forward-looking assessment and self-assessment against the established criteria and standards through continual feedback.

- *Defining* the task at hand is so important and crucial to developing lessons and curriculum goals, as they will ultimately function as the needed evidence of assessment. Students must be challenged to view any given problem in multiple ways, via the textbook as well as additional traditional and online resources.
- From there they are encouraged to *explore* the way they want to address the issue or problem. It is also the time to decide on what tools would be the best to use.
- Once a thorough exploration of the methods and tools has been done, students must *select* a plan of action that is compatible with their own skill set or objectives.
- From there students must *illustrate* a plan for others that will highlight the methods and tools **to** be used to accomplish the task at hand.
- This in turn will aid them in the next step, which is actually *generating* the solution to their assigned task.
- Once completed, they can receive feedback on the whole of the process and *note* what was successful about their efforts and what was not.

If the results were not favorable they can readily see if that was due to their initial interpretation of the problem, not enough exploration of the topic (research), or that the tools selected or methods used were inappropriate. This cyclic tool provides students with a tangible connection to the process of gaining understanding that goes beyond mere knowledge. This tool in affect creates the frame and supplies the language that will be used in discussing the process and end result.

But perhaps, more importantly, these experiences validate the subsequent assessment for both the student and the teacher by providing continuous opportunities for educational assessment, forward-looking assessment, and self-assessment - through the use of clear criteria and standards, feedback, and expanded real-world learning components.

- ## Resources

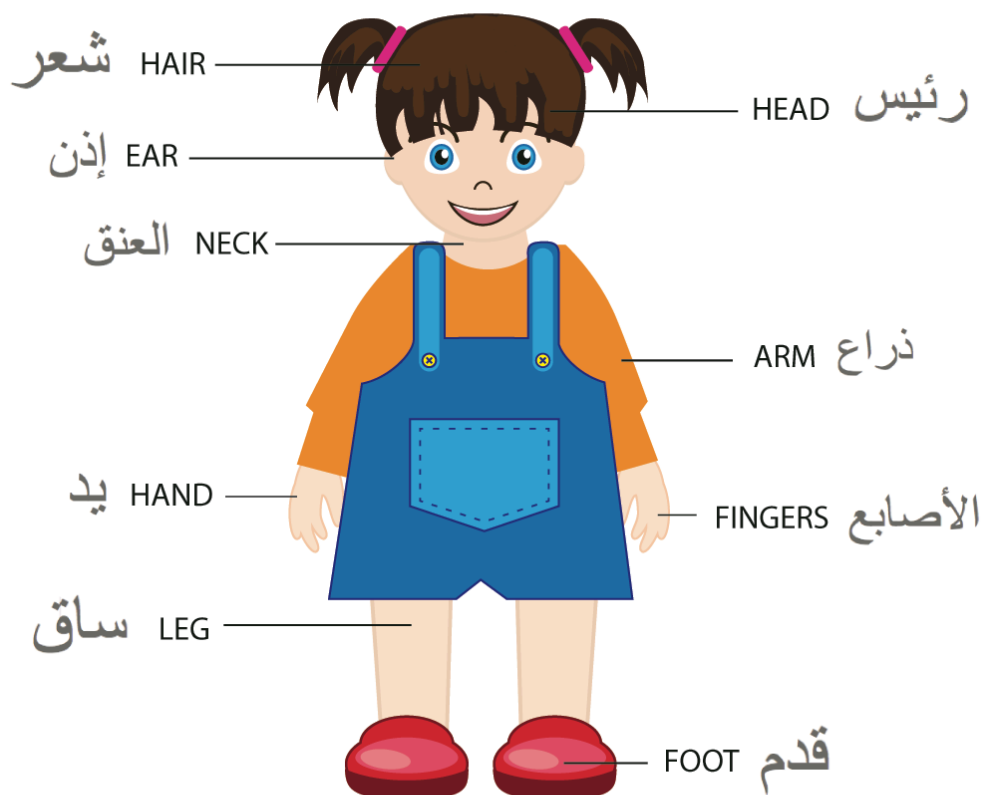
- ## Notes

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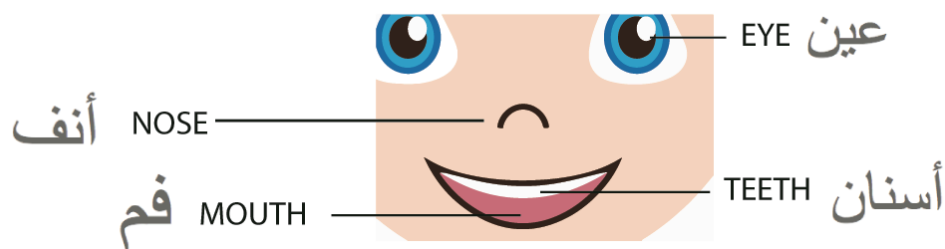
Association tools are any learning technique or tool that aids students in making visual and or verbal connections simultaneously. It is important to note, however, that this approach must also include an easily relatable component. In the body parts chart below, note how it is designed for Arabic speakers to learn English terms for body parts - both languages are offered. From here students can be asked to verbalize what they are seeing, by giving them something to relate it to both visually and verbally.

NAME: _____

REFERENCE: PARTS OF THE BODY



REFERENCE: PARTS OF THE FACE



Another form of association tool seen below is word jumble. This tool challenges the student at a different level. They can't simply rely on one way of looking at the word; this is the distinction between knowledge and understanding. I know the word arm but do I understand it if it is spelled backward? These two sample tools compliment each other as the chart above could be used as the study guide for word jumble below - again connecting with Gardner's intelligences.

ASSIGNMENT: WORD JUMBLE

DIRECTIONS: FIND AND CIRCLE THE FOLLOWING WORDS IN ENGLISH

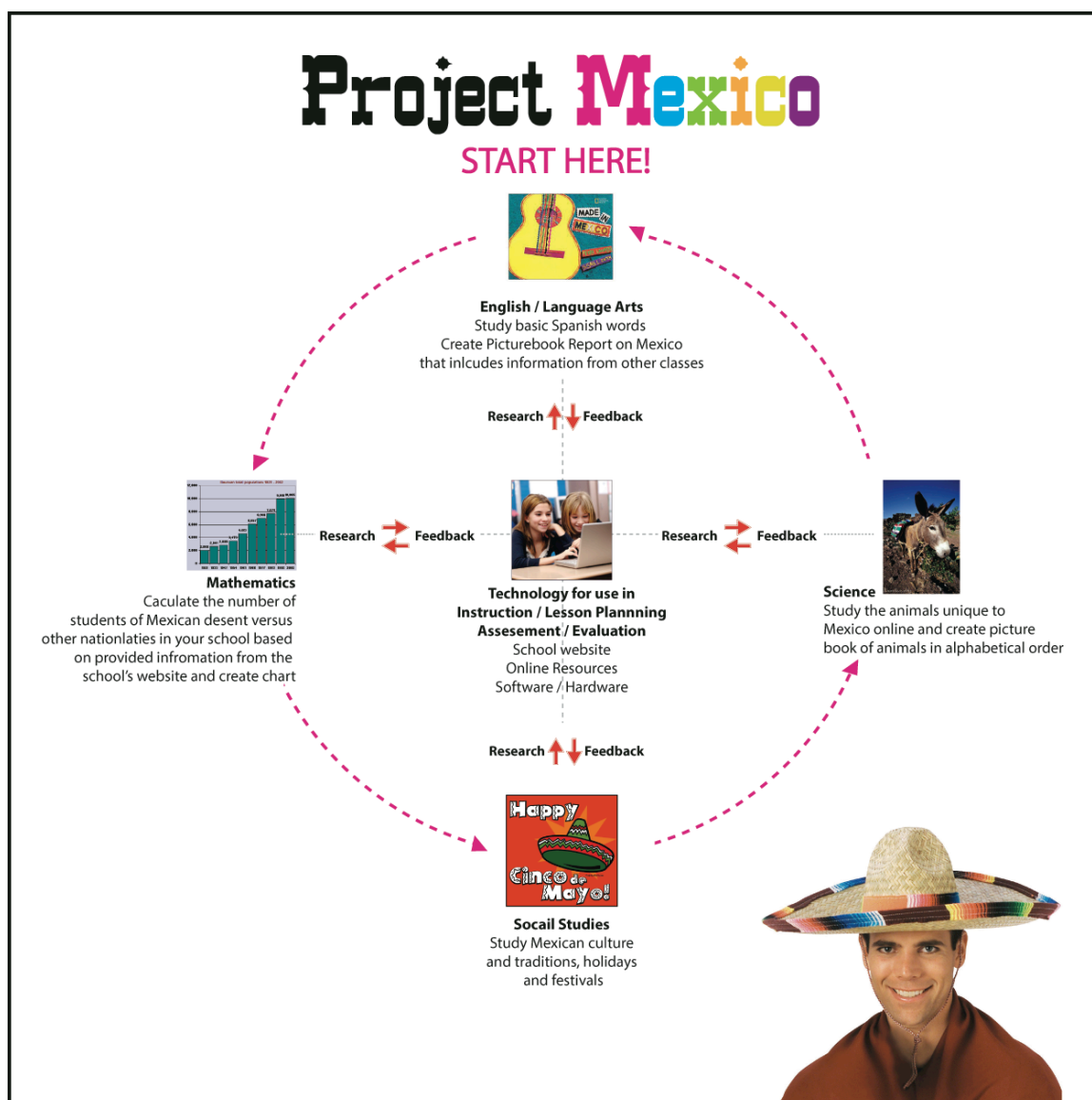
ENGLISH	FRENCH												
NECK	cou	N	A	B	F	C	E	I	J	L	E	G	D
HEAD	tête	E	H	M	I	Q	R	Y	S	T	U	A	K
FOOT	pied	C	O	P	N	W	X	A	E	B	E	V	A
EYE	œil	K	Y	Z	G	I	J	L	P	H	O	M	R
EAR	oreille	C	D	F	E	V	A	M	D	P	Q	X	M
FINGER	doigt	Q	R	U	R	X	G	O	H	F	O	O	T
NOSE	nez	S	H	T	O	O	T	U	J	V	I	Y	M
LEG	jambe	B	K	G	A	K	R	T	S	D	T	O	E
HAND	la main	C	E	F	C	P	N	H	A	H	A	I	R
TOOTH	dent	J	S	A	T	L	O	A	W	S	N	N	D
HAIR	cheveu	L	B	U	B	O	S	P	G	B	Y	Z	N
MOUTH	bouche	E	A	R	V	K	E	D	A	H	A	N	D
TOE	orteil												
BACK	le dos												
ARM	bras												

NAME: _____ GRADE: _____

Notes

A sample of how technology can be used across the curriculum for instruction.

The following graphic was created to show how technology could link a language arts class with math, science, and social studies to complete an interdisciplinary project. The project, entitled Project Mexico, could be started/introduced in the Language Arts class via the exploration of another language, in this case Spanish. Using embedded phonics to see how Spanish words connect with English words students can start to explore Mexican culture. From this, students in Math class can use the school web site to determine the Mexican population within their school and make a chart; then they can be led to examine the customs of Mexico in Social Studies. From there they can explore the wildlife present in that area of the world in Science class and develop an alphabetized list of indigenous animals. All of this information could then be synthesized to prepare a report on Mexico - all with the use of technology.



The key to developing this sort of project is again adjoining the technological community component so students, teachers and parents can see how all these pieces fit within the greater whole of the study of Mexico and its culture – allowing them multiple vantage points from which to experience the information.

Key Take Away(s)

- Regardless of approach and design of tools, keep it simple and direct and allow for as much room as possible for the student to create their relationship to the material and their own solution.

Resources

- <http://www.learningassistance.com/2006/january/mnemonics.html>

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery.

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Using area of interest as the focal point of lesson planning

- Virtually any interest can be used to frame learning. For instance Rugby can be used to teach mathematics. Here is an example of how you can use Rugby stats to challenge the student in Mathematics. In this example the student is furnished with this chart reference to draw from in order to abstract information and answer questions.

Stadium	City	Capacity
Arena <u>Manawatu</u>	<u>Palmerston North</u>	15,000
<u>Otago Stadium</u>	Dunedin	30,000
Eden Park	Auckland	60,000
McLean Park	Napier	15,000
North Harbour Stadium	Auckland	30,000
<u>Okara Park</u>	<u>Whangarei</u>	18,000
<u>Rotorua International Stadium</u>	<u>Rotorua</u>	26,000
Rugby Park Stadium	Invercargill	17,000
Trafalgar Park	Nelson	18,000
Waikato Stadium	Hamilton	30,000
Wellington Regional Stadium	Wellington	40,000
Yarrow Stadium	New Plymouth	26,000

What is the difference in seating capacity between the largest and smallest stadiums?

What is the difference in seating capacity between the two Auckland stadiums?

What is the total combined capacity of Arena Manawatu, Okara Park and Yarrow Stadium?

If Rotorua International Stadium was only half filled, how many spare seats would there be?

Trafalgar Park is only $\frac{3}{4}$ filled. How many people attended the match?

If $\frac{2}{3}$ of Waikato Stadium and $\frac{3}{5}$ of Wellington Regional Stadium were filled, who had the fullest stadium?

Eden Park is due to be $\frac{2}{3}$ full but can't host the match. Which of the other stadia could be used instead?

Make up 4 questions for your partner to work out. Do 1-step and 2-step problems.

You can also add an Extension Task that further challenges the students (and their respective intelligences):

The stadiums in Auckland (Eden Park), Wellington and Christchurch will host five pool matches each while Auckland (North Harbour), Hamilton, New Plymouth, Rotorua and Dunedin will each host three matches. Whangarei, Nelson, Palmerston North, Napier and Invercargill will host two matches.

If all the stadia are sold out each time, then what will be the total number of spectators for all the pool matches combined?

For more advance students you can challenge them to...

- Come up with additional questions.
- Make a Power Point/multimedia presentation on a given topic about a rugby team or other favorite team.
- Ask the advanced students to teach the younger students rules of rugby to prove understanding.

Key Take Away(s)

- Virtually any interest can be used to frame learning.

Resources

- <http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/topic/topic6.htm>

Final Thoughts

In the end it is all about your mindset. The questions to ask yourself are: why am I really doing this, what do I hope to gain and what do I need (in the way of accommodations) to feel I can accomplish this?

Do your best to learn as much as you can before you go abroad. Though a slick website is nice to look at, look deeper. Ask specific questions about classes, types of material needed / provided, teachers and schedules. But most of all, try to make direct contact with others to learn of their experiences before you go. Don't focus on specifics so much as the general vibe of what people are saying. Did they feel supported or lost? Did they connect with the others? Would they do it again using the same organization?

Hopefully this guide has given you some things to think about, somewhere to start, and will contribute to a fulfilling and enjoyable teaching experience – regardless of background or personal goals.

I wish you luck and safe travels!

Sincerely- Kirk



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