

Case Study One
High School Series



ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL:
TEACHERS ORGANIZE SCHOOL
YEAR AROUND ASIAN THEME



INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

This school-based case study is one of sixteen prepared by InSites, a non-profit research organization. This case 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, the 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, over 3,500 teachers in 42 states have participated in the seminars. For more information on 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 on 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 cases. 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 begins with a Vignette that introduces the central characters and focus of the case study. The case 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 on 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.

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL: TEACHERS ORGANIZE SCHOOL YEAR AROUND ASIAN THEME

VIGNETTE

How can a district administrator and an NCTA seminar leader work together to bring Asia into the schools?

All of them agreed — attending an NCTA seminar was like going back to college. The three teachers from different disciplines at the small alternative school rarely had a chance to attend professional development workshops together. And an NCTA seminar had given them the chance to study a new subject in depth — Asia. Not willing to let the experience of this 30-hour immersion in Asian studies fade away, they wanted to bring some of their excitement about Asia into the lives of their students. What could they do? They felt that the subject of Asia was too important to be confined to individual classrooms and they wanted other teachers to be as excited as they were. What about a whole school year organized around an Asian theme? Would other teachers join them? How could the non-NCTA teachers prepare to teach a subject for which they had limited educational background?

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL AND THE STATE CONTEXT

“I think the seminar has really helped me because it’s given me so much more confidence. I’m just more comfortable and I know so much more.” — *world cultures teacher*

The three NCTA teachers teach at a small alternative school for grades nine through twelve. One teacher says, “We’re a school for alternative learners: bright kids who learn differently.” Another describes the school’s goals as follows: “We’re working toward individualized portfolios. Because we’re such a tiny school we can do that, but we’ve got tons of required paperwork.” All students in the school are required to have a double block in humanities. To help ensure that students fulfill their requirements, humanities staff meets once a week to plan and work on integrating thematic units.

Because the state standards include a comprehensive focus on global studies, there appear to be many natural links to Asian content in the curriculum. The state high school curriculum, in particular, affords opportunities to include content about Asia in several areas. Ninth-graders study China as part of the world history curriculum. Tenth-graders focus on world geography and contemporary issues, including required content on China. The eleventh- and twelfth-grade curriculum is devoted to American history, but teachers can also connect to Asian studies as it relates to American history. Describing the state standards, one teacher says, “I think the teachers can teach whatever they want even though we’re moving toward the standardized assessment. There’s a great deal of freedom in my school and in most schools. That’s why I say it’s personal commitment.”

“[My] experience is that most of the teachers in the program have very poor backgrounds in the study of Asia. My goal is to be intellectually stimulating, to excite them about learning. I think one of the more important qualities that make up good teachers is to become learners themselves. So I really emphasized this in the workshop. I asked all of my presenters to come as if it were a graduate seminar.” — *seminar leader*

NATURE OF NCTA SEMINARS

Because the state’s population is widely scattered, the 30-hour NCTA seminars are organized as a “back to college” residential experience. The seminar leader, ELLEN MAXWELL of the state Social Studies Association, handles the content and design of the NCTA seminar while a colleague takes care of the administrative tasks associated with it. A few NCTA participants are new teachers, but the majority of them are in mid-career.

The seminar begins in the spring with a two-day introductory session, which includes an overnight stay at a local liberal arts college. At the introductory session, teachers receive reading materials to help them to prepare for the five-day intensive Summer Institute, held at the same college about two months later. While the seminar leader focuses primarily on presenting high-quality content about Asia, she also requires teachers to create implementation plans for their classes. She stresses that these plans should not be “busywork,” but a thoughtful and reflective approach to using the material they learn in their own classrooms. In describing the seminar, teachers mentioned their appreciation for the intellectual quality of the seminar and for the chance to develop a strong rapport with one another during the Summer Institute sessions.

IMPACT OF NCTA SEMINARS

“In the beginning of the school year, we opened with a day of activities and making fish print T-shirts. Later we celebrated Chinese New Year with kites. Now you can’t miss it throughout the school. We are currently making paper cranes and peace cards. That’s not all.... We have most of the rooms decorated with Asian artifacts or themes.” — *NCTA participant*

Three teachers from this alternative high school completed the NCTA seminar: a math and social studies teacher, a humanities teachers, and a literature teacher. When they approached their principal with the idea of a schoolwide Asian studies theme, it was approved and they began to enlist the help of other teachers and community members. Working through the summer, they collaboratively planned several schoolwide activities that began on the first day of school.

Along with the activities, teachers worked on integrating the curriculum around the Asian theme. “We spent the whole summer brainstorming with the other teachers in our school and developed an integrated curriculum that we’d never had before. That’s a huge difference,” says one NCTA participant. “The art teacher has completely taken all her ideas and run them through an Asian focus. The music teacher has done the same. For the physical education classes, we have used karate.”

A humanities teacher notes, “In American history, we started with Chinese integration and it fit right in with the twentieth century.” Another teacher comments that she was able to follow her students’ lead in bringing Asian content into her American history course. “Every time we would talk about American history we would talk about micro-Asia and people coming in. They want a whole class on Asia this semester. They are amazed at the diversity — they want to explore all of Asia, from west to east.”

One teacher found that the Asian focus helped the school make stronger connections with parents and the community. “Having everybody know you are doing it brings in all these sources I never thought of. We have a small local museum in our town. When I called the director, we talked about the Asian trade in this town more than 100 years ago. She is so excited about looking in the archives to see what they have and doing an hour-long program with our kids.” Parents helped in planning, organizing, and gathering appropriate materials for the activities. An “artist-in-residence” program also brought several Asian-related themes to the school.



Potential Effect of No Child Left Behind Act

There is some concern about new state requirements being developed as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act. Some teachers worry that the national trend to develop a high-stakes accountability system may limit schools' and teachers' abilities to make Asian studies a priority within the school.

One benefit of the NCTA seminar was the provision of \$300 to each teacher to buy resources about Asia. Rather than making those purchases individually, the teachers pooled the NCTA funds. "Between the three of us, we had \$900. So we selected materials that would cut through the entire curriculum. All the things we received doubled the Asian collection in our library."



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



Key Points

- ❖ Yearlong, schoolwide focus on Asia at school for alternative learners
- ❖ State standards with comprehensive focus on global studies
- ❖ Collaborative planning for yearlong Asian theme involved NCTA teachers, non-NCTA teachers, community members, and administrative support
- ❖ No formal plans to continue an Asian focus

NEXT STEPS

There are no formal plans for a similar focus on Asia next year, but those involved expressed great satisfaction with the year's schoolwide focus on Asia. The principal says, "It was interesting how we intensely worked pieces through this operation. I think it's worked amazingly well. You always worry whether students are getting enough and whether they're getting it in enough depth... [Asia] has pervaded everything and I wouldn't have predicted that."

One teacher says, "The whole school is going to make you proud."

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 on 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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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 the **KEYS TO SUCCESS** report and this discussion of the Alternative School. 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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Sally Bond (assistant team leader)
Carol Bosserman
Sally Boyd
Kelly Chamberlain
Jill Conrad
Zaretta Hammond
Dawn Hanson Smart
Pat Jessup
Karl Johnson
Vonda Kiplinger
Carolyn Kissane
Carol Lingenfelter
Carolyn Lupe
Beverly Parsons (team leader)
Rosemary Reinhart
Kathy Wyckoff

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Case Study One – High School Series Alternative School: Teachers Organize School Year around Asian Theme

About the Case Studies Series

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

Middle School Case Studies

1. Baker Middle School: Media Specialist Promotes Asian Studies School-Wide
2. Clemens Middle School: Seminars and Study Tours Help Foster Asian Studies
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

High School Case Studies

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 Presence

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

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