

Case Study Six
Middle School Series

KAISER MIDDLE SCHOOL:
LONE TEACHER MOBILIZES
INTEREST IN ASIA

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.

KAISER MIDDLE SCHOOL: LONE TEACHER MOBILIZES INTEREST IN ASIA

VIGNETTE

Can one dedicated teacher make a difference in a school by sharing materials and organizing a China exchange program?

Kaiser Middle School social studies teacher **SHERRY RICHMAN** is known as a person who “can get it done.” Well-respected by teachers and administrators, this dedicated, hard-working teacher seeks out professional development and looks for innovative materials to help teach her students. She admits that Asian studies is a “weakness” of hers, and yet she is always trying to incorporate Asia into her classes at Kaiser Middle School. According to **ANDREW OWENS**, her principal, “When Sherry brings Asia into her class, she does it very, very cleverly (and) gets really excited.”

Sherry’s NCTA seminar experience further increased her enthusiasm for embedding Asian content in the curriculum. She actively shared resources on Asia with other teachers, who were open to using new materials as long as they were teacher- and student-friendly. But Sherry wanted to do more.

Her determination to boost interest in Asia took her in a direction she could not have envisioned for herself before the NCTA seminar. Sherry became interested in launching an exchange program with China when she came across an e-mail from a school principal in China looking for a “sister school” in the United States. After receiving the go-ahead from her principal, Sherry presented the idea to the faculty and the PTA, and talked to a district administrator about how to proceed. Then she contacted her NCTA seminar leader and the NCTA national coordinating office that works with her state. They put her in contact with NCTA’s partner program, the China Exchange Initiative, a national program with experience in school exchanges, and she formed an exchange committee in her district.



Kaiser Middle School

Kaiser serves about 1,400 students in grades six through eight.

Approximately 72 percent of the students are Caucasian, 22 percent are African American or Hispanic, and less than 2 percent are Asian.

Although the school has a significantly higher white population than the country as a whole, the school's numbers mirror the community in which Kaiser is located. In the last two years, student enrollment has seen tremendous growth. More than 50 percent of the school's students are classified as advanced and/or gifted. About 15 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunches.

The development of the exchange program has become the major focus for Sherry's work. There is excitement in the school about the program and the possibility of "giving a face" to China by making real-life connections. Sherry says that establishing the China exchange program has become "bigger than I thought it would be."

KAISER MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ITS COMMUNITY

Kaiser Middle School lies in a growing suburban community. The building — both inside and out — has the look of a new school: clean, cool gray walls with pastel-colored doors and student lockers. Inside the building, there is a fair bit of noise — student interaction — coming from the classrooms, suggesting that teaching and learning are activity-oriented and collaborative. Students consistently earn higher scores in math, reading, and writing than the state average. The school benefits from strong parental involvement and community support.

Teachers at Kaiser Middle School praise the high level of collegial and administrative support. **ANDREW OWENS**, the Kaiser Middle School principal, says "The county's goal is to be one of the top 10 school systems in the nation. And, it's my goal to be in the top 1 percent of middle schools in the country. We can't do that by just doing everything the same every day. You've got to get out and get integrated programs going." Standing fully behind this philosophy, Andrew initiated a block schedule, in which students take language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for 70 minutes every day. Further, he pushed a program that integrates language arts and geography to promote greater opportunities for student reading.

Teachers and administrators view the community and local industries as strong potential resources for supporting school programs about Asia. Many parents have traveled to Asia for business or pleasure. Several local industries are currently exporting to Asian markets, and there is strong local interest in growing trade with Asia.



NCTA Seminar

The NCTA seminar sessions are held monthly at the state university from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Many participants travel two to three hours to attend the sessions and typically arrive early and stay late to extend their time with each other. Ronald Polk's follow-up support, other than the one formal NCTA session, occurs primarily in a one-to-one environment where teachers ask questions about content, resources, and opportunities for furthering Asian studies.

NATURE OF NCTA SEMINARS

Seminar Leader **RONALD POLK** is the director of the Asian Education Program at a nearby branch of the state university. Dynamic, dedicated, and busy, he is also quite personable. Most seminar participants have a highly collegial relationship with him. Ronald describes his seminar as interactive with a “give-and-take” scenario where teachers are asked to “bring their questions and experience to the table.” He devotes about 80 percent of the seminar to content about Asia and about 20 percent to pedagogy, but the two are solidly integrated throughout. Participants’ content needs “bubble up” from the teachers themselves — both during the seminar and through e-mails between sessions. Subsequent sessions are adapted to teacher requests and areas of interest. There is a follow-up session in the fall that provides time for teachers to review lesson plans they developed during the seminar and discuss what had and had not worked well in their classrooms

IMPACT OF THE NCTA SEMINAR

“Sherry Richman is a model for how to expand Asian studies in a school — thinking how to use NCTA knowledge and develop it further.” — *seminar leader*

SHERRY RICHMAN is currently the only teacher in her school who has attended an NCTA seminar. It has inspired her to include more Asia content in her own classroom, to share her knowledge and resources with other teachers, and to build support for Asian studies in the school through developing a China exchange program.

BRINGING ASIAN STUDIES INTO CLASSROOMS

As a teacher of U.S. history, Sherry has found creative ways to incorporate Asia into her lessons. For example, in discussions of the exploration of Africa and the Americas, she introduced students to Chinese explorers from the same century. Sherry has ordered resources specifically to help eighth-grade teachers bring Asia into U.S. history lessons.

Sherry shares materials and has discussions with other teachers after school, during conference periods, and during lunch — in short, whenever there is any time or opportunity. Sherry also supplies teachers with web-based resources through a continual flow of e-mails. Her social studies colleagues know that she has additional materials about Asia that they are welcome to use. Sixth-grade teachers are the biggest users of those materials, although seventh- and eighth-grade teachers have also used some of Sherry’s NCTA materials.

As a result of her NCTA experience, Sherry has shared her knowledge at department and faculty meetings. She hopes to recruit two to three Kaiser teachers to take the NCTA seminar in the future. In addition, she has become a leader and advocate for Asian studies through her involvement on the board of directors of the state Social Studies Association.

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR ASIAN STUDIES IN THE SCHOOL

Since Sherry participated in the NCTA seminar several years ago, she has focused much of her attention on developing an exchange program as a key strategy for generating interest in Asia in her school. Major goals for the exchange program include expanding opportunities for students and educators to learn from each other; building multicultural

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understanding; identifying curriculum materials related to Asian studies; and sharing all of the experiences and materials broadly within the school, district, and community.

The process for establishing an exchange program has been under way less than a year, and is “moving very fast” — with ideas, enthusiasm, and Internet resources. A setback occurred when the Chinese school Sherry had been in touch with chose to link with another school. Undeterred, she contacted Ron, her NCTA seminar leader, and sought advice from the NCTA national coordinating site that works with her state. They, in turn, put her in touch with the China Exchange Initiative, a Freeman Foundation funded program with which NCTA collaborates. Sherry also formed an exchange committee in her district.

Exchange committee members include a science teacher, the media specialist, the technology specialist, a math teacher, and representatives from the PTA and Apple Computer. The technology resource teacher will use his technical skills for the purpose of marketing the exchange program. He plans to raise funds, to bring visibility to the program, and to create a DVD that will “make it personal” by bringing Chinese faces and classes back to Kaiser.

The media specialist expresses the same sentiments, noting, “I want to get the feel of it so I can pass it on to students.” One of the media specialist’s goals is to increase Asian content in literature courses and to promote a cross-disciplinary approach in general. The exchange committee members are interested in going to China on a fact-finding visit.

A recent informational meeting brought together teachers, administrators, community members, seminar leader RONALD POLK, and representatives from the China Exchange Initiative and one of the NCTA national coordinating sites. At the meeting, a plan was presented for identifying a sister school in China and developing an exchange program.

Representatives from the China Exchange Initiative advised that more teachers from the school should participate in the NCTA seminar to build up a committed core of teachers within the school to facilitate the exchange. Reactions ranged from exuberance over the opportunity to travel to China and bring the excitement of that experience back into the school to awareness and interest — even among those whose personal and professional commitments might keep them from participating.



Key Points

- ❖ Dynamic NCTA teacher with strong commitment to promoting the study of Asia.
- ❖ School and district leadership that is supportive of innovative, high-quality programs.
- ❖ Combination of grass-roots initiative and administrative support.
- ❖ Organizational structure (exchange committee) moves efforts beyond a single teacher.
- ❖ Potential for strong business and community support.



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

NEXT STEPS

SHERRY RICHMAN anticipates having the exchange program established within a year and to share more Asia-related materials through conferences during the coming years. The exchange committee will begin to research and assemble Asia-related instructional materials and lesson plans to make it easier for teachers who wish to incorporate more content about Asia into their teaching. Sherry would like to concentrate her efforts in language arts. The school's strong emphasis on reading, the geography-literature integrated program, and the flexibility for language arts teachers to use a variety of novels all suggest to Sherry that this might be a good place to start.

PEG LOVELL, the assistant superintendent for Supportive Services for the district, sees a future for the exchange program. She knows and respects Sherry and her principal. If a pilot program proves successful with students and faculty at Kaiser Middle School, Peg sees promise for districtwide appeal: "I think a lot of people who are die-hard social studies teachers like Sherry are looking for something new and innovative like this for their work with their kids. We have a district, a superintendent, and a board that are very open to being innovative and creative. You can't stay in the top 10 if you're just going to (do) the same thing the same way."

Kaiser's principal **ANDREW OWENS** was similarly optimistic about efforts to build support for teaching and learning about Asia — in the school, in the district, and in the state. "I'm a firm believer (that) you practice at things, and you start small. You get a community involved. And when the word gets out, then more communities are going to want it. So it's my goal to get the word out, to get everybody all fired up so that they really want to jump on the bandwagon, and eventually get out to the whole state," he says.

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Middle School teacher
Sherry Richman

For Sherry, a little idea has grown to letter writing, convincing administrators of the merits of the program, holding school and community informational meetings, developing a proposal, and presenting the plan to the school board. Implying a newfound sense of mission and leadership, Sherry says, “This is not something I’ve done before.” With Sherry’s leadership, the support of administrators, the work of the exchange committee, and the support of a national group with experience in school exchanges, the focus on Asia has gained momentum at Kaiser Middle School. In the words of one teacher, the grass-roots and administrative support is “a perfect situation” for establishing a stronger presence for Asia in the school.

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 Kaiser. 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

1. Baker Middle School: Media Specialist Promotes Asian Studies Schoolwide
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 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.