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Lesson in Action

Conducting Research: Gathering Information

Context

Students in Ms. Gill's Grade 6 social studies/ELA class are working on a research project. Each student has selected a specific topic relating to how the economic systems of different countries interact through trade.

Ms. Gill has emphasized that research is an inquiry process that involves:

- Exploring a topic to find a specific, motivating research question
- Developing and following a plan to gather information
- Organizing and analyzing the information gathered
- Sharing the knowledge with others

The students are now involved in making a plan for gathering information for their specific research questions.

Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.7 (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/6/7/) Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.8 (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/6/8/) Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

Lesson Objective

Students will develop or revise their plan for gathering information by using a range of technology tools related to their question.

Technology

- Mind mapping interactive to record brainstorming ideas (e.g., Popplet)
- Blog platform to create final presentation (e.g., Blogspot)
- Math software to analyze data (e.g., GeoGebra)
- Digital organizer to collect notes and research (e.g., Evernote)
- Videos, websites, and other data gathering tools as appropriate to each student's project

Assessment

▸ Observation of student group work

▸ Interim discussion with teacher while reviewing research portfolio

▸ Peer feedback on progress

Ms. Gill's Class in Action

Before

Ms. Gill begins the lesson by reviewing the four phases of a research project, which she has summarized in a Prezi and displayed on her interactive white board.
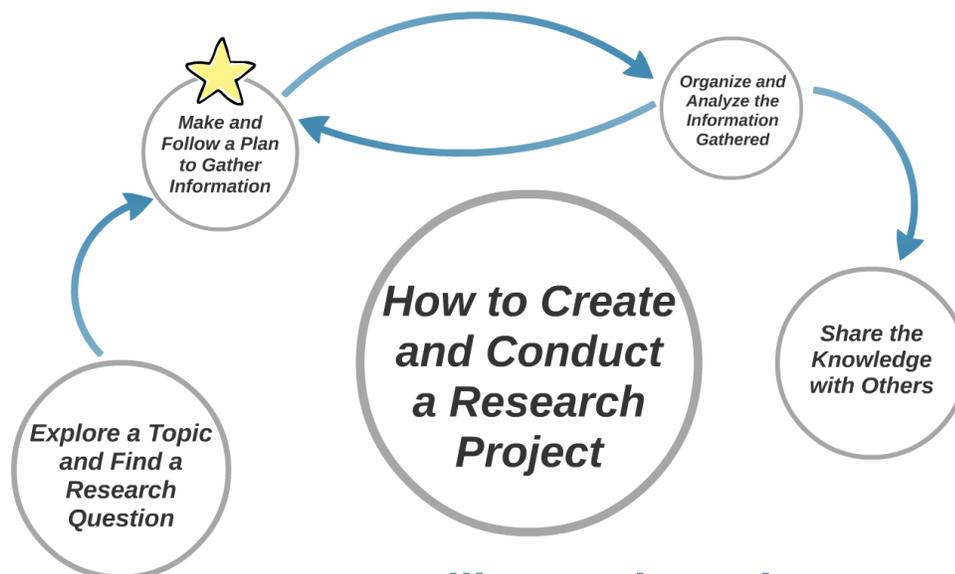
Ms. Gill's Grade 6 Class

Today, she has highlighted the second phase of research ("Make and Follow a Plan to Gather Information"). She explains, "I know that you have started to draft your plans. Today, I'll be meeting with you in small groups to review your emerging plans." Her goal is to help students think about how they can gather information using a range of technology tools.

She asks students to take out their research portfolios, where they have drafted their research plans in the form of mind maps created with the tool Popplet. Although students are creating individual research projects, she has grouped them for today's lesson based on the similarities among their questions. This way, students who are working on related topics have the opportunity to discuss their plans and revise them based on feedback from their peers and the teacher.

During

Meeting with small groups, Ms. Gill begins with Manuel, Anna, and Danny. Their research questions all focus on the geography of different trade routes. She asks students to share their information gathering plans. Manuel explains, "I have been looking for old maps, and found one of the historic Silk Road." He adds, "I want to look for other maps of the same area but different time periods." Anna and Danny are investigating how technology has affected trade in and out of specific countries. Although they are finding good online resources, they admit that they are having trouble keeping track of all of their sources.

Ms. Gill suggests that they consider using the tool, Evernote, to organize their research. They can gather multimedia content from different sources, along with their personal notes, and organize the information to correspond with their mind maps. She also makes sure to point out that Evernote can record voice notes; Danny often finds it much easier to say his thoughts aloud, rather than writing them down.

Next Ms. Gill moves on to check in on Michelle, Irsa, and Max. These students are using gross domestic product, per capita income, and other quantitative figures to compare and contrast different countries. Michelle is looking at countries in Western Europe, Irsa is looking at a few in Asia, and Max is looking at South America. She first discusses with them appropriate and reliable sources for this information. She explains, "In the United States, specific agencies, such as the Bureau of Economic Analysis, calculate these figures. There are also international organizations that collect data from different countries, such as the World Bank." The students conclude that it would make sense for them to do their data gathering together, since they all want to focus on the same figures for their different countries. Ms. Gill reminds them, "You'll need a tool that will allow you to gather your data collectively. Consider using Google Spreadsheet given its sharing properties."

Dominique, David, and Jennifer were motivated to do research on clothing and fashion—specifically the globalization of these goods. Jennifer is geographically tracing the design, creation, and sale of her favorite pair of sneakers. She has been gathering photos to illustrate the process using Flickr and already has collected quite a few pertinent images. Since she will eventually want to connect these photos to specific parts of the world, Ms. Gill talks to her about how she could make use of Google Maps or some other geographic tool.

After

To close the lesson, Ms. Gill brings together all of the students to review the different data gathering tools discussed across the groups. She asks each group to list their strategies on the interactive whiteboard. As each group adds to the list, Ms. Gill asks prompting questions, such as, "Why did you select that strategy?" and "How do you think it will help you answer your question?" She also reminds students that the school library and media specialist are resources they can use for this project.

Reflection

After school, Ms. Gill makes some notes about the research plan each student has developed. She emails the media specialist and invites him to come to class the next time they work on the projects. Besides talking about library resources, she asks him to discuss fair use and attribution. She also makes a note to talk to the math teacher about Michelle, Irsa, and Max's projects; perhaps connections can be made between math class, social studies, and ELA.