US VS. THEM

by Nicole Kirchoff

ABSTRACT:

Keeping a daily log for her school principal, a school library media specialist records her work collaborating with a high school social studies teacher as together they teach a unit of the Cold War. The three-week long project utilizes ten key ideas in information inquiry and ten guiding library principles, explaining how the Cold War project teaches these information literacy skills in a style students find interesting yet educational.

Dear Ms. Principal,

Per your instructions I've made a log of my activities over the past month. I hope it gives you an idea of what I'm trying to accomplish with our library media program.

Monday 9am– Met with the World History teacher to discuss a collaborative unit about the Cold War. *(Collaboration is the best and only way to successfully integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum. It is a snowball effect. If the teacher has a successful experience working with me, not only will she/he want to do it again, but she/he'll tell other teachers about the experience (American Association of School Librarians, 1998, p. 58).* He and his students are quickly growing tired of worksheets and end of chapter questions. I suggested looking at the Cold War academic standard and we discussed doing a research project with the Cold War and the Soviet Union that engages his students in a more meaningful way. He and I laid out a research project (a Webquest) that I think everyone will be happy with.

Wednesday 10am– Mr. Smith's World History class came to the library today. Yesterday I pulled all of the resources here (books, magazines, video clips, etc) and some excellent sites on the Internet and set up information stations throughout the media center. *(As an educator, I must provide resources for students of all learning styles, not just those of traditional print formats and sometimes using technology is the only thing that motivates a student to learn. Throughout this unit, technology plays a critical part. I use it not only as a component of teaching but also as a motivational tool (American Association of School Librarians,*

1998, p. 58). Before coming they began a K-W-L chart (What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned) about the Cold War. Mr. Smith then broke his students into groups and instructed them to record the key ideas, phrases and concepts that arose from viewing the information in the library. *(Although not every student likes the co-operative learning experience, Mr. Smith and I planned well to make sure that authentic learning is taking place and that work is fairly distributed within the group (Callison, 2002, p. 153).* The charts were collected and will be used for part of their final grade. This activity provided his students with the background knowledge to continue on in the Cold War unit.

Thursday 10am– Students met in the library again today. In their groups they looked at 5 different pictures relevant to the Cold War. They were asked questions such as:

- What is happening in the picture?
- What might have happened just prior to the picture?
- What might happen next?
- Who or what do you see in the picture?
- Who or what do you **not** see that might be important? Why?

Questioning is the backbone of any inquiry process, of course. (Callison, 2003, p. 263).

Mr. Smith and I modeled these good questions first so students could start to do the same

After looking through their pictures, students went back to the resources they had used yesterday and repeated the stations again, but this time, individually and using their newly acquired visual literacy skills. *(When teaching information skills, it's important Mr. Smith and I remember that students need to be engaged in the activity. Time and effort will be needed to make a lesson interesting from a learner's perspective (American Association of School Librarians, 1998, p. 58).*

Friday 10am- The library was booked solid so Mr. Smith's classes came in a group at a time to check out or print off primary sources relating to the Cold War. Back in his classroom, I discussed some of the copyright issues related to this type of information. Using a worksheet the students analyzed their primary sources by answering such questions as:

- What surprises or puzzles you about this item?

- What does it tell you about the individual or group who made/created this item?

- What questions do you have about it?

- Where might you find answers to your new questions?

The worksheets were collected and will go with the final grade.

Monday 10am-It was the Internet today. A checklist was passed out for students to use to assess the quality and quantity of websites. We looked at two sites about our town. One was a personal web page; the town's Chamber of Commerce created the other. Using the checklist, the students could see how a website could or could not have relevant data. Their task was to find one worthwhile and not-so-worthwhile site about the Cold War. These checklists were collected and will be part of the final grade. Also, Mr. Smith and I passed out the process rubric that breaks down how the students will be graded throughout this unit. An additional rubric will be given for the final product. *(Rubrics are used to provide classification of performances. In this instance, two different performances are being critiqued—the inquiry process and the final product (Callison, 2003, 119).*

Tuesday 10am-Finally, the Webquest began today! Their mission was to determine what might have been done to better transition the world out of the Cold War. Also, they had to evaluate how the Cold War still affects the humanity today. *(There are multiple perspectives to these questions and when prompted by the question in the Webquest, the students will feel personal ownership of the problem as they make decisions, infer, and attempt to answer the question and solve the problem (Callison, 2003, 143).* The end product will be a media rich Word document sent to the United Nations. A link to the final product rubric was included so students knew exactly what would be expected of them. They were once again put into their groups and tasks for each member were assigned. Roles included *Historian* (obtaining a historical context of the Cold War), *Multimedia Archivist* (finding pictures, video and audio information of the Cold War on the Internet from the past and present), and *Journalist* (learning about the Cold War effects in today's society). Tasks were assigned based on reading abilities. Those that had the lowest abilities were archivists. *(Students who struggle to read will have the same problems reading from a computer screen. I want to give these students the opportunity to contribute something substantial to their group while at the same time have them use the same information literacy skills of accessing and evaluation information (American Association of School Librarians, 1998, p. 58).* Groups will then work individually to complete their portion of the project. Mr. Smith and I supervised the class and answered questions when the need arose. We also reiterated to students that they have recently acquired the skills necessary to evaluate photos and documents. As a result, these resources should also be used. For now, students are using sites to that are incorporated into the Webquest, ones that I've chosen. Before beginning I gave them a "Reflection Log". Not only were they to take notes on it but also, on the other side of the paper, was an area for personal reflection. Students were to ask themselves questions like:

- What does this information mean to me?

- Does this agree or disagree with what I already know?

- Where might I find out more about this information?

The "Reflection Logs" will be glanced over each day of research by Mr. Smith or myself to assess the quality and quantity of each student's progress.

Wednesday 10am-About half way through the period, we allowed the students to start finding their own web information. First, I explained how to hunt for information on a search engine. Then, using their website evaluative checklist from a couple of days ago, the students began searching for their own sites on the Cold War.

Thursday 10am-This was the last day for students to use the computer lab. Once again they were looking for their own information. Mr. Smith and I conferenced with each group, making sure they were focused and on topic. So far, most of the students are finding what they need. The more tech-savvy group mates helped the few that were having problems.

Friday 10am-Back in the library. The students came in to use the resources the media center held, but I had reshelved all the Cold War materials about a week ago. That was ok though, I wanted the students to use the automated catalog to find the information they needed. Before the period was over, however, we pulled the groups together and had them write a paragraph of how successful or unsuccessful they had been finding and evaluating information and why. Monday, Mr. Smith and I will begin helping them with the second phase of the project.

Monday 10am-In the classroom today, Mr. Smith and I talked about the importance of graphic organizers (especially webbing) when wanting to bring meaning out of information overflow and sort out misinformation and irrelevant information. Each student got out a piece of paper. Students now had a sizeable amount of background knowledge of the Cold War and using their notes from their "Reflection Logs," they designed a graphic organizing web that incorporated our two essential questions.

- What might have been done to better transition the world out of the Cold War?
- How does the Cold War still affect the world today?

Tuesday 10am-Mr. Smith and I met during his prep this morning to finalize our plans for the final project. In class today, his students finished their webbing and began brainstorming in groups about what they wanted to include in their UN documents.

Wednesday 10am-Students came to the library today to use the computer production lab. Before beginning, Mr. Smith and I again conferenced with each group, asking what they would communicate and how they'd accomplish that their document. After the conferencing session, groups began constructing their documents. *(In their final project, students elaborate their findings with details and produce something that is unique to their experiences (Callison, 2003, p. 159).*

Thursday 10am-Talk about busy! While Mr. Smith was helping a student insert an audio clip I was showing a group how to use the scanners. It was like that all period! However, by the end of the period the final projects had begun to take shape. We will give them two more days to work in class on their projects.

Tuesday 10am-The projects were presented and turned in today.

Wednesday 8am-Graded the projects with Mr. Smith this morning. In addition the project, we also graded the checklists, worksheets, responses, etc. that we had collected from the students throughout this process. Overall, the students did very well. It'll be interesting to watch them actually email them to the UN.

10am-The groups composed a brief email discussing their project goals before attaching their documents to the UN. *(Their ability to send their final project out into the world reinforces the idea that what they learn or create is linked to a bigger world the extends beyond the walls of the school (American Association of School Librarians, 1998, p. 58).* Then the class evaluated the entire research process, both individually and as groups using the process rubric Mr. Smith and I developed at the beginning of the unit. We also asked them:

- How could this information apply to other experiences or classes?
- What went well?
- What didn't go well?
- What needed improvement?

(Throughout the unit, Mr. Smith and I constantly show how the unit and the lessons surrounding it are relevant. We also need to build student confidence in their information seeking abilities so they may succeed at the tasks placed before them (Callison, 2003, p. 241).

Thursday 8am-While it was still fresh in our minds, Mr. Smith and I evaluated the research process and project from many different perspectives—as teachers, as students, as librarians. What could we have done better? What worked well? What could be eliminated or changed for next year? Would we do it again? Were our overall objectives (the academic standard) satisfied? Yes, we'll do it again. The work was hard sometimes, but it was well worth it.

Well, there you go. As you can see, the process and project took over three weeks to complete. I'm sure if you ask Mr. Smith's students they would be more than happy to explain their Cold War unit to you. Almost all of them felt that not only had they gained a greater understanding of the Cold War, but that they had also acquired the tools necessary to become successful users of information.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Library Lady

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