Introduction

Travel Through Time and Culture is the result of a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is a Kindergarten through sixth grade social studies curriculum that was written by the staff of Valley View Alternative Elementary with the help of many partnerships. The history and education departments at Seattle Pacific University, the World Affairs Council, the Museum of History and Industry, the King County Libraries and many others helped the teachers of Valley View receive training in technology, curriculum design, research skills, use of primary sources, and historical content through field experience. One year ago, in the spring of 1999, the staff of Valley View revised and clarified the school's philosophy. Major components of the philosophy include an emphasis on studying the humanities, learning through a field-based structure, and incorporating technology into the learning environment. *Travel Through Time and Culture* is a curriculum designed to teach these components though social studies.

Valley View is a small K-6 school in Highline School District. It is located in SeaTac, Washington, a community on the outskirts of Seattle. The school has been an alternative school since it began in 1969. It has a unique educational structure that allows students of different classes and grade levels to mix with each other and interact with more than one teacher throughout the day. Students have two separate classes daily, a morning language arts block and an afternoon math and science block. The 1999-2000 school year was the first in which a twice-weekly elective block was used for teaching the humanities. Some of the classes offered at this time are art, music, history, social studies, foreign language, theater and dance. Students found themselves in a third grouping of students, placed among other students of different grades who share a common interest. The philosophical reason for this structure is to have all teachers serve as teachers to all kids. The result is a school in which the students know all the teachers and the students, regardless of their age. It is a school community where the students are interested and involved in what each other is learning.

Field-Based Learning

Field-based learning plays an integral role in these units. The Valley View staff embraced this learning strategy for many reasons. The most important is the high quality of learning. Students love to go on field trips. When structured well, students can be so engaged that they forget they are learning. This high level of interest also makes it ideal for diverse learners. Field-based learning expands the walls of the classroom by demonstrating to students how to learn from the environment. It models to students that "learning" does not *only* take place at school during school hours. Students of field-based learning are trained to see the daily chore of getting around the community, or visiting sites near or far from home, as learning opportunities.

Field-based learning encourages students to be critical thinkers. They become "detectives" of history as they examine and interpret the landscape, using it as primary source material. Students taught to interpret history through this type of experiential learning have the skills to become independent learners who can analyze, synthesize and

evaluate history. They need not be spoon-fed history but can actively seek it out in their daily encounters with the world around them.

This strategy also helps to foster an appreciation of the community in which students live. Students can look to their own communities to learn about major events in history, such as changes in technology or the impact of ideas. All too often students of history see history as involving "other" people in a setting too far removed from what they know. *What* they know, however, is a result of events and changes in history.

Des Moines Memorial Drive in the Highline Community illustrates how students can interpret history from a field site. American Elm trees were planted along 11 miles of Des Moines Memorial Drive to commemorate Highline community members who fought and died in World War I. The changing needs of the community required that many of these trees be removed. As the community grew and relied more heavily on getting around by car and using telephones and other electrical appliances, the road needed widening. We can use this site to help us understand what life was like after World War I by making inferences about the pace of the community, the communication technology and size of the population.

History is all around us. We must teach students the skills of becoming "detectives of history." By reading the landscape we learn more about who we are, how we came to be and where we fit in with the rest of the world.

How We Make Field Trips Possible

Valley View has been very fortunate to take classes on field trips. The PTSA pays for two field trips per year, or $15 per student. We cut costs by asking parents to drive, filling a bus with more than one class for a cross-age field trip and fundraising.

Valley View traditionally involves students in raising funds. They write letters to local businesses, sell pop and baked goods at school functions and organize fundraisers held at recess. Students bring in candy, trading cards and old toys. They offer face paintings and telegrams to be delivered to anyone in the school. The money raised from these fundraisers makes a difference in offsetting the cost of the field trip. Students learn economics, marketing and business skills and are highly invested in the field trip.

Technology Through the Times

Our role as educators, in teaching students to become independent, careful thinkers, prepared with skills to succeed in our society, requires that we also make them computer literate. A technology skills guide developed by the Shoreline School District is included in this unit. It recommends skills for students of k-3 and 4-6 to master. We used this guide to determine the types of technology projects students of different grade levels should be asked to do.

In addition to the computer skills we feel our students should have, we also used

technology as a theme for learning history. Ideas and events throughout history can be traced back to changes in technology. The movement of people throughout time is the result of changes in transportation technology. The transition from hunting and gathering to farming is the result of agricultural technology. The wars groups fought were made possible with technology in warfare. And the removal of American Elms along Des Moines Memorial Drive came about because of changes in technology in automobiles, telephones and household appliances.

When we speak of technology in this curriculum, we are not limiting ourselves to just computers and the internet. We are looking at *Technology through the Times*. Any way that humans control and manipulate the natural environment to satisfy their needs and goals is technology. This definition includes any tool used to accomplish a task such as a pencil, journal, siren, map, railroad spike, highway, etc.

We want our students to think critically about the technology they use, considering both advantages and disadvantages. As our students learn how to navigate the internet, chat with students in Japan and produce multimedia projects, it is important we give them opportunities to reflect on where technology has been and how it has impacted societies in the past. Students can then predict where it might take us in the future.

Curriculum Design

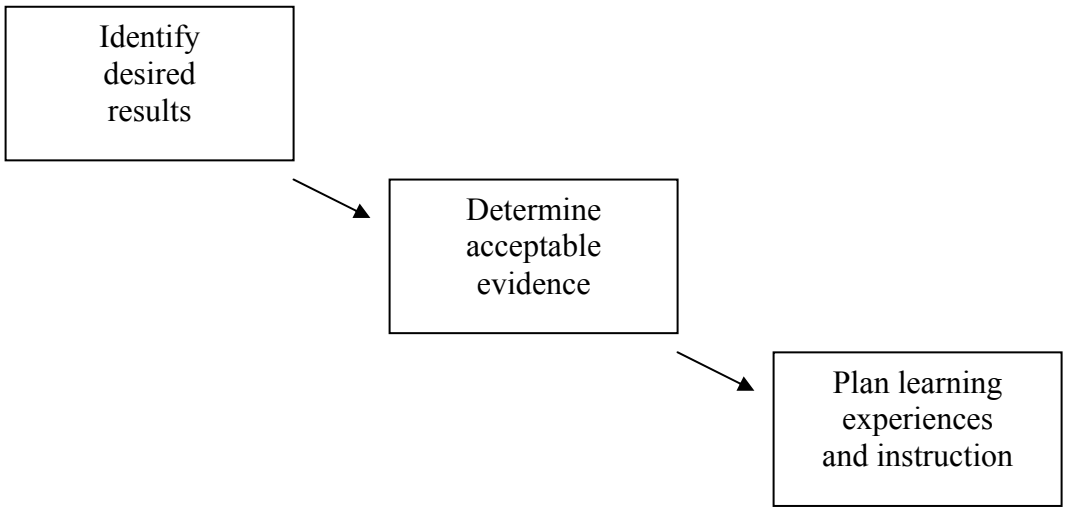
The design of the curriculum follows a template from Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's text, *Understanding by Design.* It is called "Backward Design" because as units are created, the last step is considering the individual lessons and activities. We begin by identifying the big ideas we want students to learn. These, along with the Essential Academic Learning Requirements, are listed under *Desired Academic Results* in the curriculum. Next, we think of the evidence a student could produce that would demonstrate his/her understanding. This makes up the assessment piece. The final step is planning the learning experiences and instruction that will give students the knowledge and skills to demonstrate their understanding of the learning goals.

The essential and unit questions help to focus the unit. They are intended to be used throughout the unit to evoke discussion, critical thinking and raise additional questions. Great emphasis is placed on the use of questions in this design because, "Important ideas must be questioned and verified if they are to be understood. One might say that content that hasn't been questioned is like courtroom claims that are never examined, leading to a hodgepodge of opinions and beliefs instead of to knowledge."[1] We chose units of study that fit the four criteria addressed in *Understanding by Design.* That is, they are enduring; they represent big ideas that have enduring value beyond the classroom. They are at the heart of the discipline and involve *doing* the subject. The topics are in need uncoverage: "A Curriculum designed to develop understanding would uncover complex, abstract, and counterintuitive ideas by involving students in active questioning, practice

[1] Ibid. P. 27.

trying out ideas, and rethinking what they thought they knew."[2] And lastly, they offer potential for engaging students.

Stages in the Backward Design Process[3]



Curriculum Overview

The *Travel Through Time and Culture* curriculum is intended to take students who enter Valley View at the kindergarten level on a trip, "traveling through time and culture" until they graduate from Valley View in the 6th grade. While the curriculum allows students to make several "stops" along the way, it is not a complete tour of the world nor is it a complete social studies curriculum for a K-6 school. The units themselves have not been tested in the classroom and will more than likely need some adjusting. Teachers from other schools can use as much or as little as they see fit in their particular educational setting. The focus at the primary grades is to learn about the community. As students move up the grades the geographic area for "traveling" expands. In the 3rd and 4th grades students learn about their state and in the 5th and 6th grades students explore western United States with Lewis and Clarke and learn about their role in the Pacific Rim.

All international travelers need a passport for passing through the borders of countries, and students on Valley View's excursions will be no exception. They will be issued a "passport" when they begin school, complete with photograph. This will serve as a fun way to track where students have been. Our travel theme is a loose one that is all inclusive of the various forms of travel. Not only does it include the travel you might do in a bus or car, but it also includes "virtual travel." A student could take a virtual field trip on the internet when viewing such things like museum collections or be on an adventure when reading the kind of book you simply can't put down.

As students *travel* through time and culture, stamping their passports along the way, they

[2] Ibid. P. 21.
[3] Wiggins, Grant and McTighe, Hay. *Understanding by Design.* Alexandria, VA. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 1998. P. 9.

will also keep a journal or scrap book. Students will write about their "travels" and include ephemera, photographs, news clippings, etc. to personalize their journey and remember their experiences years later. This journal will help them reflect on their travels as they prepare a final 6th grade project before graduating. The students will choose projects with guidance from his/her teacher. Projects will be presented to the school community in a fair modeled after the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition held in 1907. This historical event was legislated by the state government to promote Washington as the porthole to Pacific Rim trade and to Alaskan gold. Inventors and people who played a major role in changing the geographic landscape with canals and railroads were invited to attend to give Washington the image of a futuristic community. Our study of social studies through technology makes this an easy connection and a fun way to relive history.