

Neighborhood

A Multicultural Simulation

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Pre-service teachers need a variety of experiences with students, in addition to student teaching. And busy classroom teachers can always use some assistance.

Figuring out workable ways to accomplish both of these goals can be difficult. However, the potential re-

wards are great. Pre-service teachers get to engage in activities

that help them use the knowledge and skills they learn in methods courses, and experienced teachers can pass along their wisdom and, at the same time, gain new ideas from the pre-service teachers.

This article describes a collaborative experience of a group of pre-service teachers who practiced the knowledge and skills they had gained in a social-studies methods course by working with an experienced teacher and her students. It is the authors' hope that this experience will inspire readers to be-

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come involved in a similar experience as either a classroom teacher or teacher educator.

The Simulation Context

As part of a social-studies methods course for pre-service elementary teachers taught by one of the authors of this article, an eight-week collaboration was scheduled between his students and a group of 6th-graders.¹

The collaboration focused on a simulation called *Neighborhood* developed by Interact Simulations² in which “students simulate a multicultural neighborhood where families from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds unite in their respect for each other and in their desire to create a pluralistic neighborhood.”³ The simulation enables the students to acquire knowledge, work on their thinking skills (both creative and critical), examine their attitudes and stereotypes, and participate in a cooperative learning environment. The simulation incorporates both language arts and social studies.

In the area of language arts, students learn about world literature, study multicultural vocabulary and words from various cultures, and acquire the skills to compare and contrast basic elements of specific cultures. They work on higher-level thinking skills (analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating) and creativity (imagining, role playing, creative writing). Through the simulation, students come to appreciate the diversity in many neighborhoods and learn new and different ways of thinking. They also come to understand how beliefs affect behavior and how people can have different cultural practices yet remain united by a commitment to freedom, justice, and tolerance.

How *Neighborhood* Works

The *Neighborhood* simulation occurs over a four-week period, with activities taking place each day. Students are organized into six “families” of differing ethnic backgrounds—African-American, Hispanic-American, Jewish-American, Asian-American, Native American, and Irish-American. Each

“family” works together as a cooperative learning group to complete the group’s assignments, which deal with the ethnic background of the “family”—famous people from that ethnic group, various cultural projects, holiday celebrations, literature assignments, and the effects of discrimination and stereotyping.

The cultural projects were among the favorite activities of the 6th-grade students and pre-service teachers. The cultural projects are divided into three areas—folk tales and legends, music and song, and cultural language. After working in pairs to complete their assignments, the students shared information with their “family” members and eventually with the whole class.⁴

The culminating experience of the simulation was a street fair or festival when the “families” shared what they had learned during the simulation and got to experience other cultures.

Parents/guardians and other relatives helped organize and work on the fair, which in-

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cluded food, games, music, and other activities. For that day, the classroom was transformed into a neighborhood with booths displaying the artifacts created by the “families” during the simulation, along with ethnic foods and music. (Parents, other relatives, and church members were asked to assist.) A variety of guests were invited to the street

fair—parents/guardians, relatives, other classrooms in the school, administrators, and so on.

Pre-Service Teachers and 6th-Graders Collaborate

Twenty-four pre-service teachers and 32 6th-grade students collaborated in the au-

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thors' project. The pre-service teachers worked on the simulation during their social-studies methods course, while the 6th-graders participated during their language arts and social-studies class times. Although the program was designed for a four-week period, we felt an eight-week period was needed to ensure adequate time for everyone to complete the assignments and prepare for

the street fair.

The pre-service teachers were also divided into six "families," making two "families" for each ethnic group. As the 6th-graders worked on assignments, the pre-service teachers did the same, sharing the work they completed.

Each student was assigned to report on a famous person. The in-service teachers pro-

vided feedback and editing suggestions and then returned the reports to the students for revision. Another example of sharing was the use of various reading materials and books. During the simulation, each "family" (both pre-service teachers and 6th-graders) read a literature book dealing with the group of which they were a part. The pre-service teachers developed questions and activities based on the books (dealing with the plot, characters, et cetera). The 6th-graders answered the questions, completed the activities, and submitted their work for grading by the pre-service teachers.

Although the two groups corresponded in writing many times during the simulation, they did not meet until the street fair. Organizing the street fair took two weeks. The pre-service teachers brought food and planned

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games. The 6th-graders also brought food, decorated their classroom, and created booths (desks placed together with signs depicting their ethnic group) where they could display their artifacts and serve the food.

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On the day of the street fair, the pre-service and 6th-grade “families” met. They organized their booths and set up the games (most were played outside the classroom). During the hour-and-a-half street fair, about 130 students from other classrooms, along with relatives, teachers, and school administrators, participated in the activities and enjoyed the food!

Conclusion

This collaborative adventure produced a variety of invaluable experiences for both the pre-service teachers and the 6th-graders. The pre-service teachers had the opportunity to put theory into practice in a real-world context with an experienced classroom teacher and her students and to apply their skills and knowledge. The classroom teacher was able to provide her students with an exciting learning experience with the help of an eager group of pre-service teachers.

Because of its success, the collaboration will take place again. This time, it will incorporate a technology component. The Internet, especially E-mail, will allow the two groups to have more immediate and ongoing contact, rather than only once a week, which will strengthen the collaboration and make the experience an even more valuable learning

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Dr. Timothy D. Green, the coordinator for this special issue on collaboration, is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education at California State University Fullerton. His specialties are technology integration, multimedia development, curriculum development, and pedagogy. He maintains regular contact with K-12 classrooms by being involved in collaborative efforts such as the one de-

scribed in this article and by volunteer teaching. **Jody Peerless** is a 6th-grade teacher at Washington Middle School in La Habra, California. Her specialties are science education and English as a Second Language.

REFERENCES

1. Although this collaboration took place with 6th-graders, we believe it could be modified and used with any grade level in K-12.
2. Interact Simulations can be found on the Web at <http://www.interact-simulations.com/> or they can be reached at (800) 359-0961.
3. Taken from the *Neighborhood* simulation teacher packet.
4. *Neighborhood* costs \$43; it comes with a teacher packet and student materials.