Instructional Dream Project

By: Laura Stokes

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| Grade Level | First Grade |
| Unit of Study | Pilgrims |
| Technology | Wiki Space  Websites:   * Vocabulary memorization game * Interactive research which includes audio * Informational sites   Listening center  Microsoft word (optional) |
| Goals | Long term impact on what they are learning  (ability to retain the information)  Parent/ family involvement  More engagement based on the technology used |
| Duration | The unit lasts for 3 weeks, and most of the activities are to enhance the learning |

For my instructional dream, I wanted to find a way to use the Internet and technology tools to help me create themed units for my kids. I teach first grade, and in my experience, I have found that when you are able to cross the curriculum and tie everything together based on a common theme, the children really seem to respond in a positive way. They are able to enjoy their learning and actually retain what they are learning. In this day and age, using technology to do this is only appropriate since many of our students are growing up in homes where technology is one of the main aspects of their lives. Whether it is through video games, computer programs or some other means, we can all agree that children today have much more experience with technology that any of us had growing up. With that being said, I am setting out to find ways to incorporate this main component of their lives into their everyday learning.

I have been thinking about this project since the beginning of the course and one of the main units I wanted to use as my guinea pig was the Pilgrims. During the month of November, I go into great detail about the entire story of the Pilgrims from the start right up until today and what we have because of them. Since I do teach first grade, I had to keep this in mind when looking into the type of technology that I could use. I started off by thinking about ways that I could create some type of a common ground that they could access from home. There is so much information that they are exposed to verbally in the classroom and I wanted to find a way to allow them to involve their families at home. While children are little sponges, they hear so much, that I can’t expect them to remember everything when they go home. They create a project that they take home at the end of the unit but that is something that they take home at the very end. I wanted them to be able to involve their families throughout their learning, not just at the end.

One way I thought of was to create a Wiki. The Richardson book really made me want to find someway to incorporate this concept into my classroom. I know there are classes that have a wiki space that they use weekly, and that too is a goal I will be attempting, but this was a great way to begin doing it on a smaller scale. In doing this, I could create pages on the wiki for each pocket of our book that we create. On the page it would have the vocabulary for that pocket, important information that they have learned, as well as any websites or links that we have used in the classroom. This would allow them to access the link from the Wiki so that they could share what they have learned with their families. I created a quick example to a Wiki that I created for this reason. I wanted to be able to show my example, however, I would find ways to make it more appealing. Here is a link to the Wiki that I created:

<https://stokes123.wikispaces.com/>

On the Wiki space, there are also places where they could make discussion posts. This is a great way for kids and parents to work together to share their thoughts about the project. The parents can let me know their opinions, or they can simply post things that they have discussed with their kids. For each pocket, I posted a sample question that they could answer, or they could choose to simply post a comment about the pocket, not necessarily answering any question. The idea is allowing them a chance to again take control of their learning, and to involve their families in the process! That may seem a little advanced for first grade, but I really think that with how excited they get about this unit, and with the help of their families, they would be able to actively participate in such discussions, and learn some things in the process.

Aside from the home aspect and using a Wiki space, I would love to use some of the links on it in centers. As part of my dream, I would have at least 5 computers in my classroom with Internet access that my students could use. This would allow me a chance to set up a center that was strictly computer based. One of the days I would use the following website:

<http://www.scholastic.com/scholastic_thanksgiving/voyage/>

On this site, there are so many different options that the children could do. It would give them a chance to use a student based learning setting because there wouldn’t necessarily be an activity that the children would do, aside from exploring the things the site has to offer. They would be able to use headphones to listen to different things, while learning facts about whatever event they were clicking on. It would allow for my students who are not able to read fluently to still be getting something out of it, while allowing my more advanced students a chance to research more, not just listen to the audio portion. It is differentiated simply from what it has to offer. The bottom of the page offers a timeline where they are able to click on events in chronological order to hear how they happened and what were significant parts in the Pilgrims’ lives when it came to starting a new life.

On that same scholastic website, there is also a place that you can click on that says the daily life. On that link there is a great activity where the students can actually compare and contrast the lives of the Pilgrims with the lives of the Wompanoag Indians. It is great because it has pictures side by side of both so they are able to see the difference right away. They have the option to compare and contrast their homes, clothing, food, chores, school, and games. An extension would be able to take it farther and have them compare and contrast the two with their own lives today. The best thing about this website is that it offers the chance for the students to listen to the text. This is great for those lower students who aren’t able to read it to themselves just yet, while allowing those who would like to read it alone do so. Here is the link t that part of the site:

<http://www.scholastic.com/scholastic_thanksgiving/daily_life/>

While I was looking through the vast array of free resources available I came across a flashcard website that could also be used in my technology center. This website allows you to type in vocabulary words, and their definitions. Then it offers you games to play to help you learn the words. I typed in some of the vocabulary words that they learn throughout the unit and looked at some of the games. A few of them seem to be a little higher than first grade, but there was one that I found that was actually a voice recognition game where they could say the words and definitions to try and match them up. This would be great because my lower students would also be able to participate in the game and they would be able to study and learn their words as well. My more advanced kids could use the voice game, but they could also experiment with one of the more difficult games, while their objective to learn the words would stay the same, it would just challenge them more. I think it offers a fun way for the students to learn the vocabulary for the unit while incorporating technology at the same time! Here is a link to the site that I found:

<http://quizlet.com/3745464/vscatter/>

To continue with the center ideas, I thought it would be fun to have a listening center. I was looking online and one of the books I love to read with my students is called *Thanksgiving on Thursday*. It is a Magic Tree House book. I looked online and on Amazon I found a place for you to purchase the audio of the book. I thought this would be great, and I could have them listen to a chapter at the listening center each day at that center. I could have them write their favorite part after they listen, or I could have them take a small comprehension test on what they have heard. I think the writing would allow each child to work at their own level, but also giving those who wanted to expand more a chance to do so. Here is a link to the site that offered the audio portion of the book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Thanksgiving-Thursday-Magic-Tree-House/dp/0375806156>

Another idea I had was to allow my students a chance to use the computer lab and to research a specific job. One of the pockets that they create is called Working in Plymouth Colony. In this pocket, they learn about all of the different jobs that the Pilgrims had. There is a website that I came across that isn’t Plymouth Colony exactly, but it offers a chance for you to click on specific jobs, see pictures, hear audio and read facts about the particular jobs that they did have. This would be great because it would again allow them to actively participate in their learning by exploring as much or as little as they are capable of doing. It too has audio, so my lower students would still be able to learn something by listening to the audio, and my more advanced students would be able to read more information and facts on their own. After that, I would be able to have them do a writing assignment, where they take what they have found and tell me which job they would choose to have and why. From the site, they should be able to give me details about their job and why it interested them. Depending on the capability of the class (every class is different) I could decide if I want to have them use Microsoft Word to type up the assignment and practice using a program, or I could have them write it out. Typing it for first grade might take quite a long time, but it is always a possibility. Here is a link to the site that I would use:

<http://www.history.org/Almanack/life/trades/tradehdr.cfm>

I also came up with yet another idea that my students would be able to participate in the computer lab on. This could be a project that they do both in the lab, and perhaps at home which would again allow them to involve their families in their learning process. I thought it would be really interesting to learn about some of the actual passengers from the Mayflower. I came across a website that had a list of the passengers, and gave a brief biography on each of them when you click on their names. I thought the students could work in partners, or individually and choose a passenger that they want to research. They would figure out three interesting things about that person and write it up. Then we could create a classroom book on some of the passengers that were on the actual Mayflower. In doing this, I think that it would allow the voyage to become more meaningful to the students to learn about the actual people that traveled versus just telling them about a group of them who traveled. I added that website to my wiki space, but here is the link to the site also.

<http://www.mayflowerhistory.com/Passengers/passengers.php>

In order to stick with my dream of incorporating all subject areas within the theme, I needed to locate something for math. I thought it would be great to use a Smart Board and work on some of the math skills that my students need. I found a great Smart Board program that incorporates addition and subtraction word problems, as well as time. This is a great activity to do everyday things in a much more engaging and exciting way. Here is the link for the site that has the program I would use:

<http://exchange.smarttech.com/details.html?id=041bad34f592735040ff6af52c3533f97f9b0fcb966a9d6def16015a6844bfc9>

Not only could I use that program, but I could also create my own and allow my students a chance to do the problems as they appear on the Smart Board. If you have ever seen the fun ways that these interactive boards work, you know how entertaining you can make something as simple as revealing the correct answer. My students love this so it would be very entertaining for them, and they would still be learning at the same time!

Overall, I know that my dream is something that is extremely possible, and I have tried to incorporate some of the things that I wrote about into the class, but unfortunately with the constraints that I have at the school I teach at, I am not able to do everything. I know that it would make the learning so much more meaningful for my kids if they were able to help take an active role in their learning while exploring and experimenting with different types of technology. Most of my students have access to computers at home, but some don’t, so this would give them a chance to experience the amazing things that computers have to offer us.