

## WhatsApp Doc? Using COINs in class.

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Is it possible to use social media and emerging technology to address social challenges? Earlier this year a group of students from Michigan State University worked along with Three Sisters Education Fund, a community-based organization in Benin, West Africa to create a series of 7 bilingual storybooks based on folktales. Over the course of one semester the two groups communicated via WhatsApp to fill a gap in local language books. We used technology including WhatsApp, Google Drive, Bloom software, and a Wordpress site to collaborate on the project. Before creating the books, both sides took turns asking and answering questions about their daily lives and sharing the answers through text, photo, video, and audio messages. The final result was the self-publication of 7 books in Fongbe, Goun, and Mahi languages along with French or English as a second language. The students at Michigan State also created an accompanying website to introduce the storytellers and the context of the stories for an English-speaking audience. All photos and illustrations were created in Benin, edited in the US, and routed back to Benin where our partners had final editing approval. Through this project students were able to apply theory while utilizing smartphone technology that they typically use in their everyday lives. In addition, we used the text of the stories to analyze thematic issues related to globalization and justice.

Many of the participants in this project in Benin do not have access to computers, nor do they have books in the home outside of school notebooks. Through the use of technology available on smartphones they were able to recreate the folktales told by their elders and make physical books that reflect their language, culture, and context. The project also impacted the MSU students who expressed afterwards that it was similar to a study abroad program without the physical travel. Smartphone technology coupled with bilingual (and trilingual) classmates and colleagues were essential tools in the success of this COIN. The collection of 7 books was made available to community members in Benin through a donation made by Veterans for Peace Chapter 93 in Ann Arbor, MI. We intend to conduct a post-project ethnographic impact assessment in Benin later this year in cooperation with Three Sisters Education Fund and the Centre Beninois des Langues Etrangeres.

(We would like to present this research in progress using a Pecha Kucha format. If accepted, Marcy O'Neil will present the project, 2 students who worked on the project at Michigan State will present their experiences and Sandrine Chikou and Judith Vlafonou from Benin will present theirs via pre-recorded video if this is acceptable to the committee.)