

## **The Media Center: School-Wide, Multi-Disciplinary Portfolios**

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Accessing, processing, evaluating and communicating information is a concept familiar to media specialists working to integrate information literacy in student learning. As a middle level Minnesota State graduation standard, the concept acquires a heightened level of importance. Titled Resource Management, the standard states:

A student shall use appropriate technology to access, evaluate, and organize information and to produce products by:

- (1) gathering and evaluating information from electronic sources;
- (2) applying appropriate technology processes to an identified need or problem;
- (3) producing products and selecting language, format, and graphics appropriate for purpose and audience by using word processing, graphics, multimedia, spreadsheets, and database; and
- (4) maintaining, using, or creating a technological system.

With a high degree of information technology integrated throughout the curriculum in our 1000 student middle school, the challenge was to build on existing curricular strengths using available resources. High priority was placed on not teaching the standard in isolation. We also wanted to avoid creating extra work for teachers who were already overwhelmed with graduation standards and performance packages, the teaching activities that correspond with each standard. The natural choice, a decision made by a building level graduation standards implementation team, was to implement the standard in a cross-curricular and cross grade-level manner. This would also students to develop skills in a gradual, authentic, and integrated way. As school media specialist I happily accepted the task of coordinating curriculum writing, staff development, scheduling, implementation, and curriculum revisions. The standard became known as the Capstone Project.

Representatives from four subject areas in grades six - eight were selected to be the writing team; summer curriculum writing monies were allotted to develop a "plan of attack" and develop the Capstone project. Our first job was to divide the standard into manageable sub-tasks; each task was assigned to a grade and curriculum area as shown in the standard task list chart.

### Standard Task List

1. Students will produce and save an annotated bibliography on a geographic area (Sixth Grade Social Studies)
2. Students will produce and save a word processing document. (Sixth Grade Language Arts )
3. Students will produce and save a digitized self-image. (Eighth Grade Industrial Technology)
4. Students will produce and save a multimedia project. (Eighth Grade Industrial Technology)
5. Students will produce and save a spreadsheet: chart/graph (Sixth Grade Science)
6. Students will produce and save a database,(Seventh Grade Social Studies)
7. Students will practice appropriate keyboarding techniques(Sixth Grade Industrial Technology)

Task 2, also satisfies part of a sixth grade language arts graduation standard; task 5, creating a chart and graph, doubles as part of a sixth grade science standard. Only task 6, completing a database, was developed as a completely new activity. The final product is the Capstone portfolio, a Hyperstudio multimedia culmination of all tasks combined with new and previously acquired expand on multimedia skills.

Our initial curriculum and graduation standard package writing was summer 1998. I worked with teachers representing the curricular areas responsible for implementing each task. Tasks 1 and 6 required the most attention; other tasks were partially established and needed only fine-tuning and coordination within the Capstone project. The writing and planning sessions were opportunities for meaningful discussion about information literacy, a time to share the national information literacy standards and explain how they complemented the graduation standard. As one teacher noted, "this makes so much sense; the kids truly need this! "

Writing the curriculum to meet the prescribed standard the district format was challenging. Information literacy does not always fit a neat and tidy package; we had to limit what we wanted to do to meet the specifics of the standard and could integrate as much information literacy as I would have liked. We also had to conform to district guidelines for how the curriculum would physically look on paper, again not always a neat and tidy job.

Accessing information was written as a learning activity that would coincide with part of media center orientation for new sixth grade students. Because sixth grade students complete many resource-based activities in social studies it made sense to integrate that task with sixth grade geography. We chose to include only core resources--the online catalog, an online encyclopedia, and online magazine database in the instruction and developed forms for recording resources accessed. The dilemma was what to develop for a product; we settled a bibliography that eventually became the norm for other bibliographies.

Hoping to develop ownership in teaching information literacy and empower teachers with a greater knowledge of available resources, we planned to have teachers present the resources to the students in the classroom before they came to the media center. Students are more successful in their information searches when instruction occurs in the classroom prior to coming to the media center. I provided follow up instruction, reminders, and individual assistance when the students worked in the media center. I also developed teaching materials to help teachers and arranged for printing and distributing the forms. The search strategy forms have become a model for other information searches such as an 8th grade science inquiry project. We keep search forms and bibliography forms readily available for anyone to use in the media center.

Task lists. All of the district's graduation standard performance packages have task lists; they define what the students need to do and specify what teachers need to teach. I have been excited about the task lists from the beginning because they provide a structure to the information process. For example, the database project requires students to create a database about countries they are studying in geography. The task list specifies:

The purpose of this checklist is to provide feedback to the student about his/her work relative to the content standard. Have the standard available for reference.

Y = Yes

N = Needs Improvement

Student

Teacher

\_\_\_\_ Correctly selects countries

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Correctly gathers data

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Correctly creates database and fields

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Correctly records data

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Correctly selects categories/field

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Correctly records data

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Correctly uses sort function

\_\_\_\_\_

Students received server space simultaneously with beginning the Capstone project. We developed "common sense guidelines" for technology use and wove these guidelines into the portion of the standard defined as maintaining, using, or creating a technological system. Social studies and language arts teachers were asked to teach students how to log-in to their server space and create folders for their subject areas. Technology ethics were incorporated into the instruction.

Staff development grew out the remark "all teachers need to be aware of this." We proposed and received a full day of staff development for all teachers involved in implementing the standard. Special education teachers who work with the teaching teams or provide replacement classes were also ask to participate. Sixth grade teachers who do not have direct responsibility for implementing a task were also included since the major component of the Capstone project is implemented in sixth grade; hopefully they will reinforce what other staff members are teaching. Teachers were divided into mixed groups for the inservice to have a cross curricular questions and discussion. Inservice included a Capstone overview, a description of each component, software demonstrations, and software hands-on. Teachers were also encouraged to attend any other staff development opportunities that would help them implement the Capstone project. The staff development day was a celebration; we could not have tackled a project of this scope.

without dedicated teachers and a high level of integration already in place.

Record keeping. As can be expected, monitoring the work of over 1000 students is a challenge. Inevitably there would be work lost, files misplaced or other catastrophes. We developed a File Maker Pro database accessible to teachers via our web's server. Teachers are simply asked to check off if a student completed. Comments are only needed to explain why a student does not complete a task.

Implementation and growing pains. Now near the end of year two it's safe to say the Capstone project has gone surprisingly well. Only keyboarding was a struggle and was not incorporated the first year. But, with some handholding, encouragement, humor and administrative-directive it finally became part of the process

Follow-up meetings, informal discussions and curriculum revision have helped us monitor the process and progress. The teaching activities for Task 1, accessing information, were simplified and revised during a second round of summer curriculum writing. We simplified the research forms and bibliography format and revised the teaching materials to keep up with changes in the information technology. We moved teaching magazine access to mid-year to correspond with a persuasive writing where it is a better curricular fit. We found it worked equally well to implement accessing information in science as social studies because we could more efficiently integrate it with authentic beginning of the year information needs.

Database instructions were also fine-tuned. Overall students do well on this component, but much of their work is simply following step-by-step directions. The assignment needs to be expanded to provide more thinking and; some teachers are seeing the need to reinforce the project throughout the year. The chart and graph component is also successful and students continue those skills in several other curricular areas and grades. Word processing always goes smoothly and is by now routine. Industrial technology students enjoy creating their digital self-portraits, importing them into ClarisWorks draw, and adding computer art and a greeting in Spanish.

Students learned to access their personal server space far better than expected. Sixth grade students have the instruction as another part of media center orientation. Problems have been very minimal. Students know they need to save their files and are generally conscientious about maintaining their Capstone folders.

Teachers generally schedule media center and lab time well in advance. The Middle school house concept makes it easy to track who has completed each portion of the standard. For example, keeping track of 3 seven grade houses is far easier than monitoring 12 separate sections.

The class of 2004, 8th grade students in September 2000, will be the first to complete the Capstone portfolio using Hyperstudio. Portfolios will include samples of word processing, a database, chart and graph, their bibliography and digital self-portrait. . With the exception of students who were not enrolled when parts of the project were taught, all students would be required to include all portions in their portfolio. Assessment of the portfolio continues to be a debate. The state rubric specifies an assessment of the process, a less than easy task with a project as encompassing as the Capstone project. In the future we hope to see students have opportunities to go beyond the requirements and develop portfolios that encompass a wide spectrum of their information technology skills and whatever else they wish to include showcasing their years at Winona Middle School. Each fall the sixth grade students enter Middle School with more experience and accomplish all technology-based projects easier than in the past. This, along with changing technology means the Capstone project will always be revised.

Equity and consistency are by far the major benefits of the Capstone project. All students receive the same instruction and have the same opportunities. Implementation is not an option. Database creation had been ignored before, but is now taught to all students. More teachers are incorporating multimedia presentation skills in 6th and 7th grade social studies and language arts, so that students to create their Capstone portfolios without having to learn Hyperstudio at the same time.

The concept "information literacy" has been woven more tightly into instruction. The standard is not taught in isolation or forced on too-busy teachers. Teachers have acquired new skills and increased understanding of information technology and information literacy through their curriculum writing and teaching. Students leave 8th grade with competencies they can apply at senior high and a product they can incorporate in high school portfolios. The Capstone project is not a bells and whistles portfolio, but it is manageable, solid, and integrated. We are confident students are acquiring essential and life-long information literacy skills.