Contextual Teaching and Project Based Learning

Why do I have to learn this?
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Research:

How important is it to make connections in the classroom? What kind of connections do we make as educators of a certain content area? These questions are asked to emphasize the questions teachers get asked frequently by students, "Why do I have to learn this?" and "When am I ever going to use this information?" Educators have an obligation to make the connection of what is being taught in their classes and the real world beyond. "Knowledge and information are best learned if the context is meaningful to the individual and if learning connects to some realistic and recognizable application" (Parnell, 2001). One way this connection can be made is to connect curriculum and the work place. "The acquisition of reading, writing, and mathematics knowledge and skills is best accomplished by understanding the functional context of a job" (Parnell, 2001). This type of teaching and learning has been presented for some time and continues to gain advocacy. "To create 'functional' education means to make learning more meaningful through practical application. In other words, contextual learning" (Parnell, 2001). Contextual learning is a phrase to describe bringing applications to knowledge educators are teaching in their classrooms.

The practice of contextual learning has been presented to educators for many years. John Dewey imagined contextual learning in the 1950's when he discussed project-based learning. Educators where to design contextual group activities in which students worked together, as they would in the work place, to problem solve. "He emphasized the social aspects of learning and viewed schools as places where students could practice democracy and have opportunities to work together to identify problems" (Daniels & Bizar, 1998). Projects that make connections between curriculum and the work place have been, "...a time proven approach for providing rigorous, relevant, contextual, applied learning in a manner consistent with how learning takes place in the adult world and is also compatible with how the brain learns more efficiently" (Blank & Harwell, 2001).
If teachers can design projects based on the curriculum and model an adult work place contextual and project-based learning will take place. Employers are not looking for employees that can sit in a desk, follow direct instruction and repeat facts that have been memorized. Employers are looking for students who can work well with others and have problem solving skills. "Technology literacy, problem solving, and creative thinking are the valued skills of all modern careers" (Blank & Harwell, 2001) By having teachers create projects and a classroom environment where students are encouraged to work together educators will be preparing the students for the "real world".

Content Background:
This contextual and project-based learning activity will allow students to work together to develop a product or service. During the development the students will be introduced to skills that are used in searching for employment. These skills include: letter writing, research, resume writing and interviewing. Group projects, lectures and research will be adapted to meet national standards stated below.

National Standards:

Problem Solving- Middle School
Design a Product, Service, or System
1a. The student designs and creates a product, service, or system to meet an identified need; that is, the student:

* develops a range of ideas for design of the product, service, or system;

* selects one design option to pursue and justifies the choice with reference, for example, to functional, aesthetic, social, economic, or environmental considerations;

* establishes criteria for judging success of the design;

* uses appropriate conventions to represent the design;

* plans and carries out the steps needed to create the product, service, or system;

Writing- Middle School
2a. The student produces a report that:

* creates an organizing structure appropriate to purpose, audience, and context;

* includes appropriate facts and details;
* uses a range of appropriate strategies, such as providing facts and details, describing or analyzing the subject, and explaining benefits or limitations;

* provides a sense of closure to the writing.

3a. The student participates in one-to-one conferences with a teacher, paraprofessional, or adult volunteer, in which the student:

* initiates new topics in addition to responding to adult-initiated topics;

* asks relevant questions;

* Responds to questions with appropriate elaboration.

**Daily Objectives:**

Day One- Worked-based Learning
*Objective:* Students will identify a career choice and predict what skills and qualifications will be needed to obtain the job.
Research will be done in the library and on-line to find job descriptions and qualifications. Students should report their findings orally to the class.

[http://www.gcis.peachnet.edu/](http://www.gcis.peachnet.edu/)

Day Two- Worked-based Learning
*Objective:* Students will identify local business’ that offer careers in fields they want to be employed in.
Students will write business letters to companies to request job descriptions, applications and recruitment materials.

Day Three- Evaluation
*Objective:* Students will evaluate each group’s business idea to decide on one group project.
With facilitation from the teacher, the students will decide on a business to create. A poster collage will be created to represent each idea.

Day Four- Cooperative Learning
*Objective:* Students will discuss and decide the infrastructure of their business.
Students will discuss different jobs that make up the business and pick a job they are interested in.

Day Five- Work-based Learning
*Objective:* Students will be instructed in how-to and the purpose of resume writing.
Students will develop a resume for the job they are interested in based on the interests and career hopes. Develop a rubric to assist and assess students resume writing skills.
Day Six- Work-based Learning
Objective: Students will familiarize themselves with interviewing techniques.
Invite a guest speaker from the Department of Rehabilitative Services to demonstrate incorrect interviewing skills. Video tape the “wrong” interview for future use.

Day Seven- Work-based Learning
Objective: Students will familiarize themselves with the process of writing a thank you letter.
Students will write thank you letters to the guest speaker thanking them for their participation. Develop a rubric to assist and assess a thank you letter.

Day Eight- Problem-based Learning
Objective: Students will discuss and practice interviewing skills.
Students will interview for various positions in classroom business. Create a rubric for interviewing skills. Videotape student’s interviews to refine skills.

Day Nine- Cooperative Learning
Objective: As teams, based on job assignments, research will be conducted on marketing ideas for product or service.
Students will begin design of project and cost analysis of materials.

Day Ten- Cooperative Learning
Objective: Students, in groups, will evaluate economic aspects of product or service.
Students will research other companies that provide same type of product or service and compare costs and advertising strategies.

Day Eleven- Problem-based Learning
Objective: Students will discuss recruitment ideas and criteria for hiring potential applicants.
Students will design a pamphlet for the purpose of recruiting employees. The pamphlet will include written descriptions of company purpose, job requirements and the type of applicant sought.

Assessment:

Rubrics accessing posters representing business ideas, resumes, thank you letters, interviews and final product or service design. Students will also be accessed on group work skills.
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