

PROMISING PRACTICE: Academic/Literacy Integration

Student population: 130 juniors and seniors

Sending schools/districts: Ft. Kent, Wisdom, and Madawaska high schools

Program Focus

- 1) Develop students' literacy and critical thinking skills as part of instruction in each program area to a) support academic integration and b) decrease the number of graduates who have to take remedial reading and writing courses in college.
- 2) Partner with sending schools to select and use a common reading and math assessment so that appropriate data-based support can be provided to students.

Getting Started

David Morse wanted to reduce the numbers of high school graduates needing to take remedial courses in their first year of college. The SJVTC staff decided on a dual course of action: 1) increase the amount of literacy support and critical thinking in all program areas; and 2) work with sending schools to identify an assessment that would determine which students need help in literacy and math. During the past two years, SJVTC has:

- Supported the culinary arts teacher to participate in the CTE mentor training series
- Sent four teachers to the CTE vocabulary and writing institutes
- Provided opportunities for sharing the use of instructional strategies at faculty meetings; Initiated a focus on critical thinking; provided materials to teachers and displayed Bloom's Taxonomy posters for students to see and refer to
- Conducted walkthroughs every two weeks to collect evidence of higher order thinking instruction

Morse scheduled meetings with representatives from the sending schools to select a common assessment. A variety of assessments were reviewed, including the Accuplacer, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), and NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests. At first, all sending schools agreed to use Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), but that agreement is currently on hold.

Keys to Success

The director attributes instructor buy-in to the formal and informal professional development, collaborative sharing of strategy use, expectation for classroom implementation, and consistent walkthrough observations. Each observation was followed by a brief meeting within one day to provide feedback. Goals were set: 20% of instruction by December 2006 and 30% by April 2007 would require students to engage in higher order thinking. Observation data confirmed that all teachers met these targets. In January 2008 the walkthrough observations were extended to include literacy, critical thinking, safety, supervision, and instruction. A literacy action plan is being developed for the 2008–09 school year. The action plan will focus on continuous improvement in the following areas: literacy, higher order critical thinking, problem solving, and using assessment data to support individual student development.

What It Looks Like Now

Teachers across the center agree there is an ongoing need to improve students' literacy skills to meet the demands of the workplace and succeed on national certification tests. During the site visit in May of 2008, all seven of the SJVTC instructors provided samples of student work, and lesson plans to show how they weave literacy supports into program area learning on a consistent basis. Students in all program areas participate in Skills USA, which further develops literacy skills through activities like resume development and interview practice. Some instructors questioned if specific literacy support strategies introduced last year are the best way to meet their instructional needs. However, all teachers described how they use multiple approaches to support students to practice analytical, evaluative, and synthesizing skills.

Mini Case Studies were developed by PCG-CRM as part of a contract with the Maine Department of Education and the Maine Association of Career and Technical Educators.

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Students, whether framing a building, completing portfolios, upgrading computers, or grinding brake drums, discussed the importance of reading, vocabulary, thinking, mathematics, and problem solving. The environment at the center is literacy rich and, on the day of the site visit, included word walls, displays of student writing, visuals, students using technology for differentiated research, and current trade journals in each program area. Students spoke with pride about ways they helped people in their community, such as repairing computers for local residents or working at the local nursing home. This positive feeling towards education was reflected in Samantha Paradis' graduation speech when she quoted Katie Lusk, "Education means inspiring someone's minds, not just filling their heads." SJVTC faculty all strive to achieve this goal.

Next Steps

- ✓ **Use Data to Focus Instruction**
An assessment profile will be established of entering juniors that will be distributed to all teachers. Professional development in 2008–09 will be focused on good grading practices, using the data from assessments to plan instruction, and using schoolwide rubrics.
- ✓ **Put Additional Literacy Supports Into Place**
One or two of the seven faculty members will be sent to the CTE 21st century learning skills literacy training scheduled during the 2008–09 school year. A set of literacy resource texts will be purchased to deepen learning about literacy instruction. Teachers will work together to plan integrated units. Expanded alignment with sending schools, especially around common use of specific instructional strategies, will be sought. An action plan based on the May 2008 teacher brainstorming of literacy needs will be developed and implemented during the 2008–09 school year. Focus areas will include: schoolwide supports such as time, scheduling, professional development, and use of lexiles to match students with appropriate text; instructional supports including use of laptops to increase motivation, use of online resources, and engaging students in reading and writing; critical thinking development using Bloom's thinking prompts, struggling learner supports, and career readiness support such as job shadowing.
- ✓ **Collect Evidence of Student Learning**
Student portfolios currently in place will continue to demonstrate students' proficiencies in communicating what they have learned and showcasing their accomplishments for prospective employers. Use of the new schoolwide rubrics will help teachers and students assess student growth. Pre-post assessment scores from the beginning of the junior year to the end of the senior year as well as grades, portfolio assessment, and other formative/summative assessments will help teachers and students gauge student progress.

Institutionalizing the work will require a commitment of time for collaborative action planning, implementation, sharing of successes/lessons learned, and resources to support literacy development. Achieving agreement on a common assessment, using data-based decision making to determine when specific literacy strategies and instructional practices should be used, and continued teacher professional development in literacy will continue the momentum that is underway at SJVTC.

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