Collection of Resources for Use in Eighth Grade Interdisciplinary Teams

I. History

As I considered which of the three approaches to take with this project, one idea hovered in the front of my mind. It had to do with the change in structure that occurred within our building last school year. During the 2005-2006 campaign, we implemented a plan wherein our student body would be divided into four interdisciplinary teams, two per grade level. Our school consists of seventh and eighth graders, and I teach eighth grade social studies and computer.

We experienced the usual pitfalls that tend to accompany a change in structure. There was discomfort at times with planning discipline that would be uniform among the four content teachers of our group. Regardless of the school code of conduct, every teacher differs at least a little in terms of what is “acceptable” behavior within the individual classroom. We had teachers, specific to our group, who had taught “their way” for thirty-plus years. In their defense, it’s difficult to change drastically a plan one considers to be effective. Our veteran teachers did an outstanding job with this assimilation. There were scheduling issues with which our teaching staff had never dealt. In an interdisciplinary structure, scheduling is more exclusive to the faculty, rather than the office. With this change came some headaches and frustration, but those problems tended to work themselves out, as well. Overall, I believe our first year of implementation with interdisciplinary teams was a success.
II. The Next Step- Planning Interdisciplinary Units

One thing our team never accomplished over the course of the last school year was the interdisciplinary unit. According to the liaison hired to help us along in our quest, this was to be expected. There are too many organizational issues with which to deal in the initial year of teaming that take precedence over a focus on connecting the content areas. Further, an article (Capelluti) I encountered during my research pointed out that this focus on organization can sometimes overtake the team, thereby compromising the effectiveness of the team. It is my opinion that the most invigorating part of changing a school’s curriculum is the profound effect that change can have on student learning. Interdisciplinary units are a vital part of the learning process within the teaming concept.

Connecting what is taught in one subject to other subject areas is important at any grade level. It is my belief that the most wholesale changes occur with children during the middle levels of education. At perhaps no other time does a student experience the social, emotional, and physical changes that will help shape the adult than during those early teen years. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that an appreciation for learning that spans the curriculum is developed at the middle levels. My project will deal with the further implementation of the interdisciplinary team concept, with a focus on connecting learning among the many subjects taught at our school.

III. A Curricular Materials List

To assist my team in planning lessons that touch upon other content areas, elective subjects, and arts department interests, I have begun gathering materials for suggestion during team meetings. As part of the team structure at my school, the four
content area teachers share a common planning time. It is during this time that the most constructive work can be done. In addition, each team (beginning this year) will include a specialist from the special education department that will spend time in each content class daily as part of our new “full inclusion” format. Wherever possible, I hope to include modifications to my materials list for use during inclusion classes. I plan to divide the list of materials I submit by the subject area where the initial learning is to be introduced. For instance, a literature lesson that could be expanded into a science lesson would be archived in the Language Arts section of my folder. I will continue to research websites, education abstracts, and books to find worthwhile materials for use on my team. When it is possible, I will provide reference information for the material I present. However, URL links will be available for many of the websites I find, and these links will be easy to electronically.

IV. Summary

It is my desire to make the next school year as productive as possible for my team. Hopefully, creating a set of lessons will assist us in taking the next step necessary for success on our team. School wide, we have already experienced an increase in state test scores, and a decrease in severe discipline problems. My list of possible interdisciplinary lessons will contain references to any and all subject areas taught at my school. When the focal point is on specific subject matter, modifications will be easily made through conference among our team members. Wherever possible, this set of materials will show evidence of correlation to the Ohio Academic Standards for eighth grade.

V. Reference
Capelluti, Jody, and Brazee, Ed. (January 2003). Teaming at the Middle Level: Promising Practice or Unfulfilled Promise?. Principal Leadership, 32-37.