**Creating a Curriculum Guide Exemplar**

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ITEC 7500: Capstone Experience & Portfolio

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January 21, 2021

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 At Gainesville High School (GHS), student performance is a primary concern and focus. The diverse student body has a high chronic absenteeism rate, and some subgroups would benefit greatly from digitally available and organized supports. At GHS, each academic content area was tasked with creating a basic curriculum map- or calendar- during the Fall 2019 semester. Curriculum mapping is a way for educators to develop school-wide interdisciplinary curriculum based on standards, true classroom activities, and effective student learning (Archambault & Masunaga, 2015). The GHS maps would later be enhanced by including resource links for teachers to be able to access curriculum materials to share with students. Principal Jamie Green, suggested to me that a curriculum map is most beneficial when students can have access to it as well, providing everyone with the knowledge of available materials and upcoming topics (personal communication, 2019). For my capstone project, I chose to create an exemplar curriculum unit to demonstrate organization of these vision. The goal of the project was to develop an exemplar curriculum resource that explores standards, learning targets, content resources, and student supports for one unit within the Algebra 1 content area, to present the resource to Math Teachers, and to support them in creating similar curriculum organizations across each content area.

 I believe that student success has a direct correlation to attendance, teacher instruction, and instructional supports. Unfortunately, every teacher, content team, academic subject, and administrator has a different vision for what an organized resource may look like. This can make utilizing resources difficult for new teachers, and teachers transitioning to an unfamiliar content area, because some teams may have instructional materials in drive, in paper files/binders, or in a variety of different online programs, and some may be more organized than others. Independent teaching allows multiple sections of a course to have different learning outcomes and assignments (Archambault & Masunaga, 2015). Curriculum mapping does not undermine a teacher’s ability to personalize their course, it simply organizes available curriculum. My goal was to present a unified concept for generic curriculum organization that can be utilized across all content areas. I wanted to develop a central “go-to” resource for all curriculum materials and notes, so that teachers would be fully prepared for our diverse and sometimes challenging students- and I wanted to begin an initiative to move the entire school towards obtaining similarly organized resources for every content area.

**Capstone Experience and Results**

 I created the curriculum exemplar as a Hyperdocs, to include standards and learning targets, links to content resources (including instructional, discussion, and assessment resources), web resources and supports for students. I developed this as a continuation of the Gainesville High School curriculum map for the first unit of Algebra 1, Expressions and Equations. I consulted with peer teachers and administrators to decide the organizational aspects for the resource, and to choose the tool for mapping. Some benefits of using Google Docs for the Hyperdocs includes the ability to update immediately and share widely, collective sharing/editing capacity, ability to track changes and revert to prior versions (Archambault & Masunaga, 2015). We chose to use Google Docs to create a Hyperdocs, linking back to curriculum materials in Google Drive.

I used a Hyperdocs to organize the curriculum aspects, with a table for each topic that would include standards, learning targets, essential questions, expected timeframe, key vocabulary, and links for instructional and assessment activities. Instructional activities were further divided to organize content learning, discussion ideas, content practices, remediation and enrichment activities, as well as formative assessment and summative assessment resources. The exemplar curriculum resource was intended to serve as a guide for peer teachers in continuing the creation of highly detailed and organized curriculum maps for each Math content area. The plan also included providing professional learning supports for Math teachers to organize their own content curriculum resources, utilizing technology, and promoting student success.

**Implementation**

The first half of the capstone project required consulting with peer teachers and administrators to establish a framework design for the resource, and to collect and organize aspects for each topic within the Exemplar unit. This was completed in steps, which made it easier to focus on one aspect at a time. For the template, I also used color-coded backgrounds to identify expectations (standards, learning targets, essential questions), instructional activities (learning, discussing, practicing, differentiating), assessments (formative, summative), and other student supports (Google Classroom posts, websites, etc). My plan was to completely organize all of these by February 2020, so that I could present the exemplar model to teachers by May 2020 and provide ongoing supports to teachers for expanding the project through May 2021.

Unfortunately, the process of completing the final aspects of the capstone became complicated as school systems around the world suffered from drastic teaching changes and demands related to a global pandemic. During the first week of March 2020, our school system abruptly transitioned to virtual learning and teachers worked from home, struggling to support and encourage students, develop virtual resources, and collaborate as content teams. This limited my ability to meet with the math team to demonstrate the process and peer coach them for creating additional units and starting the resource for other content areas.

I knew that at that point, teacher buy-in could be minimal, as we were all stressed to the max, but I needed to find a way to share my organizational model and to guide content teams in creating organized curriculum resources. I created webinars to explain the exemplar and model the process for creating it. Disappointingly, my employment with Gainesville City Schools ended before the 2020-2021 school year would resume, due to risk factors for an at-risk immediate family member with health issues. Having requested an at-home accommodation, and been denied, I resigned in July 2020. I also requested to continue working with the school from a virtual and voluntary capacity to complete my studies, and although I have for some field experiences, I was not able to do so for leading professional developments or administrative/leadership tasks.

**Project Outcomes**

The project resulted in the creation of a well-organized curriculum exemplar unit. The exemplar was designed to incorporate aspects of the unit so that teachers have one resource with all information about standards and learning targets, instructional activities, and assessments. It was also hyper-linked to the curriculum map calendar by topic. The resource could be accessed and used by all content teachers but would be highly beneficial to new teachers or teachers transitioning into a different content area. The electronic map would also support utilizing data to better serve students, identifying personal student needs and delivering a higher level of instruction (Jacobs, 2004). Providing student access to the resource would be of great value to students who were on different pacings or learning autonomously. To allow student access, links to certain materials, such as summative assessments intended to be proctored, were included as links to drive folders with access restrictions. Webinars were created to allow virtual presentation of the exemplar and to provide guides for extending the project to complete the curriculum map for all math content teams. Webinars also allowed for more personalized staff development, allowing teachers autonomy over their viewing and adaptation to needs (Jacobs, 2004). In the end, the project provided an extremely organized resource for curriculum expectations, activities, and assessments, along with virtual webinars for demonstrating the exemplar and supporting resource expansion.

**Barriers Encountered**

The capstone project progressed satisfactorily through the creation of the exemplar resource. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 global pandemic resulted in a variety of barriers that hindered the project’s completion. To explain, I live with an elderly grandparent who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease and is under Hospice care. In March 2020, as local school systems transitioned to virtual learning, it became increasingly difficult to meet with Math teachers and provide personal assistance and demonstrations. Instead of holding professional learning meetings to demonstrate the exemplar, and to guide peer teachers in support of other unit/content curriculum guides, I created a series of short webinars to share by email. Webinar topics included:

1. What should a curriculum resource look like & how do I use it?
2. Using the exemplar template & dividing the workload.
3. Linking resources & other ideas

During Fall 2020, I planned to meet with teachers and provide ongoing supports for creating curriculum resources. Unfortunately, with August came another obstacle to my plan. Our school system was set to begin the school year virtually and then transition to face-to-face learning rather quickly. At home, the hospice care team, warned that my return to school would be placing my grandparent under significant risk for contracting Covid-19, as I worked an area with a high rate of contraction, and in a school with 2400+ persons. I requested permission to work virtually from home this year- or at least until it was safe- but was ultimately denied this accommodation. Because my family’s safety could not be guaranteed, I resigned from my teaching position at the end of July. While, I do not regret this decision, it did cost me the ability to work with peer teachers to continue development of the curriculum guides.

**Follow-Up**

Since I no longer work with Gainesville City Schools, follow up on the impact of the project and its continuation has been significantly hindered. I reached out to some of my prior coworkers, the department chair, and the supervising administrator, in an effort to gather information and attempt to finalize my work. Although, some math teachers were willing to talk to me, they were unable to grant me access to see their current curriculum resource guides. The department chair did not respond, and the administrator responded with well wishes but denied permission for me to work with the team in a voluntary capacity to complete my project (personal communication, 2021).

**Discussion and Reflection**

This capstone experience taught me many things about technology facilitation and leadership. Most importantly, I learned that an instructional technology coach must exhibit expertise with technology facilitation and be able to adapt easily to changing circumstances and new technologies. I also learned that I must be able to continue my own professional development and evaluate my own effectiveness within my field. Being a technology coach requires one to continuously learn and improve his/her knowledge base about new and emerging technology, best practices and strategies, and methods for supporting faculty professional development. For this capstone experience, I found myself researching and collaborating with peers within the program to identify methods for continuing professional development for the math team and the curriculum expansion. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting school closures, our team was unable to meet in face-to-face settings. To transition to entirely virtual support, I developed webinars to share with the team that included how to guides and strategies for continuing with building the resource. I also used online surveys to evaluate the effectiveness, participation, and overall outcomes of the project.

The creation of the Curriculum Exemplar allowed me to demonstrate many of the skills and knowledge required of a instructional technology coach. As a technology leader, technology coaches must be able to inspire educators to use technology to promote learning, improve instructional practices, and meet the needs of all learners. This capstone experience provided me with an opportunity to showcase my ability to curate a curriculum resource and inspire change at GHS to improve instructional strategies and learner outcomes. As required by PSC 1.1, I was able to facilitate the development and implementation of a shared vision (the curriculum exemplar) for the use of technology in teaching, learning, and leadership. This required me to research best practices for and to recommend an organizational framework for designing curated curriculum resources at GHS, which also allowed for initiating and sustaining technology innovations and managing the change process, as outlined by PSC Standard 1.4. Creating a Curriculum Exemplar also provided the opportunity to model and facilitate the design and implementation of technology-enhanced curriculum resources and learning experiences aligned with student content and technology standards and the effective use of research-based best practices in instructional design (PSC 2.1 and PSC 2.6). This project also conveys my ability to effectively manage digital tools and resources through overseeing and assisting with the collection and organization of digital tools and resources (PSC 3.2).

Technology coaches must also be knowledgeable about facilitating professional development, which I provided to my peer educators through webinars, as well as to evaluate the impact of learning opportunities, such as through the feedback surveys. Per PSC Standard 5.2, I developed and implemented technology-based professional learning aligned to professional learning standards, to integrate technology to support face-to-face and online components, model principles of adult learning and promote best practices in teaching, learning and assessment. I used the feedback surveys to gather and analyze data about the effectiveness and impact of the capstone project, as it related to the shared vision of developing well-organized curriculum resources, which allowed me to determine the overall effectiveness of professional learning and impact on teach content knowledge and pedagogical skills (PSC 5.3).

Curating and promoting curriculum resources has also expanded into being able to assist non-technology savvy teachers with learning new programs and apps to better enable them to teach 21st century learners. This requires knowledge and skills beyond the initial capstone experience, but pertinent to teachers being able to utilize the resource within their classrooms. To help my team, especially during remote collaboration, I made sure I was available for advice, troubleshooting, and guidance in using various technology tools and programs. Ultimately, I took on the role of a virtual technology coach, which allowed me to provide continual professional development on an as-needed basis to support teachers’ technology integration (Sugar & Tryon, 2014). This demonstrated leadership skills related to ensuring teachers were receiving continuous supports and trainings to use the technology resource to support student learning and engagement. Being readily available to assist, providing a supportive environment, and promoting a positive attitude are important dispositions for every technology coach (Sugar & Tryon, 2014). Through this project, I developed a profound understanding of the role of instructional technology facilitator and leader, with the experience being challenging, inspiring, and nurturing.

**Recommendations**

I believe that creating a highly organized curriculum resource for all content areas is a valuable curation endeavor. I would recommend that teachers or curriculum teams take time to evaluate their resources and make sure that items can be edited or modified in the future. For example, a pdf with practice materials for math cannot be easily edited later to address modified standards or differentiation/scaffolding techniques. It would be more practical to have the editable version available for future applications. Another aspect to consider is the medium for curation. A Shared Google Drive can be difficult to reorganize later, and a hyperlinked website can incur errors when linked documents are moved or changed. My advice for this would be to use a website where documents could be uploaded and downloaded and stored directly on that site. Weebly includes this option, but Google Sites simply links to documents loaded into a Google Drive. As I completed my project, I found that any documents that were moved within drive ended up with broken links in my HyperDoc. I wish that I had used Weebly instead, but at the time that the decision was made, I was more familiar with Google Suite, and working in a Google Suite school. Teachers and curators should consider these aspects when deciding which medium to develop the resource in.

References

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