

A Different Approach to Teaching Research

by
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Teaching research can be a thorn in our teaching side. Years ago we revisited the traditional approach to research for our Grade Nine students at Cox High School in Virginia Beach; what evolved was a project designed to teach the process of research, building a foundation for a more traditional research paper later in the school year.

Together with our CRTs and librarians, English teacher, Latonya Ferguson conceptualized taking one of the research papers and turning it into a PowerPoint presentation. With idea in place, I evaluated what my inclusion and general education students needed and enhanced the initial project.

The overview that follows is a unit created through collaboration. This blending of teaching ideas has benefited all our students by making a research project that promotes success for all students.

Overview:

Career Research Project

(Note: Virginia Beach City Public Schools integrates a continuum of career/college exploration for high school students in its English curriculum beginning in Grade Nine.)

Virginia Grade Nine English SOLs: 9.2, 9.4, 9.6 – 9.9

Four-Step Approach

1. Teach the process
2. Complete the research
3. Put it all together
4. Publish

Teach the Process

This preliminary stage guides the students through the maze of learning how to create source cards and note cards, compiling a works cited, and taking effective notes.

Initially students are taught how to create source cards using generic information and a cloze activity (See Appendix 1). It is important to use the types of sources the students will encounter when they research including reference books, Internet sites and subscription databases. The cloze activity is followed by guided practice using authentic source examples. We correct these worksheets as a class by projecting a large blank index card on chalk/white board. Students correct their entries, highlighting errors in formatting.

One of the most important goals of this unit is to ensure students know how to take effective notes. However, students must also be taught how to format a note card. Using the students' previous exposure to formatting source cards, students learn how to

format note cards. Eliminating the frustration of formatting enables us to concentrate on reinforcing good note-taking practices. We do not recommend that this research project be the students' initial exposure to taking notes; but we do advocate revisiting such an important skill during this unit. For taking notes, try using a Smart Board, although an overhead works just as well. Either way, directly interacting with actual sources makes this task more meaningful.

The final pre-research step is to teach students how to construct a Works Cited page. To enhance the traditional way to compile a works cited, we use students holding enlarged source cards to show how they will shuffle their own source cards.

Complete the Research

Success is derived from eliminating too many variables and using technology to our advantage.

While we recognize that choice is important, 15 year-olds often have no idea what they want to do with the rest of their lives. Therefore, we ask students to take a skills/interest inventory from a subscription service. While students do not have to choose one of the careers that match their skills and interest, it is a worthwhile 10 minutes for them to learn a bit more about themselves. Another way to keep this project simple is to limit the web sites that the students may use. We provide hyperlinks to *Virginia VIEW* and *Choices Explorer* on a CD ROM.

By far, our biggest advantage is placing the entire project on a CD ROM. Based on a self-guided tour, students use the CD to navigate their way through the research. This eliminates most questions the students have concerning format and project expectations. Our time as teachers is better spent and students become more self-reliant. Students use hyperlinks on the CD to access all elements of the project including a teacher-generated example, information on formatting source cards, due dates, and the project grading rubric. **(Internet Source for developing practice in generating source cards, note cards and works cited --Choices Explorer from Bridges Transitions, Inc. (http://cxonline.bridges.com). See also Virginia Career VIEW (www.vaview.vt.edu) copyright 2004 by the Virginia Department of Education.**

Putting it all Together

At this stage of the research project, students must blend new and old skills to ensure a quality product. Students will evaluate their research, utilize running references, and write effective introductions and conclusions.

We found that students always wanted to know how many note cards they should have. To avoid this question, students use a graphic checklist to make certain they have enough information from the minimum number of sources. Students then evaluate their

research by sorting note cards and eliminating information that is not germane to the project.

The importance of writing a draft is not overlooked. Rather than have the students write a traditional rough draft, they complete storyboards. Using a template (See Appendix 1), students work with a similar format to an actual PowerPoint slide and draft their presentation. Documenting sources by using running references and writing the introduction and conclusion are no different from a traditional research paper.

Publishing

The final step in this unit is the creation of a PowerPoint presentation. In this alternate form of assessment the students create a PowerPoint slide show that they will present to the class.

Appendix 1

Source Card Cloze

Author's last name, _____ name. _____ of the Book.
City: _____, Copyright year. _____ (book with author)
Author's _____ name, first name. "Article's _____." <u>Name of the</u>
<u>Reference Book</u> . Book's _____ . Edition, if known.
Volume number. City: Publisher, _____ year. (ref. Book)
Author's last name, first name. "Page Title." <u>Underline the</u>
_____ <u>Name</u> . Copyright date. Sponsoring Organization.
Date Accessed < _____ >. _____ (Internet)
Author's last name, first name. "Page Title." <u>Underline the Web</u>
<u>Site Name</u> . Sponsoring Institution. City, State.
Accessed <URL>. _____ (subscription databases)
*please remember to use one source per card

Title Slide

Funeral Director

Anita Goodgrade

Block C2

Ms. English

Introduction

(You must tell the reader why you'd like to consider this job as a career. As a listing thesis statement, tell your reader what aspects of the job are going to help you decide if this job is for you (for example: the job description, the necessary education, qualifications for this job, etc.)

Qualifications

Work Environment

Conclusion

(Is this job for you? Why or why not? Use information you learned through researching the career.)