

High-tech Bicentennial Learning

By: Ben Waymouth

Paint Rock High School was an average size community with a high school enrollment just over 1000 students. See how they managed to solidify long term funding through the synergy of staff expertise and student interest in high tech learning. PRHS successfully received the Blue Ribbon Technology Grant for Electronic Learning Excellence, below is their story.

In the Spring of 2008 principal Adams at Paint Rock High School announced the school had applied for the Electronic Learning Excellence Grant. In order to receive consideration for the grant the school must successfully plan, and implement a collaborative online environment. To win the grant the school had to show proof of electronic learning, sharing, and discussion among students and faculty. The grant currently requires one successful year of online collaboration at a high school of more than 1,000 students. Startup cost and equipment for consideration was unfunded however if awarded the grant Paint Rock stood to receive unlimited funding for the continuation of and expansion of their collaborative curriculum for the next 10 years. Above all else the school had to show effective student learning as a result of their processes.

Throughout the remainder of the Spring and Summer of 2008, staff met to discuss, plan, and create guidelines for implementing an online learning community. Duties were quickly divided among the faculty. Leading the charge to change were media specialist Mrs. Elizabeth Smith and social studies teacher Mr. Kevin Brown.

The faculty quickly agreed a focus on technology literacy was the first and foremost priority. For students to be expected to learn, discuss, and share a baseline of technology competencies needed established. After considering many of the technological standards the entire faculty adopted the NETS Standards₁. These standards would act as an overarching guide for faculty when creating lessons, activities, and learning scenarios geared towards an online learning community.[P2]

Initial meetings centered on a how to begin utilizing the Media Center. Its technology and leader, Mrs. Smith, was the most electronically savvy and equipped in the building.[P1] All teachers agreed that initial student projects would best be centered in the Media Center so as to allow for project based student inquiry projects. This further allowed for cooperative teaching moments as classroom teachers could collaborate and co-teach with the Media Specialist Mrs. Smith. Her assistance with technological issues was the hub, and her ability to gather, sort, and direct students was the spokes of the project wheel.[P8, P10]

Mrs. Smith welcomed the vote of confidence by her staff; she'd only been hired a couple months before. She felt this opportunity would be her chance to forge collaborative relationships with colleagues. This melding of expertise and knowledge put into practice would surely solidify her role as a collaborator and "teacher" of students instead of a "keeper of the books". [P3]

Throughout the planning stages teachers met in the media center so they could get a feel for environment in which early projects would be implemented. This was also an opportunity for the Media Specialist to play an active role in the planning and curriculum development process. During these meetings discussions regarding what specific types of resources students would be using was at the forefront. Mrs. Smith took the opportunity to create a Media Center website with links to all teacher sub pages. From their own computers teachers could upload and redesign their assignments as needed. At the core of the website would be links to all the electronic resources funded through the Media Center. Also the website would work to promote the print

resources inside the school by explaining and linking resources to specific teacher projects.[P5] As part of the website Mrs. Smith implemented a blog for sharing with the outside world, namely parents and community members, what projects and learning activities were taking place in the school. Beyond documentation the blog gave Mrs. Smith the opportunity to share in detail the importance of collaboration with classroom teachers.[P10] It was ultimately through this blog, the personal blog of Social Studies teacher Mr. Kevin Brown, and student blog responses that Paint Rock was able to garner the ELE Grant.

US History teacher Mr. Kevin Brown took advantage of Paint Rock's upcoming bicentennial celebration as a means to creating a problem and project-based unit revolving around the Roaring 20's.[K8] The timing of the project was such that local community interest would spark student motivation in the project.[K7] Not only would students learn technology skills they also would gain an awareness of local, regional, and national history. Above all this project served a larger purpose for students who could appreciate the role Paint Rock played in the hustle and bustle of the late 1920's.[K7]

The end product for students centered on the creation of a multimedia web site for display on the school server and eventual hosting on the local historical societies website. Students were charged with capturing the essence of the town's history while recording and preserving it through electronic means. When finished students were required to have the following elements linked throughout their website: audio, pictures, video clips, and personal accounts.

Prior to starting the project Mr. Brown and the students received training from Mrs. Smith in the Media Specialist regarding how to create web pages. Their training focused on how to add interactive elements, how to add links, and how to upload their necessary elements to the server. The challenge for students was to develop a creative way to weave multimedia elements into an informational yet interactive kiosk type web site.[K10]

When constructing the project Mr. Brown felt more than a static web page and proof of technological skill at the end was necessary. His goal was to foster inquiry learning focusing on the many processing steps of learning students would go through. Feeling uneasy about the length of time the project would take Mr. Brown felt he needed several intermediary checks of student learning. Mr. Brown created a blog site for his class project.

To prepare students for the process of blogging and showing of learning Mr. Brown spent three days teaching students how to blog. These three days were also spent instructing students on the use of the Big6 Model₂. Blog entries would be focused around the progression of steps students would encounter with this project. Mr. Brown supplemented his instruction on blogs by utilizing Janet Murray's chart on application of the Big6 with the school accepted NETS Standards₁.

This created constructivist opportunities for students such as questioning, exploring, and reflecting on their inquiry efforts.[K2] With the assistance of Media Specialist Smith an examination of student blog postings helped to grasp and evaluate the extent that his students were working, grasping, analyzing, and synthesizing the content.[K1] Blog postings helped clarify for both Mr. Brown and Mrs. Smith where students were struggling in their use of technology and overall research. Sharing in the evaluation of student work Mr. Brown reinforced the role of the Media Specialist in the planning and collaborating and teaching process.[P9]

As students became enamored in the project English teacher Mrs. Melanie Jones became a collaborator. Mrs. Jones's portion of the project revolved around the recording of interviews with local individuals who grew up during the founding of the Paint Rock community in the 1920's. Being a novice with everything electronic Mrs. Jones sought the guidance of Media Specialist Smith. Working together Smith and Jones created a two week unit where students would visit, record, and document their findings.[P3] To lessen the difficulty and amount of interviews required students were allowed to work in groups of three to conduct interviews.[K3] Mrs. Smith

instructed students in the technical aspects of recording their interviews and featuring them as Podcasts through iTunes. She further instructed students on the placement and linking required to place their content online.

Two weeks into the project Smith, Jones, and Brown came together to plan, schedule and assign students to help with the organizing of content and delivery to the web. From this meeting the conclusion of the project was mapped out. It was agreed that students would be responsible for proper placement, linking, and working of their online finished project. Students that appeared to be struggling with blogging and or technical skills would be granted release time from class to meet with Mrs. Smith in the Media Center.[P7, K6] At the suggestion of Smith and Brown, Mrs. Jones English students were expected to blog about the processing they encountered at each stage of the project. Like Brown Jones provided prompts for students at each stage of the Big6₂ process. This proved valuable as students had familiarity with blogging and the Big6 steps. This also served as proof of learning and creative, technical, and reflective writing for English state standards.

As student content was created the Media Center website quickly became the portal to everything Bicentennial in Paint Rock. As student content streamed and grew Mrs. Smith advertised the project to the local media encouraging civic groups and local businesses to become involved in the effort to add content and create more publicity.[P10] At her encouragement local groups began offering content for students to add to the website. Suddenly student interest and buy-in to the project began to pick up momentum. More and more students began visiting the Media Center on their free time to view, read, and enjoy the collection of information. Consequently the amount of checkouts, reference questions, and use of computers in the Media Center increased.[P6] At the conclusion of the project a select group of students for extra credit created a graphic overview using Inspiration software to act as a homepage for the Bicentennial project.

The conclusion of the project for students involved a reflective blogging experience in which students replied to two other classmates' postings. In their final posting students had to touch upon the following:

- What types of critical and creative thinking did you have the most difficulty with in this project?[K4, K5]
 - Describe the types of questions you selected for your interviewees. What types of questions were most effective and why?[K9]
 - What skills and knowledge did you enjoy learning during this project?
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When the bicentennial celebration was over the teachers involved in the project were recognized by all civic groups in the community. The publicity among the local and regional media was more than enough documentation for the PRHS grant proposal. As the accolades poured in the students felt it only right that the recognition be displayed and discussed on the website.

In the end PRHS received the Blue Ribbon Technology Grant for Electronic Learning Excellence.

Connections:

10 Key Ideas

- K1. Assessment
- K2. Constructivism
- K3. Cooperative Learning
- K4. Creative and Inventive Thinking
- K5. Critical Thinking
- K6. Individual Differences
- K7. Meaningfulness and Motivation
- K8. Problem & Project Based Learning
- K9. Questioning
- K10. Technology

10 Learning and Teaching Principles of School and Library Media Programs

- P 1. The library media program is essential to learning and teaching and must be fully integrated into the curriculum to promote students' achievement of learning goals.
- P 2. The information literacy standards for student learning are integral to the content and objectives of the school's curriculum.
- P 3. The library media program models and promotes collaborative planning and curriculum development.
- P 4. The library media program models and promotes creative, effective, and collaborative teaching.
- P 5. Access to the full range of information resources and services through the library media program is fundamental to learning.
- P 6. The library media program encourages and engages students in reading, viewing, and listening for understanding and enjoyment.
- P 7. The library media program supports the learning of all students and other members of the learning community who have diverse learning abilities, styles, and needs.
- P 8. The library media program fosters individual and collaborative inquiry.
- P 9. The library media program integrates the uses of technology for learning and teaching.
- P10. The library media program is an essential link to the larger learning community.

Works Cited:

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