Steps to Designing Inquiry-based Units

In this issue of SLMAM, Audrey Okemura provides a step-by-step approach to building inquiry-based science units (November 2008: 47-51), also applicable across the curriculum. Below are steps, summarized, that will assist library media specialists and content area teachers as they collaborate to take an active role in promoting and improving learning using an inquiry-based approach.

Collaborative Planning and Teaching for Inquiry

The teacher and library media specialist will collaborate to:

- Identify the content and information literacy standards that would serve as the overarching concepts for the unit of study.
- Answer the questions: What is it that students should be able to demonstrate by the end of the project? How will it be assessed?
- Identify the skills and knowledge students need in order to achieve outcomes.
- Identify attributes of inquiry-focused teaching and learning.
- Identify important essential questions.
- Design lessons and activities to stimulate curiosity and invite differentiated paths of investigation.
- Design social and interactive opportunities for learning.
- Use feedback from students to improve instruction or assist individuals.
- Adapt instruction, change directions, add, or subtract as needed.
- Reflect as partners on the progress and success of the unit.

Students will:

- Connect what they are learning in the classroom to their personal lives and/or to the world around them.
- Be actively engaged in question making, problem solving, and learning.
- Make choices in what they study/research.
- Generate and answer essential questions.
- Work in teams and exchange peer feedback.
- Undertake reflection on the process and learning (e.g., journal writing).
- Have an understanding of how to improve performance.

The teacher and library media specialist will (for students):

- Ensure that students have a clear understanding of the learning targets (e.g., outline expectations and the timeline of the unit, share project rubric, etc.)
- Provide needed background information (e.g., print, online, video, DVD).
- Demonstrate flexibility to change plans and adjust instruction based on students' needs.
- Inform and guide development of essential questions as needed.
- Teach students how to access and evaluate a variety of information sources.
- Relinquish control of the learning when appropriate.
- Recognize students' need for guidance and provide assistance.
- Allow for greater student choice and voice in progressive steps.
- Use assessments throughout the unit and provide timely interventions.
- Assist students in achieving their learner expectations.