

The Horizons Electronic Lesson Plan Resource (HELPR)

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ONE of the most enduring issues in education concerns improving student motivation in the learning process. In an effort to address this issue, the Horizons Partnership, a division of San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools in southern California, has developed a strategy that helps engage learners through practical application of academic standards.

Since 1997, the Horizons Partnership has worked at providing innovative methods of instilling contextual learning and teaching strategies into classroom practices. The basis of contextual learning theory is that people (both children and adults) learn better and retain information longer when they can relate subject matter to real-world situations.

Through the development of the *Horizons Electronic Lesson Plan Re-*

source (HELPR) system, at www.horizonshelpr.org, the Horizons Partnership has provided a rich resource of contextual lesson plans that bring relevance to the learning environment while teaching academic content standards.

Concept Development

The concept of the HELPR system began in 1999 with a collection of contextual activities created by the San Bernardino team for the Professional Educators Faculty Engagement (PEFE) grant (see "PEFE STC in CA," January 2002, *Tech Directions*).

Joe Scarcella at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB) hosted work on the PEFE project, with the PEFE team comprised of local K-16 educators. Led by Scarcella, the PEFE team developed a website for promoting contextual learning in southeastern California.

Concerned with the lack of available planning time in teachers' already busy schedules, the PEFE team sought to provide models that would help teachers implement contextual activities in their classrooms. To gain local support, these

conceptual models had to blend work-based learning activities with state academic standards.

During this same time, the Horizons School-to-Career partnership had been working on similar activities that promoted the use of contextual teaching within San Bernardino County. Led by Project Specialist Leslie Rodden, Horizons coordinated teacher job shadowing experiences and workshops for developing contextual lesson plans.

Rodden's participation with the PEFE grant led to discussions on the need to create additional lesson plans in order to better demonstrate integrated contextual learning to educators. Fellow PEFE team member Alan Blanchard had already created similar plans for at-risk youth participating in vocational training at the local Job Corps center.

Blanchard agreed to develop a prototype lesson plan that would articulate state academic content standards through work-based learning activities. From this were created two models that confirmed the value of providing web-based lesson plans

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in a contextual format, and the foundation for developing a virtual library.

In early 2001, Horizons was awarded funds through a California School-to-Career Sustainability grant to develop web-based contextual lesson plans. Shortly thereafter, Horizons hired Blanchard to oversee the virtual library's development.

The HELPR system has been successfully presented at several state conferences. Feedback from various state educators has led to refinements in the website that enhance its usefulness and scope.

System Attributes

The HELPR system categorizes various lesson plans by either academic content area or career pathway. In this way, academic teachers can present subject matter by emulating workplace situations, and career/technical instructors can demonstrate the infusion of academic skills and knowledge within their courses.

One of the major differences between this and other curricular

websites is that HELPR lesson plans are presented comprehensively for immediate use by teachers. These lesson plans provide everything teachers need to teach a topic, including timelines to help them plan the delivery of instruction, handouts and teacher aids, applicable standards, and links to additional internet resources.

The HELPR system allows teachers to use the lesson plans as presented or to expand upon them. In an environment where little free time is available for lesson development, HELPR helps teachers bring engaging, context-rich instruction to students.

The Horizons Partnership is well on its way toward realizing its goal of developing a sustainable, dynamic library for educators, both in California and beyond. One objective of the HELPR system was to have 100 such lesson plans available by Spring 2002.

On average, each lesson provides approximately one dozen pages of printable material. With the momentum demonstrated thus far, Horizons' initial estimate of 1,000 pages will be markedly surpassed by the end of the year.

HELPR and Standards

Whether one agrees or not with the idea of standardized testing, the reality is that the issue probably won't go away any time soon. Unfortunately, this often translates into pressure on educators to teach more for the goal of passing tests than for students' deep comprehension of the material.

Appreciating this struggle, the Horizons Partnership has attempted to provide ways to assist educators to teach material that has meaning to the learner while simultaneously supporting students to meet performance objectives on standardized tests.

Each lesson plan in the HELPR system lists all applicable academic skills and knowledge so that teachers see how the lesson activities satisfy various state content standards. Hyperlinks allow viewers to

connect to additional internet sites for greater clarification.

Although each lesson plan suggests appropriate target grade levels for the material, the flexibility of reviewing state standards instantly allows teachers to adjust the lesson plan to meet the specific needs of their students.

In addition to academic requirements, state and/or national career standards are also provided along with a list of applicable SCANS (*Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills*) competencies. Through this appreciation of both academic and career requirements, the HELPR system truly excels. In constructing the HELPR system in this manner, the Horizons Partnership has provided a strong model for integrating academics with career preparation.

Lesson plans such as these may prove critically important when an emphasis on test preparation forces some school districts to lessen or eliminate their students' exposure to career explorations. In some instances, contextual lesson plans may provide the only source of connectivity for students between academic theory and application in the workplace.

For schools able to continue providing work-based learning activities, instruction with contextual lesson plans can strengthen students' preparation for job shadowing experiences and internships.

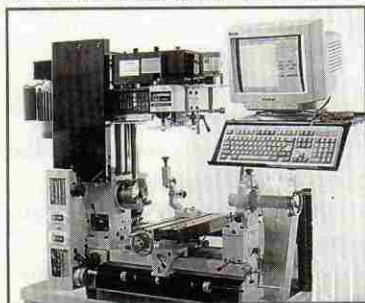
There are many opinions regarding the role of education in our society. But regardless of whether students plan to continue on to college, postsecondary training, military service, or induction into the workforce, every form of education should lead to the students' eventual employment.

By helping provide an environment that stimulates the desire for lifelong learning, teachers can benefit their students to the greatest degree. By offering the HELPR system to educators, the Horizons Partnership hopes to provide one more resource to help them create just such an environment. ©

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