Replacing Textbooks in Oregon's Schools

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EMPL 655 –Analysis of Teaching and Learning

Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) there are 3.8 Million teachers in the United States. In the National Center for Educational Statistic's 2004 (the most current available) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) Oregon's share of this number is 29,000 teachers. Every one of these licensed professionals must demonstrate an understanding of curriculum design (TSPS, 2009) to acquire and maintain their Oregon teaching license. In the state's largest Graduate School of Education (PSU), pre-service teachers are required to create a full unit of curriculum as part of their coursework (PSU Bulletin, p.227).

As early as 1997, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has advocated a new approach to teacher development. In Dennis Sparks' book, *A New Vision for Staff Development*, describes how the outcomes of professional development for teachers have become proficiency based knowledge interconnected across schools --even districts-- and grounded in Constructivist views that teachers should create their own knowledge rather than receive it from others (Sparks, 1997).

Considering the number of teachers who have been trained to create curriculum in Oregon, and the changing views on professional development in the field, primary and secondary education appears ready for a new approach to curriculum development and dissemination in our state.

Single Goal Improvement Plan

The goal of this plan is to replace commercially produced curriculum in Oregon schools with curriculum created by Oregon teachers, to Oregon standards.
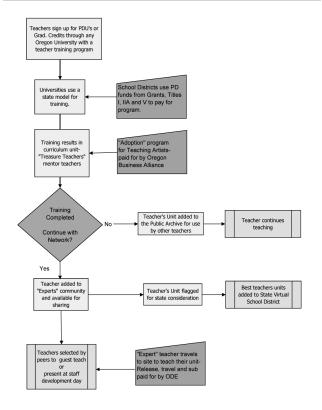
With the advent of the *American Memory*, *Teacher's Tube* and other social networking sites for teachers, high quality units of teacher created curriculum are now available via the Internet. Evidenced by ubiquitous file sharing, and the more common use of video, audio, pod, vodcasting…etc., the technical challenges of sharing educational content have been solved.

What remains are the political and operational issues of such an idea. Solving the political issues is beyond the scope of this assignment, but I believe I can solve the operational issues that stand in the way of Oregon building a searchable archive of high quality, standards based curriculum, that in time could eliminate the need for commercially produced textbooks in our state.

The Idea

It is now possible to tap the creative energy and passion of great Oregon teachers to create a state-wide system of curriculum development based on the principles of results-driven education, systems thinking and constructivism. Were we to do so, we could have a dynamic, ever changing, multi-media, standards based, Oregon aligned body of curriculum that is accessible to teachers 24-7-365 via the Internet.

According to Eduventures, schools spent $4.4 billion for textbooks in the 2006-07 school year. This expense would no longer be necessary with an open source such as I describe. This idea is already being tried in Florida, the nations 5th largest textbook market where *FreeReading* was the first open-source instructional program to be approved through an official state adoption (Wireless Generation,2010).

How It Works

• Teachers are trained using a state curriculum development model created by an expert coalition of scholars from the six Oregon University System -- Colleges of Education.

• Teachers who complete the training earn professional development credits and can enter the units of curriculum they create during their training for adjudication into the "Treasured Teachers" database.

• Treasured Teacher units are added to the Oregon Department of Educations online Virtual School District database.

• Treasured Teachers become part of a community of "experts" who share the units they are experts in - the units they have created- throughout the state.

• ODE covers the cost of "expert" teachers while they are in the field teaching their units, including subs and per diem.

• Teachers and School Districts are encouraged to use the "Treasured Teachers" curriculum, and over time School Districts are able to phase out commercially produced curriculum in Oregon.

Challenges To Achieving The Goal

• Cost – Initial program costs would first be covered by the state (Round two Race to the Top Money ?) eventually, cost savings from adoptions would pay for the program.

• Consistent Quality – A state panel of curriculum experts would select the Treasured Teacher units.

• Alignment with state standards – Alignment would be included as part of the training and creation process.

•Teacher support – This work is already being done (see OVSD), Oregon just needs to support teachers that want to do more and share the work with the state and mentor their peers.

•Community support – Oregonians need to be reassured that the open source curriculum that will eventually replace commercial curriculum is of a quality suitable for adoptions (See Florida).

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