I.3

Learning Expeditions:
Designing Products and Linked Projects

Overview

Products, the tangible results of in-depth investigations, are critical components of learning expeditions. Products are motivational, drive a need to know, and propel students to apply skills and understand learning expedition content and key concepts. They require students to develop craftsmanship and afford the opportunity for creativity in a particular medium or format. Teachers determine what students need to know and be able to do to create a specific product. They then plan backwards to develop a sequence of lessons leading to the product. In-depth investigations may include one or more linked projects; each project may result in a product. The linked projects and resulting products often culminate in an exhibition or performance.

BENCHMARK 3:

DESIGNING PRODUCTS AND LINKED PROJECTS

A. Product Design

1. Products are designed to motivate and to demonstrate student understanding of learning expedition content and skills.
2. Products require students to grapple with the learning expedition's big ideas and guiding questions.
3. Products are the result of in-depth investigations.
4. Product formats lead students to master the conventions of a particular medium.
5. Product formats (including technology-based formats) fit the purpose, audience, and mode of presentation of a project or investigation.
6. Teachers create clear product descriptions.
7. Literacy is intentionally woven into every stage of product development — reading and research to develop background knowledge, writing in a particular genre or format as the product itself, and/or other kinds of writing that explain or document the product.
8. Technology is used appropriately in various phases of product development — researching to build background knowledge, recording and analyzing data, documenting product development, and presentation.

B. Authentic Audiences

1. Products often meet an authentic need and have an audience and purpose beyond families or the classroom teacher.
2. Some products are particularly motivating because in themselves they are acts of service.

C. Linked Projects

1. Within a learning expedition, projects and investigations are logically linked and sequenced.
2. All projects and investigations within the learning expedition are chosen to develop deeper understanding of the compelling topic.

D. Planning Backwards

1. Products are scaffolded (e.g., skill instruction, mini-lessons, use of models and drafts) to build the understanding and skills needed to produce high quality work and to gain expertise in the chosen format.
2. Instruction is planned down to the daily lesson level; effective practices are used to teach the expedition content necessary for the products and to differentiate instruction.
3. Technology skills are integrated into daily lesson plans as needed.
4. Rubrics focus on standards and are created with students by analyzing exemplary product models and by generating criteria.
5. Students use rubrics to improve each successive draft and to inform peer critique.

E. Assessment

1. Each student's skills and knowledge are evident and assessable in the product and accompanying documents and presentation.
2. Teachers design products to meet standards and portfolio requirements.