Level 5 Design, Creativity and Technology - It Has To be Worth an ‘A’ At Least

PEEL in Practice: 1300 ideas for quality teaching
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Daniel, a Year 9 Technology student, dropped the assignment onto the desk. "Sorry it's a bit late, Mr Waite, but I had it on the computer and Dad was using it, so I had to wait to print it out." The cover page almost jumps off the desk at you - plenty of colour and well laid out with a couple of bits of clip art. "Very impressive", I tell him. Daniel responds with a smile, "It has to be worth an 'A' at least. I tried real hard and I got a lot of stuff from Dad."

Later, as I sat down to mark the assignment, it became very obvious that the real work was done, not by Daniel, but by the manufacturers of Encarta. The 'stuff' that had come from his father was just downloaded straight from the computer, printed out, and submitted with a glossy cover page. This was becoming a real problem, and the students really thought that they were meeting the requirements of the assignment.

The next time I saw Daniel, I sat down with him and asked him to explain what he had presented. He couldn't. In fact, it became very obvious that he had hardly scanned the text before he submitted it. I pointed out that one of the requirements was that he demonstrate and understanding of the subject he was covering, and that it had to be in his own words. "But I did what I was supposed to", he said, and he meant it.

So what was happening?

It wasn't hard to work out that we had given Daniel and all the others a tool, lauded its praises, and declared that here was a tool that would simplify many of their tasks. Now, we were complaining that students had listened and were using these wonder tools!

OK, so what could I do about it?

I have always believed that tools were there to be used, but sensibly, so, rather than deny students their use, it would be more effective to factor them into the equation.

I rewrote the assignment - still the same aim (to have the student demonstrate understanding of the subject being researched) - but forcing the student to use more than one tool. I downloaded a piece of software-based information, photocopied a page from a book, and gave these to the students, together with information on where they had come from. A class brainstorming session gave a list of keywords, and each student recorded these plus any others that they may wish to include. Each student then had to find two other pieces of information. Using all four sources, they then had to scan the information for the facts relating to the keywords. They then had the choice of rewriting the information in a report format, or submitting the four sets of information with a glossary which gave a clear explanation for each keyword.
This exercise proved very positive as, rather than demanding understanding, I was now showing how to achieve understanding and, for those who chose to make the attempt, it achieved the aim. To allow greater flexibility, I included in later assignments the opportunity for students to present their work using other forms of presentation (video, audio tape, oral presentation) so as to cater for those students who had trouble with written assignments.

Systems Technology Electronics

Year 9 Assignment #1

The radio microphone that you are building uses an electret capacitive microphone insert to input the audio signal. This is only one type of microphone among many.

You have been given two information sheets on microphones. Page 1 is from Encarta 96 and page 2 is from FM Bugs in the library. You are going to research microphones using the list of keywords selected by the group.

You are to:

Find another two pieces of information from two different sources.  
Scan all four information sheets for facts relating to the list of keywords.  
Under each keyword give a brief description of the facts and a reference for that information.

THEN

You are to use the information to demonstrate your understanding of microphones by:

- Rewriting the information in a report format using the Keywords as subheadings or
- Submitting, your four worksheets with an attached glossary giving an explanation for each keyword.

As an alternative the report can be presented in a form other than written, such as video, oral presentation or audio tape provided it meets the minimum requirements listed above. If you intend to use this method then discuss it with your teacher first.

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