



by Matt Huth

IOWA CORE CURRICULUM AND 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

This article is collectively written by Matt Huth, ICDA President, Roger Henderson, ICDA President-Elect/Iowa Core Curriculum 9-12 Writing Team, and Elizabeth Fritz, IBA President-Elect/IAAE. We hope to provide information that will help shed some light on this new state initiative.

Background

In 2005, the state of Iowa began a journey of developing a statewide initiative that will impact the education of children in Iowa like no other initiative in Iowa history. Iowa has been working on developing a core curriculum in literacy, math and science for students in grades 9-12. In 2007, the legislature added the content areas of social studies and 21st century skills to the Iowa Core Curriculum and expanded all content areas to include students in grades K-12. The Iowa Core Curriculum is structured to support the state standards and benchmarks in reading, mathematics, and science, and provide the concepts and skills needed by students to attain these standards. (21st Century States, 2007)

On April 25, 2008, the Iowa legislature approved mandating the Iowa Core Curriculum for all students in grades 9-12 by 2012 and grades K-8 by 2014. Governor Culver signed this into law on May 1, 2008. (Iowa Core Curriculum, 2008).

This is the closest that the state has come to "Standards" in our educational history. These "Standards" are not focused on content areas, but are focused on learning skills that are used across all content areas. Work-teams have been working to develop the process that will be used by districts to support the implementation of the Iowa Core Curriculum. These teams have made a commitment to provide some common tools to assist districts in their implementation

needs and to develop model units of instruction that will assist teachers with strategies to develop higher level thinking and produce authentic intellectual student work. Twenty-first century skills will be integrated into all the content areas to the degree possible and some areas will be stand alone as separate units of instruction. (21st Century States, 2007)

What are the implications for arts educators under the new state initiative called the Iowa Core Curriculum and 21st century skills?

Iowa Core Curriculum

The Iowa Core Curriculum (also known as Model Core Curriculum) provides local school districts a guide to delivering instructional content that is consistent, challenging and meaningful to students. The curriculum identifies the essential concepts and skill sets for literacy, mathematics, science and social studies, as well as 21st century learning skills (civic literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, health literacy, and employability).

A popular question that is often posed:

"Why is music NOT in the core curriculum?" -The answer is, "We are in the 'Core Curriculum.'"

Last year, a series of conversations, meetings, and hours of committee work provided a platform for a meeting with the Governor's Educational Advisor. During this meeting we were able to share our belief that the arts

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IOWA CORE CURRICULUM AND 21ST CENTURY SKILLS, CONTINUED

are a critical part of 21st century education. We stressed that the arts must appear in the language of all documentation and that the arts are essential in the education of each child. As a result, music and visual arts are in the process of writing the sample units along with math, literacy, science, and soon social studies.

Our local Area Education Associations (AEA) have started training sessions with the "Model Core Curriculum Team" from our schools. During these initial sessions, the AEA staff are training local teams who are in the process of developing a local action plan, the first requirement of the Department of Education. The 9-12 plan must be in place by 2010. The plans developed at the local level will reflect the necessary steps needed to bring the local district closer to preparing students with the essential skills inherent in the 21st Century Skill initiative and the Iowa Core Curriculum. Sample units that model the necessary pedagogy of the 21st Century Skills and the Iowa Core Curriculum, including music and the visual arts, will eventually be available on the Department of Education (DE) web site.

Representatives from the Iowa Choral Directors (ICDA), Iowa Bandmasters Association (IBA), Iowa Music Educators Association (IMEA), Iowa String Teachers (ISTA), and Art Educators of Iowa (AEI) sit on the team of educators that are writing sample units for the "related arts area." These units are example of how arts can be integrated into cross-curricular units and will not be used as required curriculum.

The Iowa Core sample-unit writing is divided into two levels

- K-8: Writing units incorporating essential skills and concepts of Math, Science, Literacy, and Fine Arts
- 9-12: Writing units incorporating essential skills and concepts of Fine Arts, Social Studies, and 21st Century Skills

The following timeline will give you a perspective of the work that has been and will be accomplished.

Timeline of planning:

Summer 2008

Sample units K-8: Writing units incorporating essential skills and concepts of Math, Science, Literacy, and Fine Arts

Fall 2008

Sample units 9-12: Writing units incorporating essential skills and concepts of Fine Arts, Social Studies, and 21st Century Skills

Sept. 15: K-8 sample units submitted

October 1: Sample units reviewed by AEA

October 1-December 1- Sample unit refinement and field testing as pilots

December 1- January 6- Unit refinement

July 1, 2010: Implementation Plan grades 9-12 (not implementation – just the plan)

July 1, 2012: Implementation Plan grades K-8 (not implementation – just the plan)

Layers of Development

- Governor's Office (signing of the bill)
- Department of Education (collaborative design for implementation of stages)
- Local AEA's (organization and development of network support)
- Your school's Team with the assigned AEA representative (provide support and facilitate implementation)
- Your school (alignment of instruction and assessment)

There have been several recent press items regarding the progress of the Iowa Core Curriculum.

In a recent letter from the Dept of Education, Kevin Fangman explains that this is a process that schools and administrators should take their time in developing. The letter also explains that there are "TQ funds" (teacher quality funds) to help support the implementation of the Iowa Core Curriculum.

"Prior to initiating in-depth alignment work and professional development, districts are encouraged to participate in the Leadership Training to learn more about how to facilitate this work and to establish an implementation plan with the support of the Iowa Core Curriculum Network facilitator from their AEA. Teacher membership on these leadership teams is strongly encouraged and Iowa Core Curriculum TQ funds may be used to support their attendance."

To see the full letter, go to the home page of our web site, www.iowachoral.org

Department of Education Documents

Listed below are segments of the 21st Century Skills and the Iowa Core Curriculum. The entire document may be viewed on the Department of Education site: <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/674/1023/> Watch Judy Jeffrey's DE Podcast on Iowa Core Curriculum

<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/1365/1157>

21st Century Skills

As each Iowa student is provided access to essential concepts and meaningful learning experiences in the core academic content areas, it is imperative that we also look to 21st century skills to build capacity in students so they are prepared to lead productive, satisfying lives. According to Ken Kay, president of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, the 21st century skills set "is the ticket to economic upward mobility in the new economy" (Gewertz, 2007). Business and industry is providing a very clear message that students need the skills to "work comfortably with people from other cultures, solve problems creatively, write and speak well, think in a multidisciplinary way, and evaluate information critically. And they need to be punctual, dependable, and industrious." (Gewertz, 2007).

The Framework for 21st Century Learning stated, "We believe schools must move beyond a focus on basic competency in core subjects to promoting understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects" (2007). 21st century skills bridge the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of students from the core academic areas to real life application.

"The primary aim of education is not to enable students to do well in school, but to help them do well in the lives they lead outside of the school."

-Ray McNulty, ICLE

Iowa High School Summit, December 10, 2007

The reality of building capacity for the 21st century is that we do not know what the work of the future will be like (Darling-

Hammond, 2007) or how technology will influence health and financial issues. The challenge is to prepare students to think critically, to engage in mental activity, or habits of mind, that "...use facts to plan, order, and work toward an end; seek meaning or explanations; are self-reflective; and use reason to question claims and make judgments..." (Noddings, 2008). It may be that our task is not only to prepare students to "fit into the future" but to shape it. "...If the complex questions of the future are to be determined... by human beings...making one choice rather than another, we should educate youths - all of them - to join in the conversation about those choices and to influence that future..." (Meier, 2008)

Descriptions of what constitute essential 21st century skills are plentiful as well. In the 2007 session, the Iowa Legislature established the Iowa 21st century framework as:

1. employability skills
2. financial literacy
3. health literacy
4. technology literacy

Employability

- Communicate and work productively with others, incorporating different perspectives and cross-cultural understanding, to increase innovation and the quality of work
- Adapt to various roles and responsibilities and work flexibly in climates of ambiguity and changing priorities
- Demonstrate leadership skills, integrity, ethical behavior, and social responsibility while collaborating to achieve common goals
- Demonstrate initiative and self-direction through high achievement and lifelong learning while exploring the ways individual talents and skills can be used for productive outcomes in personal and professional life
- Demonstrate productivity and accountability by meeting high expectations

(excerpted from Iowa Core Curriculum Project Lead Team report - Essential Concepts and Skill Sets, 2008)

In closing, there are several important things to remember:

1. The arts are and have been "at the table" during this important developmental stage. The arts have a voice and our professional organizations are contributing to the process.

2. "Local Control" - Your school will have control over how your plan is shaped in response to the essential skills of the 21st Century initiative and Iowa Core Curriculum. It is important for you and the other arts educators in your district to be involved and informed during this process.

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