Inspiration® SOFTWARE, INC
The Leader in Visual Thinking and Learning™

CASE STUDY

Academy Park High School
Sharon Hill, PA

At-Risk Ninth-Graders Set Course for High School Graduation Learning With Inspiration

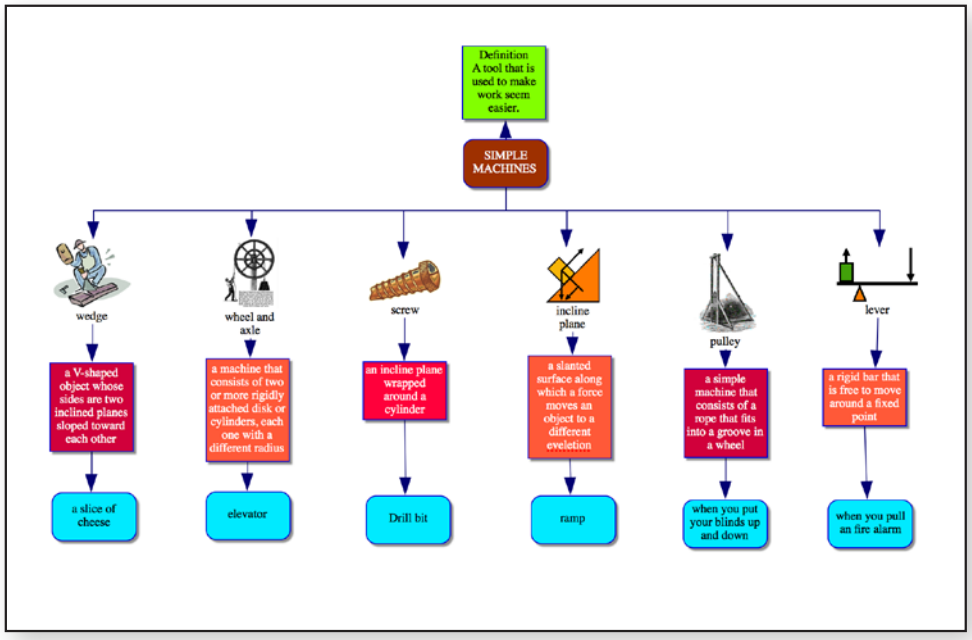
With 34 years of teaching behind her, science teacher Maryanne Porter is well-versed at finding ways to engage students in learning. Putting her skills to the test, Porter, along with two colleagues at Academy Park High School in Sharon Hill, Pa., located just outside of Philadelphia, recently began a pilot program to team-teach a class of 20 at-risk, ninth-grade students, many with discipline issues. Nearly every day, Porter reaches for Inspiration®, the ultimate thinking and learning tool to comprehend, create, communicate and achieve more, from Inspiration® Software, Inc., designed for learners in grade 6 to adult.

In this unique classroom, known as "305," after the room in which it's located, Porter collaborates with a math teacher and a language arts/special education teacher to give the students the focused attention, instruction and encouragement they need for academic success. The students share the same curriculum as other ninth-graders in the district, and must meet the same state standards. For lessons across the curriculum that require "higher level thinking," Porter and her colleagues employ the help of Inspiration, which Porter has come to rely on since she began using it six years ago in a regular science classroom.

"I love Inspiration—we use it constantly," she said. "It's very user-friendly, and it makes it much easier for my students to organize their ideas. They have a lot of fun learning with it—it's definitely a perk for them."

Porter recalled the first time she and her colleagues saw a demonstration of Inspiration, nine years ago, by the district technology coordinator. "Here we were, a group of veteran teachers, and we couldn't stop playing with it," she said. Today, every computer at Academy Park is loaded with Inspiration, and "students are really taking off and moving far ahead with it," she said.

The students of 305 use Inspiration to build graphic organizers—including concept maps, webs, mind maps and idea maps—to brainstorm, plan, organize, think, outline and present their ideas. Porter appreciates the ease with which it allows students to move from one format to another, she said. "It's sensible, and it's the way things should work. I don't know if my students understand that it's a big deal, but it is."



Students in Porter's class created this Inspiration diagram to relate new information with real world examples to better understand the six simple machines.

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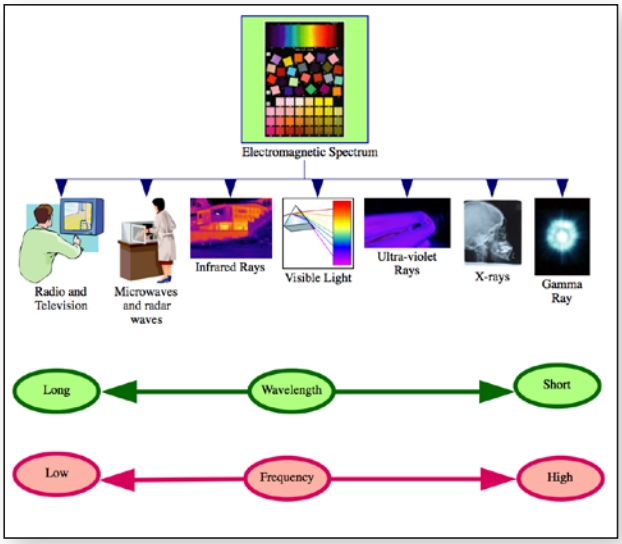
With each assignment, Porter has her students add more visual elements to their work, drawing from Inspiration's extensive online libraries of clip art and symbols, or by adding their own images. "Inspiration allows students to bring their own creativity to their work. They can very easily add images that are meaningful to them, and everyone's is different, not cookie-cutter," she said.

For some students, seeing a visual representation of a concept is the only way to learn it, said Porter. "A traditional written outline doesn't work for everyone," she said. "But if they can see it in a graphic organizer, they know whether they've connected something in the right place, and it makes sense."

In line with district goals, Porter is teaching vocabulary that relates to the curriculum, in response to research that suggests it results in improved achievement. So every week, Porter chooses an article about a current event in science that is relevant to a lesson she's teaching in class. Next, she asks her students to choose four vocabulary words they read in the article. She then creates a vocabulary list from the most frequently selected words, and using the Word Guide in Inspiration, her students look up the definitions. Next, the class converts the vocabulary list into an outline, which becomes the study guide. And with just a few keystrokes, Porter creates a quiz. "This exercise puts the vocabulary words in context for them and gets them thinking. We've had some interesting discussions about the alternate meanings, and they remember what the words mean," she said. "Some of my students are getting perfect scores on the quizzes every week."

When Porter taught the electromagnetic spectrum, she used Inspiration to look at wavelength and frequency. When her students learned about lab safety and physics, she used Inspiration again. And her co-teachers in 305 use it for math vocabulary and writing assignments. "I can't think of a topic for which it wouldn't work," she said.



Porter used Inspiration during a lesson on the electromagnetic spectrum. Adding visual elements provided her students with meaningful connections, reinforcing their comprehension of the concepts of wavelength and frequency.

Porter makes use of Inspiration for topics that are complex, but perhaps most valuable for her students is the ability to create a clean and polished finished product, which gives them pride in their work, she explained. "With Inspiration, you don't have to be the best student to build something that looks nice. Some of my students have difficulty using a pencil, or other challenges. Inspiration helps level the playing field for struggling learners."

Today, by any account, the students of 305 and Academy Park High School are succeeding, as discipline issues in the ninth grade, school-wide, have dropped by 90 percent. "These students are learning, and they'll be ready for the 10th grade," said Porter. "This class has made a huge difference, and Inspiration has definitely been a part of that."

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