Technology Embedded in Writing Lessons

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Writing can be a difficult subject to teach. The proper sentence structure, grammar and paragraph usage could cause roadblocks for some students. Traditionally taught writing strategies may not be sufficient for these students. How can student’s writing achievement improve when the conventional methods are not working? Technology has been a proven motivator for many students. Could technology help student write better?

One important goal for teachers is getting children motivated to learn. Once children are motivated, they are open and willing to start processing knowledge. Teachers need to understand that computers can be powerful allies to process this knowledge. “Reading resources and writing activities are widely available on the Internet.” There are vast amounts of curriculum material also available on the Internet that provide the opportunity for authentic learning. Authentic learning is “realistic, complex learning experiences that encourage richer knowledge structures, not simplified, abstract content” (Castellani & Jeffs, 2001). These environments support a more active and engaging role for students. Students who self select their materials are taking responsibility for their learning. They should be held accountable for their achievement.

Student’s achievement in school depends greatly on literacy development. Literacy is the ability to read and write. Effective writing is not necessarily determined by correct English usage, but by the capability of communicating
appropriately. How do we help students attain effective writing? There are several theories and studies done that help students in writing.

Melanie, a writing teacher, knew her high school students needed more opportunities for effective writing. She decided to integrate two strategies, an Electronic Read Around and online synchronous chats, via a local area network (LAN) into her writing curriculum. These strategies were providing additional chances for the students to write. “Melanie’s goal was to give her students, regardless of their sophistication as writers, strategies that would strengthen their ability to discuss a topic before writing and enable them to be more critical during the revision phase.” The methods Melanie used served both these purposes (Strassman & D’Amore, 2002).

In a pilot study of a Laptop Program (Lowther, Ross & Morrison, 2003), sixth and seventh grade students in the laptop group (1 computer per student) revealed in their response surveys “significantly higher confidence” compared to control students (5+ computers per class) for using basic software applications. The laptop students were demonstrating superior writing skills by exceeding a full rubric point. “Open-ended comments on the Student Survey identified the facilitation of writing as the best aspect of having a computer” (Lowther, Ross & Morrison, 2003).

Melanie Helt’s challenge was to integrate technology to raise reading and writing scores. An online learning community was created, which included students, preservice teachers, a grant administrator and building principals.
Would online correspondence motivate students into performing better? The main focus was the online literature circles that were formed. “Although it is difficult to say whether the technology affected the test results, it is fair to say that the test results showed dramatic increases in reading scores across the board” (Helt, 2003). Students who have been shy and difficult to discuss the literature in class have been participating in the online discussions. Students are free to express themselves in an environment that is not intimidating. Thus creating an open invitation for writing. Online literature circles are communicating through writing back and forth between participants. “If we want to help struggling students succeed and move ahead in their skills, we must find alternate ways of motivating and guiding them” (Helt, 2003).

“The field of special education technology has long recognized the area of writing as one in which technology holds considerable promise for individuals with disabilities” (Edyburn, 2003). The tools available that can be used in helping students succeed in writing are vastly growing. Spelling, speech synthesis, voice recognition, word prediction and word processors are just some of many technologies that guide learners to reach goals that may not be feasible in a traditional classroom setting.

“The integration of computer technology has provided students and teachers with the tools to meet their literacy education curricular needs as well as giving them the opportunity to read, write, publish, and produce with real-life purpose” (Maslin & Nelson, 2002). Once children are connected to real life, it
Writing with Technology gives them the purpose to learn and that learning is demonstrated in their writing. It provides students with opportunities to publish their work and connect with other students who have published their works. Using technology has allowed teachers to demonstrate literacy fundamentals of the future. This includes reading electronic texts, online literature circles, technology-based authoring, multimedia resources and applying the writing process electronically. Editing and revision phases of the writing process are simplified using a computer. Teachers who use technology as a tool in their writing lessons will find they are better prepared to implement future technologies.

A major obstruction in this implementation is the lack of training for teachers. Technology needs to be integrated, but without training it is difficult to pass technological knowledge to students. School districts should offer more training and practice for teachers. Technology liaisons should be assigned to campuses to instruct and guide teachers on how to integrate technology into teachers' lessons.

Writing can be greatly improved with the use of correct technology. Technology integration in literacy education in all classrooms would make enormous strides for the future.
References


