

USING THE INTERNET: ENHANCING THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CURRICULUM

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INTRODUCTION

With the current trend of integrating technology into the classroom, teachers have had to quickly search for effective training in new skills and the implementation of them into their classrooms. Even though teacher education programs are currently creating technologically prepared teachers (Maurer & Davidson, 1998), there is still the need to help currently practicing teachers. In addition, the state of North Carolina has created a computer skills curriculum, which is now, required for graduation of all high school students. This curriculum focuses on “preparing the student to be an independent user of technology for personal and school needs” (NC Correlation Chart, 1993). Tying both the need for training teachers and students in technological skills due to both the state requirements and the educational potential to provide effective instruction (Pea & Soloway, 1987; Panyan, McPherson, Steeves, & Hummel, 1994), state funding was sought to provide the avenue in which to accomplish these goals.

After obtaining a *Rural Challenge Technology Partnership* grant from the state of North Carolina, three school districts created a partnership to employ technology as a learning tool. Core academic instructional areas included language arts, math, and science classrooms. Over a two-year period, hardware was purchased, training was provided, networks were established, and integration of this technology into the classroom was monitored.

The purpose of this report is to discuss an Internet enhanced curriculum designed through collaboration between high school teachers and university professors which was part of this grant. Challenged by both new state English competencies and a state mandate to integrate technology into the curriculum, this faculty chose to use the Internet as a resource, to provide new learning methods and as a venue for student publishing. The desire for an increased student pass rate on state mandated technology testing was also an impetus for this collaboration.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

University faculty members met with administrators and faculty of the participating high school to discuss the desired skills’ instruction, immediate hardware needs, time for both in-class and after class consultations, and the evaluation process. Upon completion of these meetings, hardware was ordered, instruction was delivered and personal consultation was completed. This training was evaluated at the end of year one and again at the end of year two.

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During the end of year one evaluation, it was noted that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience were utilizing technology less than those teachers with more experience. These less experienced teachers were focusing on the North Carolina state curriculum without applying the technology curriculum to other subjects. Observations and discussions with teachers indicated a lack of classroom access to strategies on incorporating language arts writing components with new technologies. Additionally, the majority of language arts' teachers had received technology training focusing on skills, rather than integration techniques or strategies.

Communication strategies were developed after the first year's evaluation. These included: 1) professional training schedules and topics listed on a web site to inform all teachers, coordinators, and administrators, 2) superintendents' endorsements and explanations of activities to participants, and 3) implementation schedules created further in advance.

The greatest need expressed by teachers was the integration of technology into the new English competencies for the state. During the second year of implementation, after discussions and training on various types of uses such as PowerPoint, subject-specific curriculum software, and the Internet, the participating English teachers agreed to proceed with work using the Internet to enhance the state's curriculum. The greatest concern of this effort was limited time. Workshops were seen as a valuable time to explore new possibilities. An effort was made to include both experienced and beginning teachers in these groups. A list and plan was created jointly between six high school English teachers and a university consultant. The six teachers engaged in additional workshops on the Internet, after which they wrote a list of integration ideas for each new English competency.

DISCUSSION

This study has shown that not only are teachers willing to integrate technology into their senior English classes, but they also are willing to create the ways in which this can be accomplished. When given the hardware, training, support, and most of all, time, these teachers were highly successful at creatively and effectively planning lessons around existing curriculum enhanced by technology. An additional value of this type of training is the way in which it creates a community of learners between experienced and less experienced teachers. This example has paved the way for additional work in this school district in using the Internet to enhance classroom curriculum.

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