

CLASS WEB PAGES ENHANCE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT **by LAURA WOODS^o**

Imagine entering one of the second grade classrooms at John M. Sexton Elementary of St. Petersburg, FL. There, it is not uncommon to see students working diligently at their computers, creating and editing writing or art projects which they are preparing for internet publication. Students regularly confer with peers to critique their writings to gain another perspective on what they have written. This happens before final editing is done and the work is submitted to their teacher for final modifications. When these are made, the project is given the "Good Writing" stamp of approval and permission is provided for inclusion to their classroom web pages.

This may seem to be a very simple process. Simple, however, is not the case when working with many students who are functioning below grade level. These students, for what ever reason, need additional incentives to try a little harder and work a little longer to reach their potential. The use of projects for their classroom web page, for many of these youngsters, seems to be the magic key that unlocks their desire to try their hardest to learn and achieve.

There are many such classes at John M. Sexton Elementary which participate in the school web site project with more joining the ranks with each passing week. Teachers at Sexton recognize the potential power of the magnetism created by the use of classroom web pages. In a world in which the educational arena is driven by research based documentation, sometimes plain old fashioned teacher instinct is what is needed to instill the desire for some students to pick up the gauntlet for driving their own educational freight-train.

The direction of this student maneuvered train is piloted by teachers who are provided training on classroom web page creation. Along with this training, 9uidehnes for steering students through deciding what should be included in a class web site is also addressed. Student creativity comes to the fore during this process as they can come up with some really wild ideas. It is up to the teachers to focus this explosion of excitement with reason yet tolerance. Not an easy bill to fill.

A school web site, that is maintained by students, as well as teachers and the school web master, is a large undertaking that could become totally overwhelming. However, with training for both students and their teachers, this becomes a labor of pure enjoyment for all stake holders. This affords the students the opportunity to boost their self-esteem and take pride in their work that follows, when they see the fruits of their hard earned labor published for the whole world to see. Teachers gain that same pride in their students, as well as themselves. They see their teaching strategies paying off, as their students achieve higher skills through creativity and hard work, making all their efforts worthwhile.

How all this creativity comes about is the responsibility of all stake holders. The teachers are provided hands-on training in the computer lab by the school's technology specialist providing time to practice and explore the

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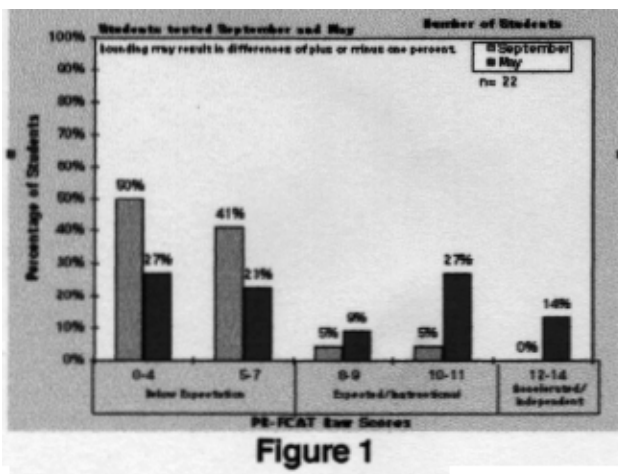
many options afforded them using web page software. Students are then brought to the lab where lessons on the use of the internet along with word processing software is provided by both the technology specialist and teacher working cooperatively. On returning to the classroom, brainstorming begins between teacher and class as they determine what they want to show the rest of the world. As soon as the students are comfortable with the process and can use the software “on their own”, they are then given the time to create, edit and publish original stories and projects that may be included in the class web page. From this point students, under the guidance of their teachers, take on the responsibility of monitoring and maintaining the web pages.

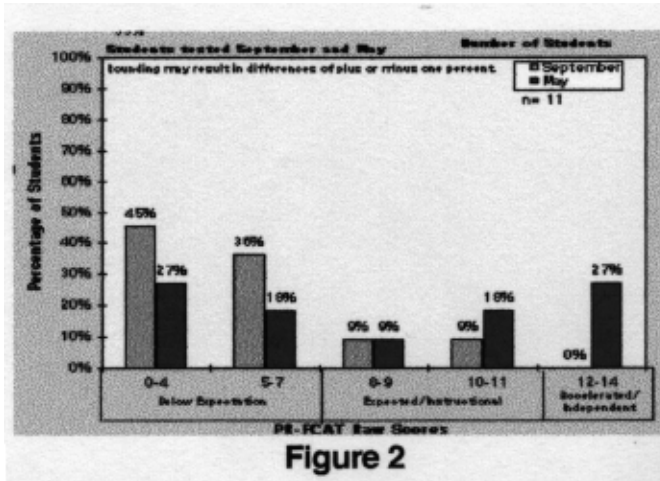
Classroom web pages are created using software such as Claris Home Page which is very easy for the students to understand and implement. Students create mini sites connected to the main class web page that exhibit the many skills practiced in the classroom. Sites for computer generated and scanned in art work, original stories (one of the most popular), class environment pages showing off animals and other unique characteristics of their classrooms, management tools students utilize daily, homework calendars, classroom wish lists, newsletters and many other ideas are displayed on these collaborative sites. Many students have computers at home so this, we have found, is an excellent way for students to share their knowledge with family and friends at the home level.

Our students also use the Internet to collect information through research strategies which provides them with a broader perspective of where information may be obtained. Their curiosity is always peaked when browsing the WWW for they are never quite sure what interesting facts they may dig up. As teachers provide safe sites for the students to use, they are also supporting the concept of placing the responsibility for browsing the Internet on the students shoulders. Consequently, they are expected to act dependably when maintaining their own sites. It can be difficult at times but rewarding in the end. Student achievement can be impacted through the use of web pages coupled with classroom strategies that enhance what the students are exhibiting.

As the year accelerates, the children’s progress is monitored to determine the validity of the use of the web pages. Standardized testing is a

strategy which helps track student progress but is by far not the only measure that should be utilized. Although many strategies are in place in the classroom to help children achieve, keeping track of the students who take an active part in their web pages helps support the idea that creative publication can have a positive impact on student productiveness. To the left, you will notice in Figure 1 a classroom’s reading





achievement scores from Sept. to Jan. Please note the improvement of many of these children. You also have a class in Figure 2 that did not do any web page publication.

Much of the proof manifests itself in the form of teacher observation as students exhibit a keen desire to create academically based projects throughout the school year. Critiquing done

by peers and interested adults such as, other teachers and/or parents, is another excellent way for students to self assess what they have created. All of this input, along with the grades they receive on their projects and written pieces, gives kids an extra boost to strive for excellence. There is nothing like the respect of your peers and adults who care about you to make you want to do even better and reach that much farther. Although the class web page is not the sole motivational piece which impacts these students, it becomes evident as classes are observed, that is a definite stimulus helping move them toward their final destination, that of highest student achievement.

Through the use of class web page creation and maintenance, students share their skills, knowledge and the environment in which they learn in an interesting and creative manner. They use real world information to support their research, reports and projects which are then published proudly. As teachers continue to work with classes and expand the school web site with additional class sites, it will be interesting to see how many more creative, as well as, innovative ideas the students will generate as the years progress. Since the school's inception in 1997, many classes have joined the ranks of classroom web site creators and the school looks forward to many more classes joining the site to make this a wonderful place to come, explore and find out about our student's educational world. If you are interested in seeing some of the creative work these children have generated, as well as the teachers, join us at ...sexton-es.pinellas.k12.fl.us... and watch our progress as we advance into the new millennium. See you on the Internet.