MACUL JOURNAL

AUTHENTIC

2ND GRADE IN THE ~IES

Trip

ASSESSMENT

Learning for the Real World

Incorporating iPods to Increase Student Proficiency

Stacey Schuh, MACUL Grant Recipient

One of the most important things I stress to students is that everyone learns differently. This year I had the opportunity to demonstrate this by incorporating video-enabled Apple iPods in the classroom. The goal was to increase students' proficiency in the areas of math and reading by recording electronic whiteboard lessons and providing audio books for later playback on the iPod. By the end of the year, students increased their grade-level proficiency.

At the beginning of last school year, I chose four students who were a grade-level or more behind in math; these students were then provided with a video enabled iPod. As I taught math lessons throughout the year, I recorded my interactions with the students and the whiteboard for later playback. The iPod provided each student the ability to look back on past lessons at anytime; they loved the fact that they had the ability to review what was taught when they required additional instruction. If for some reason I failed to record a lesson they would ask me why not and demand that I record it for them. I was glad to see that students were taking an interest in math and their learning. By the end of the year these four students had a better understanding of complicated concepts and were excited about math. It was amazing to see such growth in students who had such low self-esteem in the beginning of the year.

Several of my students were also reluctant readers; because of this, many did not read or were not reading at their grade level. To resolve this issue, students were provided with iPods to listen to audio books. When I introduced the idea of listening to audio books while reading, many students showed a higher interest. Quite a number of students commented that when they listened to their audio books they understood how a reader should read aloud. Most for the first time understood inflection and applied it to something that was important to them.

To save costs, I used the Capital Area District Library to download audio books off their website for student use. One student who did not want anything to do with books was now begging me to download copies of the newest

iPods continued from pg. 23

book releases. After he had read and listened to a book, I let him pick a book at his level to read. He seemed more willing and excited about reading. I even overheard him recommend a book to another student. This particular student scored low on reading tests at the beginning of the year, but by the end was reading a grade level ahead.

Students became so excited about the use of this technology, iPods became integral parts of other classroom projects. For example, students incorporated their use in our class annual video project interviewing local community members and building iMovies around those interviews. The iPods, with the use of compatible microphones, became integral tools to completing the project.

By using a new medium in my classroom, I captured their attention and created an excitement for learning. Students have shown much growth, not only in math but in reading comprehension and reading inflection.

Challenges

My goals for using new media in the classroom were to excite students about learning and to give them a way to share their own ideas with others. I will continue to use MP3 players in the classroom because of the excitement for learning they provide. However, using these tools does come with some challenges.

At times students would not be able to listen to certain books, because the library did not offer a digital version of that particular book. Also recording and uploading math lessons was a bit time consuming. Fortunately, this year the lessons are already recorded eliminating the need to rerecord them.

Alternative Technologies to MP3 Players/iPods

Even without access to MP3 players, I believe I could recreate this project using online resources such as USTREAM—a site that allows you to webcast your lessons and post them on a particular website. For recording students' voices the audio program Audacity could be used to record and upload student podcasts. I would still be able to download books from the library using just the computers we have access to; however students would not be able to take those books home with them.

It is important to think about how this type of tool would benefit your students learning. Simply purchasing MP3 players for the sake of purchasing "technology", defeats the purpose. As a teacher I am fortunate to have access to these specific tools, but there are tools available that are free for use. This particular project has taught me to use technology not only to excite students about learning, but to have students make connections with each other and share their ideas with a wider audience.

Stacey Schuh teaches 6th Grade at Island City Academy in Eaton Rapids, schuh@islandcty.org.

Breathe and Rebuild continued from pg. 23

Teams of 2 or 3 were formed and each team worked together to create one spreadsheet with their agreed-upon recommendations. (Suggestion: select teams according to understanding and experience so that each team has a student who seems to have more knowledge of the process). The team picks were shared with the class, parts were discussed, reviews talked about, and one shopping list was set. Because I wanted some reassurance that the parts chosen would work together, I had other IT resource people available to check it out. Parts were ordered and the kids were excited!

Once the parts arrive, the students take inventory, read some of the documentation (I had them look over the motherboard manual and answer quiz questions about it), then get started building. (Suggestion: have an area of your room that the teams can work together with enough room to work where they can leave it when the bell rings. Carts on wheels are nice to use so you can lock up the project.) During the first day of building, I had arranged for help from a resource person that was experienced in PC building to be on hand to answer questions and give advice. Not only was that helpful for the students, but my confidence level rose to the comfort zone knowing an expert was overseeing the actual work. The students are excited when the system gets turned on for the first time and it works! They install an operating system and some basic software that we use in our district. After that, the computer is used in our department or wherever needed in the school system.

Additional activities that are covered during this process include social bookmarking (such as delicious or ikeepbookmarks), keeping a log of activity for documentation purposes, self-evaluation, and team evaluations.

This computer building project is fun and exciting for the students. As a business teacher, I stepped outside of my comfort zone, took a big breath, and let the kids build.

Carol Cox is a Business Teacher at Westwood High School, NICE Community School District, Ishpeming, Michigan. She may be contacted at coxc@nice.k12.mi.us.