Improving Writing with Technology

Capstone Report

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**Capstone Report**

The purpose of this capstone project was to address the need to improve writing growth in elementary school students by integrating technology strategies. The teacher survey revealed that students’ engagement level in writing assignments had decreased. Student’s at Riverside Primary had been exposed to Lucy Calkins writing strategy for the past five years. Riverside Primary is a school of grades kindergarten and first. Students in kindergarten were learning how to write using Lucy Calkins methodology. Though they showed some growth in their writing skills, by the time they got to first grade, they were still using the strategies, but seemed to lose interest in the writing process. With a review of Kindergarten data, first grade teachers expected to have first grade students to excel in writing. What they discovered were same stories students used in kindergarten. They had lost creative engagement to produce a writing piece that showed growth from Kindergarten to now first grade.

At Riverside Primary, there are lots of tools that integrate technology for both reading and math. This includes Scholastic iRead, SplashMath, Scholastic FastMath that are used on the iPads, classroom computers and educational websites, but there were none for writing. Though some may disagree with introducing computers for emergent writers isn’t beneficial, research shows differently. Crafton (1996) states that technology would drastically improve student writing quality and improve students' attitudes toward writing. Knowing this, allowed the push forward to incorporate technology for writing as well. Introducing Microsoft Word Processor was the new way to include technology in the writing lessons.

The capstone project produced a plan to engage students by improving their technology skills and enabling them to use keyboarding skills for the publishing phase of writing as a motivator to increase student engagement in the writing process. As one school year ended from Riverside Primary and another school year started at KIPP STRIVE Primary, it was best that tutorials videos were created along with online collaboration among the mentor, who was still at Riverside, to assure proficiency of each lesson. From the tutorials and the collaboration with the mentor, classroom teachers were reached by email and skype. Most of the classroom teachers had the lessons implemented (see Appendix A). Microsoft Word was introduced as a form of engagement for publishing their writing pieces. The objective was to still teach writing lessons and have students practice writing to improve fine motor skills.

In addition to using Microsoft Word, students needed to know how to type. Typing Club was another tool that integrated technology during ‘work on writing’ of student’s center/rotation blocks. This tool is a great way for students to practice their typing skills. Two computer lessons were taught at Riverside Primary. Collaboration played a key role in the success of this project. Tutorial videos were shared that helped with troubleshooting for other classes. Once students got the hang of typing club, they were engaged with typing and were more prepared for publishing their work. After about two months of learning how to type, a PUBLISH PARTY on Fridays was an incentive for the class that made it to the highest level on Typing Club. Teachers shared a list of students that made it to the passing level. Those students were able to type their final draft in the computer lab at the PUBLISH PARTY. Those students that didn’t make it to the level was still able to type their final draft in their homeroom classroom during their writing block.

The feedback provided through surveys of teachers was a mixture of highs and lows. Some teachers thought that it was a waste of time teaching early learners how to type and not enough time to write. Others thought it was a great idea and had a positive outcome for a lot of their low students. Recommendations were given to teachers for focusing on writing skills throughout the week so that Friday could be a day of typing. More teachers found the focus-skills to be helpful for struggling writers and tried it for the remaining of the time.

**Follow-Up**

In the end, the mentor expressed a great job at delivering the introduction of Microsoft Word and Typing Club to emergent writers and the principal was happy to see the students typing at an early age. With technology being used, students are more engaged, and the use of the computer was rewarding while they were able to create their writing stories. Keuchle (1990) also found that computer stories were longer and more detailed. Once the project was over, a follow up visit on the experience with the mentor took place. She enjoyed it so much she said she would implement it for the remaining of the school year. Towards the end of the school year, teachers wanted to use this process for this upcoming school year and included it in their curriculum calendar.

Results were shared at the data team meeting that occurred at the end of the fall semester. Classes that participated in Typing club while publishing their work in Microsoft Word, had higher writing scores than those that did not participate. Teachers expressed that students wanted to practice writing so that they could attend the PUBLISH PARTY that took place on Fridays.

**DISCUSSION & REFLECTION**

Technology is highly required and anticipated by many teachers and students. Lots of planning takes place as a facilitator and many long nights reading several resources to reassure the appropriate measures of individual task performed during the capstone. Knowing how to create videos for tutorials and troubleshoot tools when there was a malfunction was very important to know. Being open minded and having lots of patience were some skills learned during the implementation of the capstone.

Lots of background knowledge was needed to know to work through this capstone. Being a content master on the tools introduced was important as a facilitator and as a coach. Providing a schedule (see Appendix B for the project timeline) so that all classes would have access to technology was also a part of the background knowledge needed to work on this capstone. Modeling and facilitating the use of digital tools such as Microsoft Word and Typing Club for primary students helped teachers have an understanding of ways to implement the tools. Increasing the use of web tools such as computers and iPads served as resources to engage students in authentic learning experiences that improved the quality of writing.

Higher order thinking skills were used by facilitating the use of digital tools that enhanced higher order thinking. Students were able to strengthen their writing topics by creating longer and meaningful writing samples. Improved keyboard and typing skills maximized teacher and student use of digital tools and resources. Increased enjoyment and improved classroom writing, and engagement allowed facilitating the use of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to be effective. The same effectiveness was designed and implemented so that teacher could improve professional learning and a deeper knowledge of content.

Having time set aside for planning and facilitating is crucial when attempting to address a similar problem. Being familiar with the tools that are being used to implement the change helps to be more supportive to those that may be working together or alone. Knowing the student standards of ISTE assures students are following research-based standards and increase their ability to perform specific tasks when working.

Reference

Crafton, R. (1996). Promises, promises: Computer assisted revision and basic writers. *Computers and Composition, 13,* 317-326.

Kuechle, N. (1990). Computers and first grade writing: A learning center approach. In R. Boone (Ed.), Teaching process writing with computers (re.ed.) Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education, pp.49-52.

**Appendix A**

Project Activities Alignment

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Project Activity | Project Objectives | Deliverables |
| Tutorials on word processor and web 2.0 tools. | Increase use of Microsoft Words and web 2.0 tools | Create tutorial videos |
| Collaborate with computer teacher on keyboard skills and web 2.0 tools. | Student will increase use of keyboard and 2.0 web tools. | Introduce Typing Club and Microsoft Word. |
| Demonstrate and implement tools for student and teachers. | Improve writing material and build writing engagement. | Strengthen students’ abilities to research through educational sites. |

**Appendix B**

Project Timeline

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Month | Activity | Hours |
| August | Create surveys for teachers and students. | 5 |
| August | Create and find resources that will be used during the professional development. | 10 |
| August | Conduct survey and evaluate results for professional development. | 5 |
| September | Inform teachers of how Microsoft Word Processor is used in elementary schools to improve student engagement and writing process | 4 |
| September | Learn to troubleshoot issues that can occur. | 5 |
| October | Students learn about word processor and what can be created. | 5 |
| October | Students learn and practice how to use the keyboard. | 8 |
| October | Students research educational sites for topics | 5 |
| November | Students begin to create paper and pencil draft. | 10 |
| November | Students begin to work with the word processor after editing pencil and paper draft. | 20 |
| November | Students use web 2.0 tools to complete writing samples. | 10 |
| December | Post survey is conducted for teachers on student engagement and improvement of writing. Survey is evaluated. | 4 |
| December | Post survey is conducted for students on how much they enjoyed using the innovative way of writing. | 4 |
| TOTAL HOURS |  | 100 |