

Chapter XXIV

Using Technology to Create Children's Books for Students by Students

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a children's book project in which high school students used technology to create e-books for younger students. The benefits of the project for both younger and older students are discussed. Older students developed technology and writing skills; younger students developed letter writing and reading skills. The process is also detailed in the hope that others who might be interested in replicating the project in their own classroom would be able to do so.

INTRODUCTION

This project combined a high school English class writing instruction project with an elementary school unit on writing letters and served to develop both creativity and reading skills. High school students used a variety of technological resources including MSWord, PowerPoint, Paint, the Internet, and scanners to create electronic children's books. These were saved on CDs and floppy disks, and e-mailed to elementary students. Publishers re-

port the growing popularity of electronic books (e-books), reporting double-digit growth in the sale of e-books. (Reid, 2002) When students in a class that used e-books exclusively were surveyed about the experience, 16 of the 19 students rated it "extremely positive" or "positive"; only one student rated it "negative" (Simon, 2002). This project gave students a chance to experiment with their own e-books.

Both sets of students used e-mail to communicate about the books. Technology integration enhanced this assignment for both groups of

students. Older students developed their creativity and writing skills, and younger students improved their communication and reading skills.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Arends (2004) defines some of the challenges for teaching in the 21st century as “teaching in a multicultural society, teaching for the construction of meaning, teaching for active learning, teaching with new views about abilities, and teaching and technology” (p. 9). This children’s book project finds a way to meet each of those challenges.

The best use of technology is when it is an integral part of the lesson, not as a stand-alone piece or a separate, unique activity, but as a means of enhancing the learning opportunity. This is particularly true in a time when students are being tested yearly to ensure that they meet state standards. Bitner and Bitner (2002) suggest that “learning should be the impetus that drives the use of technology in the school. Its use can allow teachers and students to become partners in the learning process” (p. 95). Using technology simply to use technology separates it from the learning process. It is only when technology is a part of the context of the class that it is truly valuable. Tyack and Cuban (2000) contend that the use of computers and related technologies are potent tools for both teaching and learning. When teachers know how to integrate them appropriately into their classrooms, students benefit in a myriad of ways. Students benefit enormously from day-to-day interaction with technology when it is used to support and extend learning.

At every level, teachers are required to cover a wide variety of standards and course objectives; when technology is integrated with those requirements, it not only provides the opportunity to learn specific information, but

also gives the learner tools to use to expand learning. In addition, for most students, using technology adds a level of fun and a sense of accomplishment to the experience. Goddard (2002) argues:

Computers in the classroom should support, not carry, the curriculum as a tool for real-world applications, inquiry composition, and communication. Integrating technology with the curriculum fosters creativity, which, in turn, can lead to classrooms where engagement is nourished and learning enhanced. (p. 19)

But teachers often perceive difficulties with integrating technology. According to the Heller Report on Educational Technology Markets (2004), the three areas that teachers most often indicated as being a moderate to great barrier to using technology all had to do with time limitations: limited time to develop new activities that incorporate technology, limited time in the school schedule to conduct activities, and limited time to practice technology skills. With a little creativity, instead of developing new activities and trying to fit additional activities into an already full schedule, teachers can enhance current assignments by incorporating the use of technology into existing lesson plans. In addition, the teacher does not have to be an expert in all facets of technology. Students are anxious to figure out ways to use technology, and equally anxious to show others.

Giving students the opportunity to discover how to use a particular piece of software or allowing students to teach their peers is a valuable learning experience in and of itself.

Children's Book Project

One example of a learning activity that was adapted to integrate technology is a multi-age children’s book project. Children’s books are

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