Chapter VIII

Inspiring the Learning: Third Grade

Although much of the teachers' trepidation about using computers in their classrooms appeared to stem from concern about how their relative lack of expertise would influence their position in the classroom and their ability to effectively and efficiently teach students using them, another factor also seemed to contribute to their reluctance. Some teachers felt quite anxious about the mere idea of having to learn to use an unfamiliar and rather intimidating machine (Schofield, 1995, pp. 115-116).

The third grade classroom is beginning to look like a typical elementary school classroom. Desks can be arranged in many ways—in groupings to allow collaborative learning or individually to promote individual achievement, or a combination of both to serve the needs of learners. Third graders are much more mature than early grade students. They know their letters. They read more complex materials with plots that are more in depth and interesting. They can read poetry and begin to understand symbolism, irony, metaphors, and similes. They can discuss ideas and present their own ideas as arguments.

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1999) is extremely important in third grade. Students are beginning to demonstrate their preferences for learning different subject matter in different ways—through social activities (interpersonal), through discussions with others (linguistic), through the use of numbers and reasoning (logical-mathematical), through images (spatial), and through self reflection (intrapersonal). Each of these ways of knowing and learning, in addition to music, nature and bodily movement, are important ways for young children to experience life and learning. Not that they have been absent in early grade classrooms, but with higher order thinking skills becoming even more evident with third grade, tapping into these different intelligences allows teachers to focus on each student's needs in different ways.

At the same time, allowing these youngsters to construct knowledge based on activities situated within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) is an important concept for allowing them to see the relevance of subjects and topics to their own lives. Making the learning of mathematics, science, and social studies, along with reading, relate to what they know best brings the topics and knowledge home allowing them to take ownership. Computers allow students to do just that through presentation of knowledge in multiple ways that complement the curriculum and support other ways of demonstrating learning through projects, plays, dioramas, other informal assessments along with formal assessments, or tests.

This chapter presents six third grade teachers from various parts of the City of Philadelphia. They represent different ages and experience in teaching. All-in-all, they were moved by the CPI experience to try ideas out in their classrooms that, like the teachers presented in Section II, they never would have imagined. As Weizenbaum said, "Man can create little without first imagining that he can create it" (1976, p. 18). This is the same with teachers using computers in teaching. They will not use computers unless they can imagine how these machines can benefit

Table 4. Third grade teacher summary

Name	Yrs teaching	Grades in school	Prior computer usage	Overall change	CPI teacher
Mickie	10 years	K – 8	Novice user	Some	VT only
Geri	20+ years	K – 8	Novice user	Some	Both VT & RT
Kim	10 years	K – 8	Some knowledge	Very much	VT only
Margaret	20+ years	K – 8	Novice user	Very much	Both VT & RT
Becca	30 years	K – 8	Novice user	Very much	Both VT & RT
June	20+ years	K – 6	Novice user	Extensive	VT only