

Chapter XIII

Beyond Computers: Grade 8

Technology of the printing press provided a new social and intellectual context for modern schools. The technology of print became the 'defining' technology of schools. A defining technology is a technology that results in fundamental changes in how people see themselves and their world (Norton & Wiburg, 2003, p. 4).

How do you differentiate eighth grade from other grades? Whether the eighth grade is the last grade in an elementary school or the last grade in a middle school, these are the oldest students in the school. When they graduate from eighth grade many are on their way to high school. By eighth grade the students are 13 or 14 years of age, well into the angst years of teenage.

As with seventh graders described in Chapter XII, eighth graders in elementary schools have a homeroom teacher who is either the math and science teacher or the literacy and social studies teacher—or perhaps the special education teacher if they have been diagnosed with a disability and have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) on file. During the school day, they move back and forth between the classrooms

as the schedule or IEP dictates, but they will only have these two or three primary teachers. Eighth graders in middle schools may have a homeroom teacher, but that person will only teach one subject or may be a special education or ESL teacher. These students rotate around the school to their specific subject teachers. These two scenarios present very different learning experiences for students, and very different teaching experiences for teachers.

Another aspect of middle school teachers is that they typically teach more than one grade level. Many of the teachers discussed in this chapter taught sixth and seventh graders as well, but discussion focused on eighth grade issues. It is not impossible for a middle school teacher to only teach one grade level, especially in very large schools, but not likely in Philadelphia where middle schools are an endangered species.

This chapter presents seven teachers who all taught in middle school settings. Three of them came from the same middle school in southwestern Philadelphia, two came from another middle school in southwestern Philadelphia, and two came from a different middle school in northwestern Philadelphia. Four of these teachers were special education teachers, meaning they taught more than one subject. One aspect of these stories was how different the impact of CPI was on their classroom practices. This was also true with the seventh grade teachers, and perhaps a phenomenon related to the nature of middle school classrooms. Teachers in middle schools, where students rotate from class to class, function more like high school teachers than elementary school teachers. Their subject matter expertise is what matters most, and the curricula are more focused on higher order thinking skills, rather than on creative expression through drawing, except in art classes.

Table 9 gives the reader an overview of the teachers presented in this chapter. The information provided includes how many years of teaching experience they had

Table 9. Eighth grade teacher summary

Name	Years teaching	Grades in school	Prior computer usage	Overall change	CPI teacher
Ruby	5 years	5 – 8	Novice user	Extensive	VT only
Rose	20 years	5 – 8	Novice user	Very much	VT only
Tanya	6 years	5 – 8	Novice user	Some	VT only
Jerry	26 years	5 – 8	Novice user	Some	VT only
Maddy	26 years	5 – 8	Novice user	Some	VT only
Dara	18 years	5 – 8 to be K – 8	Novice user	Some	VT only
Ella	13 years	5 – 8 to be K – 8	Novice user	Little	VT only

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