Chapter XXXVIII
Promoting New Media Literacy in a School District

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ABSTRACT

This book chapter reports an Enhancing Education Through Technology Competitive Grant (EETT-C) project that was designed to improve student achievement and to promote new media literacy. During 2005-2006, the project served 30 sixth to eighth grade mathematics teachers and approximately 3,250 students in Palm Springs Unified School District, a medium-sized, high-poverty school district in Southern California. The research-based program consisted of a student program and faculty development. Strategies used for the student program included data-based decision making, cues, timely feedback, visual and contextualized learning, synthesis of learning for deeper understanding, and parental involvement. Strategies used for the faculty development involved coaching and mentoring to develop teacher expertise, assessment of instructional activities related to student achievement, access to differentiated professional development opportunities, and access to high quality curricular resources. The authors hope that the chapter will inform educators of a better design for professional development and program evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

What is literacy? Does it just refer to an individual's ability to read? How about math literacy, science literacy, visual literacy, health literacy etc.? The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 defined literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society." As advanced technology has increasingly shaped our society, all types of literacy have been intercon-

nected and cannot be separated from information technology literacy. In this article, information technology literacy, digital literacy and new media literacy refer to the same concept. Anderson and Bikson's (1998) research focused on digital literacy requirements for citizen participation, and they suggested that generic, rather than application-specific, knowledge and skills should be the focus of media literacy.

Why should generic, rather than application-specific, knowledge and skills be the focus of media literacy? The primary reason is that technology changes rapidly, and what is available for use today will be soon obsolete. Generic skills are broad and can equip people to carry out their roles as citizens under conditions in which technologies continue changes (National Research Council, 1997). What are "generic skills?" They are cognitive abilities like learning-to-learn, analysis and problem solving, application, innovation, and communication (Bikson & Law, 1995; Bikson, 1994). Such generic skills enable learners to learn new applications when they need them. Researchers (McArthur, 1987; Curley & Pyburn, 1982) suggested that learning the underlying principles is more important than learning specific features of an application.

The "generic skills" well align with 21st century learning, promoted by The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2003), an alliance of education, business and government leaders working to fully address the educational needs and challenges of work and life in the 21st century. This organization identified six key elements of 21st century learning, and two of the six elements are "emphasizing learning skills" and "using 21st century tools to develop learning skills." Learning skills (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007) referred to (1) critical thinking and problem solving skills, (2) creativity and innovation skills, (3) communication skills, (4) collaboration skills, and (5) information and media literacy. The partnership strongly advocated the use of technology to accomplish these learning skills.

To help students at Palm Spring Unified School District (PSUSD) obtain the 21st learning skills and to promote new media literacy, the district secured an Enhancing Education Through Technology Competitive Grant (EETT-C), a technology grant to offer teachers professional development and students a student program. This book chapter describes the district technology initiatives. It starts with an overview of the grant and the background of the school district. It then describes the student program and faculty development and followed by the project evaluation. Issues, challenges and lessons learned from their experience are presented to help professionals in the field.

BACKGROUND

The EETT-C grant supported the project "Step Up to Math Mastery Integrating Technology" (SUMMIT) of PSUSD. The primary goal of the grant was to improve access to technology and to provide technology integration training to teachers and students in grades four through eight to enhance teaching and to further learning of the state academic content standards. Eligibility is limited to high-need districts. A high-need district is a district that:

Is among those in the state with the highest numbers or percentages of children from families with incomes below the poverty line and;

Serves one or more schools identified as Program Improvement (PI) schools or;

Has a substantial need for assistance in acquiring and using technology, defined as having an average of 10:1 student-to-multimedia computer ratio or greater in schools serving four through eighth grades in the district or an average of less than 50 percent of classrooms connected to the Internet in schools serving fourth through eighth grades in the district as determined by the