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President's Message

By: Brian Dorman, FLCA President
Sanford Middle School Reading Coach,
Seminole County Public Schools

Happy Holidays to all our members! Have an enjoyable and well deserved Winter Break and a wonderful New Year's.

I am sure that your teachers appreciate all you do for them and the students at your school.

Please check out our new web address! The website there has been recently updated.

Check us out at www.floridaliteracycoaches.org

Respectfully,



Brian Dorman

Upcoming FLCA Events

January 25, 2008	FLCA Board Meeting University of Central Florida Orlando, FL
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By The Numbers

States: Pennsylvania &
South Carolina

559 Current membership
61 Districts Represented
2 Other states represented

Best Practices

The *Coaching Update* would like to start a Best Practices column. If you have a great idea that seems to be working in your school, please share it with the rest of us. Please submit your ideas to Maxine Mangus, newsletter editor at mangusm@lake.k12.fl.us



Research Review

Using Technology to Improve Comprehension by Middle School Students

By: Brian Dorman
Sanford Middle School
Seminole County Public Schools

Schools have a tremendous challenge in finding ways to offer the instruction necessary for all students to reach proficiency in reading. Dorman (2007) had asserted the students' ability to learn was influenced by their teachers' ability to create instructional activities that provided meaningful feedback. Furthermore, students needed to be more engaged in their learning as well as provided effective, immediate feedback. Finally, teachers should find ways to capitalize on the students' interest in technology and communication skills. One effective way to capitalize on this interest may be to infuse technology into lessons. Technology has tremendous potential to improve individual learning gains.

Supertrend: Technology

Cornish described the internet as a "global network of interconnected computers and telecommunications systems" (p. 18). Day, Janus and Davis (2005) reported an increase in the number of households with internet access in 2003 from the number of households with internet access in 1997. Day, et al. (2005) further reported an increase in the number of students who had used a computer at school. The current generation of students had experienced more exposure to computer technology than in any earlier generation. Students used the computer predominantly for school

assignments and for connecting to the internet. With the increased use of the computer and the internet for school assignments, there was a great potential for the computer to be used to provide instruction in today's schools and in future schools. Schools in the future may use programs that provide meaningful immediate feedback.

Benefits of Using Technology

Computer-based learning had positive results on learning and achievement (Nguyen, Yi-Chuan, & Allen, 2006). Using the computer allowed immediate feedback to the students. Computer-based assessments also allowed for multiple practice sessions which led to an increase in students' self-assessment and self-regulation. This gave the students a better opportunity to monitor their own learning and set their own learning goals. Richards (2006) stated that students were very quick to learn how to use technology in the classroom and to have an opportunity to use what they already knew about technology in a positive learning experience. Reeve (2006) argued that by combining technology into classroom instruction teachers developed the technological literacy of their students. The students viewed the lessons as more relevant and meaningful because they were able to

connect their knowledge of technology to other subject areas.

Grisham and Wolsey (2006) asserted the use of technology allowed students to build connections between the text and themselves in meaningful ways. By allowing students to use threaded discussions, classroom discussions were deeper and richer. Furthermore, students who did not normally participate in class discussions felt more comfortable online and were more engaged in the discussion. Glasser (as cited in Grisham & Wolsey) determined the technology component in the class allowed the students to experience greater choice, power, and a sense of belonging. The social aspect of writing discussions online increased motivation by reluctant students. The students also gained a deeper understanding.

As well as allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of the texts, technology is also used when students conduct research for class assignments. Savard (2007) asserted that school libraries needed to use technology to build a collection of online resources for the students. Because the internet often provided a flood of information with little control over the content readability or reliability, knowledgeable media specialists should monitor and collect meaningful online sources for their students.

Middle school students were given an opportunity to solve challenging problems that illustrated a wide range of careers in science, technology and engineering. The Society of Manufacturing Engineers felt it was important to start with middle school students so they were better able to make

choices in their high school elective courses (Outreaching further, 2007).

Further studies indicated that technology could be infused into science content classes. Yager, Yager, and Lim (2006) concluded that science students who were engaged in learning through technology were able to apply science concepts to new situations. Yager, et al. (2006) further concluded that by engaging students with technology based learning, there was an increase in the level of engagement among the students. The technology allowed further inquiry into specific topics by the students. When using technology to extend the classroom experiences of the students, teachers have an opportunity to provide feedback to their students outside of class time.

Finally, Starkman (2007) concluded the benefits of online classrooms, described as a cohort of students interacting with each other and an instructor, allowed students to have more flexibility in time, overcome physical barriers to traditional classrooms and provide an opportunity to have a positive school experience for students who had previously found school as a negative experience.

Challenges of Using Technology

In spite of the studies that had shown technology infusion to be a benefit to student learning however, Lawrenz, Gravely, and Ooms (2006) found that technology was used in limited amounts of time. The greatest challenge facing teachers in their attempt to incorporate technology into their classes was finding ways to adapt

current instructional practices (Lawrenz, et al.).

White and Washburn further stated that utilizing websites and other online resources led to female students being introduced to role models via the technology used in the courses.

Conclusion

Technology should be used during instruction and assessments as educators strive to close the achievement gap. The research showed there were a number of benefits when technology was incorporated into lessons. The potential benefits included students who were more engaged with the lessons and increased motivation. By engaging the students' natural desire to communicate in class, the use of technology may allow teachers to build a stronger sense of community, leading to more active learning. Students would be able to use their knowledge of technology to deepen their understanding in content subject areas. Finally, the students may be able to increase their learning because the technology being used in the classroom has the potential to provide immediate feedback.

Students in this district use a computer-based tutorial program to prepare for the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT). The FCAT Explorer is a web-based tutorial covering the skills tested by the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) and matched to the Sunshine State Standards (SSS). The Sunshine State Standards are a set of expectations regarding student achievement approved by the state Board of Education (Sunshine State Standards, 2005). Using the FCAT Explorer

program, students received immediate feedback as well as guidance in standards that needed improvement (FCAT Explorer Parent Guide, 2007). Additional research should be conducted on ways to overcome the challenges presented by White and Washburn (2006) regarding the lack of female students interested in science and math careers. Further research may also wish to focus on the challenges presented by Lawrenz, Gravely, and Ooms (2006) to find ways to make technology infusion in the classrooms more meaningful and worthwhile to middle school students. As educators know, students who are not engaged in their lessons will have difficulty learning.

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FLCA Area Representatives Email Addresses

Area 1 – Open

Area 2 – Vicki Gillmore
gillmvd@bay.k12.fl.us

Area 3 – Patricia Rouse
rousep@mail.bellevue.leon.k12.fl.us

Area 4 – Jerry Lanford
lanforg@stjohns.k12.fl.us

Beryl Rogers rogersb@stjohns.k12.fl.us

Area 5 – Karen Lisa
lisak@citrus.k12.fl.us

Area 6 – Toniamae Lopez-Dykes
lopezt@brevard.k12.fl.us

Archer Israel
ajisrael@volusia.k12.fl.us

Area 7 – Maxine Mangus
mangusm@lake.k12.fl.us

Pat Fisher
fisherp@lake.k12.fl.us

Area 8 – Brian Dorman
Brian_dorman@scps.k12.fl.us

Diana Triplett
tipletd@osceola.k12.fl.us

Area 9 – Stacie Kagel
Stacie.kagel@sdhc.k12.fl.us

Area 10 – Jennifer Radcliffe
radclij@martin.k12.fl.us

Michele Daily
daily@palmbeach.k12.fl.us

Area 11 – Emma Winfield
emmaw@lee.k12.fl.us

Areas 12, 13 & 14 – Sandra Perkins
sperkins@dadeschools.net



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