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Introduction to Technology (ISLT 7377)
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Technical Teacher Interview

Interview Subjects

Allison's interview subject: A biology teacher with ten years of experience. The teacher is in year two of the district's eMINTS program. She teaches ninth grade pre-AP students.

Greg's interview subject: A fifth and sixth grade instrumental music teacher with 20 years of experience. He sees his students for approximately an hour a week. He strongly suggests they practice their instruments at home at least 20 minutes a day in preparation for their weekly rehearsal.

Marguerite's interview subject: A third grade eMINTS teacher who went through training from 2002-2004. She has 21 years of teaching experience.

Interview Questions and Responses

1. What are the different types of technology you use in your classroom?
Marguerite: I use a Smart Board, computers- there is one computer for every two students plus my personal computer, a digital camera, scanners, and Palm. Some software that I use is Smart Notebook and Inspiration

Greg: I use SmartMusic, a Smart Board, and Windows Media Player installed on the same computer connected to the Smart Board. The computer is also connected to amplified speakers that allow the entire class to play along with the SmartMusic accompaniments.

Allison: Through eMINTS, I was given a Promethean Board, document camera, laptop, LCD projector, and cart with 15 laptops for student use. I use most, if not all, of this technology everyday. The software I commonly use is ActiveInspire for the Promethean Board, Inspiration, Publisher, and PowerPoint.

2. Why do you use those items?
Marguerite: I use all of these items to enhance my students learning and motivate them to want to learn.

Greg: I use SmartMusic as a teaching and assessment tool. The majority of our students also use this application at home when they practice their instrument. I use the Smart Board as an interactive tool with the students, and as a way for me to manipulate SmartMusic without being tethered to the mouse. Windows Media player is used to play various audio and visual examples.

Allison: Since it is available, I try to use it. I don't want to assign books this year, so we are taking notes using Inspiration. It has lots of features.

3. What are other pieces of technology you would like to use?
Marguerite: I would like to learn how to record students' voices so that I could have them create Voicethreads from their favorite books, stories, and poems.

Greg: Although I do use Finale (music writing software), I would like to become more adept at doing so. Music written in Finale can be imported into SmartMusic, allowing me to create custom student exercises or assignments.

Allison: One teacher in my department is going to a training on Gizmos this week. I would like to learn how to use them. Another eMINTS teacher in a different building showed us software that allows you to make comics and cartoons. I'd like to try it, too.

4. What types of training did you receive on using these technologies?
Marguerite: I went through two years of eMINTS training, and have attended several workshops and in-service training.

Greg: I mostly learned on my own. With SmartMusic, I began hosting workshops for others to learn to use the application, and picked up a lot of training through that experience.

Allison: We have met six hours per month for eMINTS during the past year. That is where I have received all the training.

5. Do you have any opportunities to train other educators to use these technologies?
Marguerite: Yes, I have shared some information from my eMINTS training with my grade level, I have also helped with some after school training for small groups of teachers with specific needs as requested by our building principal.

Greg: I now am a clinician for the company that produces SmartMusic, and travel several times a year to train others. I have also had opportunities to train other instrumental music teachers in my district.

Allison: Not formal opportunities. Some teachers recently got new technology in their rooms, so they will ask me for help.

6. How do you feel these technologies impact student's learning? What are they able to do with this technology that they were unable to do before?
Marguerite: Technology impacts my students in a huge way, it motivates and inspires them to learn. Technology is the present, the here and now, the students need to stay current with technology. My students were able to create power points, graphic organizers with Inspiration, and conduct in-depth research more quickly through the use of the Internet. The students have a greater wealth of information from using the Internet to complete projects and research.

Greg: These technologies impact student learning in a huge way. I have seen an incredible improvement on the Band students' ability to listen, play in time, to find their place in harmony, and to match pitch since we have begun using SmartMusic. Students are able to receive immediate feedback when performing with SmartMusic. Additionally, students are able to receive and submit assignments from home using this software.

Allison: Last year, when I first started using the student computers, many of the students didn't know how to use weblinks. They would get to a webpage and stare at it. They didn't know that the different color text and underlined text were hyperlinks. The students are much more digitally literate now. The drawback is that I have to give up content time to teach computer skills.

7. Can you assess student learning with this technology? What data do you collect in the process of using the technology?
Marguerite: Yes, I can collect assessment information from various sites that record students knowledge, I use DIBELS for a reading assessment to determine a student's reading level, I create rubrics on projects to assess the student's knowledge of a particular content., I can collect information of my students' knowledge of basic facts and their growth on mastering their facts.

Greg: Yes! Data collected includes audio recordings of individual performances, screen shots of the "red and green notes" (indicates correct or incorrect pitches that the student played), percentage of accuracy scores, and how long students practice on each assessment.

Allison: With the new technology, I can assess student learning in a variety of ways. I use Inspiration to assess the students' ability to connect the information that they learned to their prior knowledge and make connections to the real world. On the projects that I assign, I often use a rubric to assess their content knowledge and their ability to use the technology.

8. Does the technology facilitate cooperative learning between your students? If so, how?
Marguerite: Yes, my students work as groups to complete projects; each child will have a different job to complete and then they come together to complete a project or share information.

Greg: The Smart Board certainly can be an element of cooperative learning. I use the Smart Board at times for small group work (not necessarily Kagan strategies). SmartMusic can be used to accompany the entire class as they play together.

Allison: Since I have only 15 computers on my laptop cart, the students always have to work in cooperative groups of at least two. We have started using Google Docs to collaborate along with our new school website for blogs, discussion topics, and wikis too. The wikis have worked especially well for group work.

Summary and Comparison of Results

The three teachers who were interviewed represent a variety of grade levels, subjects, and experiences before considering their use of technology. Represented in this group are a high school biology teacher, middle school instrumental music teacher, and an elementary classroom teacher with experience ranging from ten to 21 years. When their use of technology is included in the comparison of these otherwise unique teachers, the differences begin to fade. Two of the three teachers have received eMINTS training, while all three use technology to enhance their daily instruction regardless of the subject or grade level that they teach.

Summary and Comparison of the Answers Given to Individual Questions

1. What are the different types of technology you use in your classroom?

The answers to the first question reveal all three teachers use an interactive whiteboard in their classroom. Despite the difference in subjects and grade levels, this piece of technology appears to be a common denominator. Coupled with the interactive whiteboard is Smart Notebook or ActiveInspire that facilitates student and teacher interaction with the board. The list of similarities continue for the two eMINTS teachers including laptops for student use, imaging tools such as digital cameras, document cameras and scanners, and the use of Inspiration software. Palm devices, Publisher, PowerPoint, Windows Media Player, and SmartMusic only appeared in single answers.

2. Why do you use those items?

The overall theme of the three answers focus on the enhancement of instruction and learning. All three indicate the technology is used on a daily basis and it is an important part of the learning process. One teacher has replaced textbooks with laptops, another teacher includes technology as a source of motivation, while the third teacher uses SmartMusic to motivate students to practice their instruments both at school and home. This same teacher also uses Windows Media Player to play audio and video examples to his students. These audio/video examples serve as an important source of modeling and motivation.

3. What are other pieces of technology you would like to use?

Although the specifics of the three answers were different, they contain the same theme; all three teachers continue to seek tools to enhance the learning experience of their students. The elementary teacher is exploring ways to encourage students to read, the band teacher is investigating ways to differentiate his instruction to meet the needs of individual learners, and the biology teacher is looking for alternative ways of presenting information through comic strips or cartoons along with showing an interest in virtual manipulatives (Gizmos) that demonstrate math and science concepts in an interactive environment.

4. What types of training did you receive on using these technologies?

The two eMINTS teachers experienced very similar training through the eMINTS program. The third teacher's training began rather informally through using the technology. Later opportunities to share what he had learned on his own resulted in a deeper understanding of the SmartMusic software. Although this was not directly stated, it is very likely that all three teachers received help and suggestions from colleagues both inside and outside of their buildings.

5. Do you have any opportunities to train other educators to use these technologies?

All three teachers indicated opportunities to share their experience and knowledge within their building and district. Although the two eMINTS teachers did not indicate any formal training opportunities, they are certainly an important resource in their building. They are likely part of a very small minority to receive extended and focused training on the use of technology in the classroom. In addition to local opportunties, the instrumental music teacher has had unique opportunities to provide formal training outside of his district with the support of the company that produces SmartMusic.

6. How do you feel these technologies impact student's learning? What are they able to do with this technology that they were unable to do before?

A positive correlation between the inclusion of technology and enhanced student achievement was present in all three answers. These teachers have seen improvements in motivation, digital literacy, research skills, playing an instrument, and the sharing of information through the application of technology to the learning process.

7. Can you assess student learning with this technology? What data do you collect in the process of using the technology?

Technology is used by all three teachers to collect data on student learning. Reading levels, pitch and rhythmic accuracy, application to prior knowledge, and even the amount of time spent practicing a particular exercise can be measured by the tools available to the three teachers.

8. Does the technology facilitate cooperative learning between your students? If so, how?

Cooperative learning opportunities are facilitated through technology by each of the respondents. Elementary students are assigned specific tasks necessary to complete a project; once these tasks are finished, the students combine their information into a single product. Band students can work together in large or small ensembles accompanied by SmartMusic. Biology students use Google Docs, blogs, discussion boards, and wikis to communicate, share information, and complete assignments. In all three of these scenarios, students are given the opportunity to use technology in a way that contributes to the success of a team.

These three seemingly different educators have much in common, as indicated by their answers to the eight questions above. All three subscribe to the philosophy that technology is a tool to enhance and facilitate learning, and are seeking new methods and technologies to improve student learning and assessment in the future. Through careful planning and intentional implementation, technology is playing a critical role in their daily instruction.