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Volume 3, Number 2 Fall 2007

Voice and Choice: Onscreen Usability as a Praxis of Democracy <i>R. James Owen</i>	1
Developing an Evaluative Instrument for E-Learning Presentations <i>Richard Kordel</i>	12
Special Issue: Teacher Technology Mentors:	
A Message from the Guest Editor Janice Kelly	24
Teacher Technology Mentors Annette Kratcoski, Karen Swan, and Patricia Mazzer	26
Using Digital Tools to Support Children's Inquiry Nancy Condit, Laurie Kidwell, and Annette Kratcoski	33
Building Social Skills Through Podcasts Kate Viers, Sherry Lacko, Annette Kratcoski, and Kristina Weiss	37
The Power of PowerPoint Marcia Wallenfeldt and Janice Kelly	40
Podcasting with Kids: Differentiating Instruction Digitally Karen McClain, Theresa Boyle, Margie Franks, Barb Komoff, and Annette Kratcoski	42
Using SMART Boards to Enhance Student Learning Annette Kratcoski, Christi Bates, and Amy Hopkins	47
Intervention Podcasting Janice Kelly and Annette Kratcoski	50
Exploring the Use of Technology to Facilitate the Writing Process Annette Kratcoski, Selena Cottrell, Erin Killeen, Allisa Kruse, and Debra Miller	53
Using Digital Recorders to Increase Reading Fluency Richard Booth, Deidre Hichens, and Annette Kratcoski	56
Journal of the Research Center for Educational Technology (RCET) Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 2007	

Using Digital Recorders to Increase Reading Fluency

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Abstract

This project explored the use of digital recorders as a tool for targeting fluency instruction. The vignette documents the impact of the project on students' fluency skills as well as their motivation for reading practice.

The Project

Fluency is defined as the ability to read text accurately and quickly (National Reading Panel, 2003). Fluent readers recognize words automatically, and are able to read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Fluency is regarded as important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding words, they are able to focus on meaning and comprehension. While fluency does not ensure comprehension, comprehension is difficult without fluency. If a reader must constantly stop to decode unknown words, meaning will most likely be disrupted and the process of reading becomes long and laborious. When students make gains in reading fluency, they are able to focus on comprehension and are able to analyze, interpret, draw conclusions, and infer meaning from texts.

As third grade teachers, reading fluency is often an area of focus with our students. Classroom teachers generally have students complete repeated readings of instructionally appropriate texts to build fluency. This task often becomes labored and monotonous and the students lose interest quickly. The teachers in this study were looking for a way to continue the practice of repeated readings without losing the students' focus and interest. Technology has become an effective way of doing this. The most likely form of technology was the digital voice recorder. Using the digital recorders, the students were still exposed to the traditional means of developing reading fluency while utilizing a simple form of technology.

The project focused on the following goals:

- to increase students' reading fluency
- to provide opportunities for individualized reading instruction
- to provide opportunities for extended reading practice

With our mentor grant, we purchased 14 Panasonic digital recorders and a Bluetooth Keyboard/Mouse. The students were given a grade-level appropriate reading passage from the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency set. They were to read the passage once silently, then read the same passage again into the Panasonic digital recorder. Throughout the week, the students were to read the passage aloud five times at home. On the following week, the students rerecorded themselves reading the passage a final time.

Their fluency rates were determined by dividing their words correct by the time it took to read the passage (in minutes). The fluency rates were recorded throughout the school year as the process continued biweekly. At the end of the school year, the initial fluency rates were compared to their final fluency rates to show how much growth was made during the school year. The Bluetooth Keyboard/ Mouse were used in conjunction with the existing SMARTBoard in the classroom to allow both the teacher and students to complete writing projects and model the writing process.

Results

Across the project period, our students were highly motivated to use the digital recorders to promote reading fluency and became more intrinsically motivated throughout the project. The students were eager to get their signatures so they could record the story for a second time and see how much faster they were able to read. They were eager and willing to complete repeated readings, whereas in the past students felt this was a mundane task. Additionally, using the digital voice recorders enabled the students to become more confident and self-directed. On average, the students in these classes gained 32 words per minute through the school year. Students who were reading below grade-level showed more growth than those reading on grade-level, though progress was made by all students. These results are similar to previous results without the use of the digital recorders, though motivation was much higher in those students who used them for this task.

Conclusions

This project allowed us to explore an innovative way to approach fluency instruction. Utilization of digital recorders proved to be motivating to our students, resulting in increased practice and ultimately, improved reading. The project also expanded our use of digital tools in our classrooms and led us to utilize technology in new ways. There were many comments on how innovative this technology made the development of reading fluency from other staff members and from parents.

References

National Reading Panel. (2003). *Put reading first. The research building blocks for teaching children to read.* Retrieved August 21, 2007 from http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/PFRbooklet.pdf