

Chapter V

Beyond Finger Painting: Kindergarten

Technology shapes the growing mind. The younger the mind, the more malleable it is. The younger the technology, the more unproven it is (Healy, 1998, p. 17).

Imagine, as best you can, your Kindergarten classroom from way back when, or that of your children's Kindergarten classroom, or perhaps one in which you teach or have taught. These are spacious rooms with tiny tables and chairs made especially for the small children who inhabit them during the school year. These small children are the future and their education in the early years is so important for establishing a set of skills and knowledge base to support their education for years to come. While all teachers are special, Kindergarten teachers take on the role of weaning children away from the home into the milieu of schooling. They often are a surrogate parent for these children who are away from home in a strange place without Mom or Grandmother or any other relative or familiar figure for the first time in their lives.

Making the Kindergarten classroom warm and inviting is so important for these small learners to be comfortable and make the classroom their own. There should be lots of resources available for these children to explore and learn through what is referred to often as hands-on/minds-on activities. Teaching centers, or areas set aside in the classroom for specific small-group teaching and learning activities, are important areas in Kindergarten classrooms, as they are in all early grade classrooms. It is through these teaching centers that children can investigate books, materials and ideas, from science to their environment, their community, and computers. Often Kindergarten classrooms do not have many computers available because there are educators and others who believe small children should be doing hands-on work rather than computer work (Healy, 1998). However, having computers available to expand the repertoire of learning experiences, not as the only learning experience, reflects the view that education of this generation of learners should be from the 21st century perspective rather than that of the mid-20th century.

This chapter presents seven CPI Kindergarten teachers who embraced computers in their classrooms for many different reasons, and were successful for different reasons. They were in different schools with different populations of students and from different areas of Philadelphia. The names of the teachers have been changed to pseudonyms to honor their requests for anonymity, and schools are described in general terms. But their stories are poignant for how the CPI program impacted their teaching and learning environments.

Table 1 gives the reader an overview of the teachers presented in this chapter. The information provided includes how many years of teaching experience they had prior to participating in the CPI program, what grades were included in their school, how they characterized their prior use of computers/technology prior to the CPI program, and whether they were a Visiting Teacher or also asked to be a Resident Teacher. This information may help the reader in deciding which teacher story is close to theirs.

Table 1. Kindergarten teacher summary

Name	Years teaching	Grades in school	Prior computer usage	CPI teacher
Joyce	38 years	K – 8	Some knowledge	Both
Patrice	20+ years	K – 4	Novice user	VT only
Ellen	10+ years	K – 8	Some knowledge	VT only
Marta	10+ years	K – 5	Novice user	VT only
Ronnie	36 years	K – 5	Novice user	Both
Marla	5 years	K – 4	Novice user	Both
Eleanor	20+ years	K – 8	Novice user	VT only

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