

Chapter IX

Ideas to Concepts: Fourth Grade

Everyone has a technology story. The stories tell about your own levels of adoption and the journey through them. You might not think you use technology because it has been a true tool of your work, the memory of the technology might fade to the background of the project, as it should. If you begin to recall the machines and tool you've used, you will probably surprise yourself (Carroll & Witherspoon, 2002, p.1).

Fourth grade is a wonderful grade. The students are even smarter and more eager to engage in science and social studies activities. Assessment of learning and skill level for reading are more sophisticated in fourth grade. The emphasis is not so much on phonics as much as on comprehension and vocabulary, which are the main themes of literacy through high school.

Like third grade, fourth graders are developing their own styles of learning and engaging with new knowledge. They can discuss and understand difficult subjects. For instance, one fourth grade classroom the author observed for three years dis-

cussed “suffrage” in some detail. The student population was mixed, with about one-third African American, one-third Asian and one-third Caucasian, and about two-thirds of the class female. They debated the notion of who was allowed to vote when the American Constitution and Bill of Rights were written back in the late 18th century and what criteria were used to determine such eligibility. This discussion was happening during a presidential election and the teacher was connecting these discussions to current practice where any citizen could register to vote. The students were encouraged to interview relatives at home about their beliefs and experiences with voting and a rousing debate ensued during the next social studies lesson. The point being that fourth graders are old enough to begin discussing political issues and really understand power relationships.

This chapter presents six fourth grade teachers. Three of them are from the same school and participated as a group in the CPI program. The other three are from very diverse backgrounds and schools. Each of them presents a different set of reasons and motivations for participating in CPI, as well as different outcomes for the use of computers in their classrooms.

It is important to point out that, at the time when the CPI program was offered, the School District of Philadelphia required students in fourth and eighth grades, in 2000 through 2002, to complete a service learning project. At the same time the CPI program was offered through the district, another professional development program for infusing computers into project based learning was also offered. Many of the fourth grade teachers participated in both programs since they supported different aspects of the curriculum at that time. In both programs the teachers received an Apple computer for their classroom upon completion; but only the CPI program offered the loaner laptop during the program for them to practice the skills they were learning and to network with other teachers, allowed teachers to visit other teachers’ classrooms to see master teachers at work, and provided ongoing support back in the classroom. Assessment of the project based learning program demonstrated that teachers participated to “get” the computer, but they did not actually incorporate the computers into the required service learning projects (Schifter, 2006).

Table 5. Fourth grade teacher summary

Name	Yrs teaching	Grades in school	Prior computer usage	Overall change	CPI teacher
Darrell	5 years	K – 8	Novice user	Some	VT only
Edie	15+ years	K – 8	Novice user	Some	VT only
Dee	20+ years	K – 8	Some experience	Some	VT only
Maya	10 years	K – 4	Novice user	Some	Both VT & RT
Emma	15 years	K – 5	Some experience	Very much	Both VT & RT
Shari	10 years	K – 4	Some experience	Very much	VT only

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