

Chapter X

Expressing Knowledge in New Ways: Fifth Grade

Using a computer once meant having to write a computer program to make it work. Today's microcomputers, however, are very user-friendly. This is due partly to changes in computers and partly to improvements in software. Operating a classroom microcomputer today is easy primarily because software publishers have produced lots of ready-to-use computer programs for classroom applications (Geisert & Futrell, 2000, p. 5).

How do fifth grade classrooms differ from fourth grade classrooms? The simple answer is that the curricula for mathematics, literacy, science, and social studies are more complex, requiring the students to learn new vocabulary as well as to expand on concepts previously learned. The room will not actually look much different, other than there may be less student work posted around and more rubrics posted for writing, reading genres, ciphering mathematics, or science concepts. Word walls will no doubt still be prevalent, since the vocabulary word of the day is still an important component of learning. And there may be many different word walls, such as one for mathematics or one for science concepts, as examples. Otherwise,

the room itself will not appear much different from a fourth grade classroom or sixth grade classroom.

How different are the students other than at least one year older? In Philadelphia, fifth grade is when some students may be accepted into academic magnet schools, thus siphoning away from neighborhood schools those students who achieve at high levels. This results in students in typical classrooms being those who may be more academically challenged. At the same time, these children are typically 11 years old, or pre-teens. So there is another dynamic coming into the classroom that was perhaps not there in earlier grades. Thus teachers must have teaching skills and a repertoire of teaching methods that engage these students in subjects in which perhaps they have not excelled nor been interested in the past—not an easy situation to navigate.

In Philadelphia, the fifth grade may be located in an elementary school or middle school. The fifth graders may be the older students in the school with seniority over the younger students; or they may be the younger students in the school and at the low end of the student pecking order. Each situation establishes different dynamics between classes of students. Being the oldest, or even one of the older grades in a school, may give the students opportunities to mentor younger students or to take on leadership roles within the school. However, being the youngest and newest group in a school means having to learn the culture of the school along with new teachers and subjects. Another feature of being in an elementary school setting is that the fifth grade students are assigned one teacher who is responsible for all subjects, except for special subjects like art and computers. If the fifth grade is part of a middle school, students typically have a homeroom teacher with whom they meet at least once a day, but then they rotate through the school to different teachers for English, social studies, mathematics, science, gym, health, art, and/or music. While

Table 6. Fifth grade teacher summary

Name	Yrs teaching	Grades in school	Prior computer usage	Overall change	CPI teacher
C.C.	20+ years	5 – 8	Novice user	Extensive	Both VT & RT
Venda	10 years	K – 8	Some knowledge	Very much	VT only
Edith	30+ years	K – 5	Novice user	Some	VT only
Patti	30+ years	K – 5	Novice user	Some	VT only
Chris	20+ years	K – 6	Novice user	Extensive	Both VT & RT
Gail	30+ years	K – 6	Novice user	Extensive	Both VT & RT
Dionne	20+ years	K – 6	Novice user	Very much	VT only

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