Chapter XII

Becoming Tech Experts: Grade 7

Computers are not an end in themselves. The goal of technology integration into the classroom and curriculum is not to expose students to computers and the Internet. Technology, by definition, is a tool. That tool should be serving a greater purpose, and what that purpose is for you may be very different from what it is for the school down the street (Dockterman, 1998, p. 21).

As with fifth and sixth grades, the seventh grade classroom depends on whether the school is an elementary school or middle school. In many Kindergarten through eighth grade schools in Philadelphia, seventh graders have two different teachers rather than only one as with sixth graders. One teacher concentrates on literacy and social studies, while the other teacher takes on mathematics and science. These students cycle between two different classrooms. In contrast, students in middle schools may have a homeroom teacher, but they cycle through a number of different classrooms and teachers for each subject. Their school experiences are much different from those of students who only travel between two classrooms.

In addition, seventh graders are typically 13 or 14 years of age. They are growing by leaps and bounds physically and emotionally, which challenges the teachers who are trying to help them grow intellectually. Keeping these students attention attuned to what is happening in the classroom, rather than what is happening in the hallway, lunchroom, etc., becomes a never-ending process. Computers in the classrooms can help.

Piaget's stage of development for this age range is the "formal operations" stage (1972, 1990). Here children begin to move into abstract or adult thinking. Not all children have developed to this stage and may continue to develop in the "concrete operations" stage where they cannot yet think in abstract terms. The seventh grade classroom brings a mixture of students' intellectual development, again challenging the teacher to present materials in both concrete and abstract terms to adequately engage and promote learning by all students. Computer simulations and productivity programs can support efforts in both directions.

This chapter presents six seventh grade teachers from different parts of the school district. All but one of these teachers taught in a middle school setting. One teacher went on to become a Resident Teacher. Their experiences with CPI were different, and their paths to using technology in the classrooms were divergent. Each has a unique story that represents many of the approaches to using technology in middle grades.

Table 8 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 8. Seventh grade teacher summary

Name	Years teaching	Grades in school	Prior computer usage	Overall change	CPI teacher
Sandra	19 years	5 – 8	Novice user	Very much	VT only
Amy	5 years	5 – 8	Novice user	Very much	VT only
Amanda	10+ years	5 – 8	Novice user	Little	VT only
Elaine	20+ years	K – 8	Some experience	Some	Both VT & RT
Sam	20+ years	5 – 8	Some experience	Very much	VT only
Nancy	26 years	5 – 8	Some experience	Very much	VT only