Article #1

Having Our Say: Middle Grade Student Perspective on School Technologies and Academic Engagement:

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The purpose of the study was to glean information from a group of stakeholders from whom little has been known, the students. Researchers have been focused upon the new state standards and how to assess student academic achievement. Educators face new challenges than ever before as as result of the demand for more rigorous curriculum in our schools. Educators are now concerned with new ways of teaching children in the 21st century, especially as they begin to understand how our children learn new information in the technological age of the 21st century. It is widely understood that children in present-day society learn at a much different rate, and they utilize different resources than in the past. The manner in which children learn new information and communicate that information is indicative of the manner of which our students utilize and create understandings and knowledge in new and different ways.

It has been argued that students are not performing academically as they should; taking into consideration how students learn, constructivism is a leading instructional strategy that is suggested to complement how students are learning outside of the realm of education. "Constructivism as a learning theory is focused on multiple forms of knowledge, the role of prior knowledge, and the social nature of knowledge and its acquisition. (Leinhardt, 1992. Pp. 20-25). Many educators are advocating the educational reform to as a motivating force to assist our students in being academically successful. All in all, it is proposed that students should be prepared to face the technological, economical, informationa, demographic and political changes as educators prepare our studens for civic, economic and social life.

There are six key elements in the educational process that should be included so that our students are able to face the new demands of the 21st century. Considering that our students utilize technologies to communicate their ideas to others, it is apropos that our schools should include core subjects and learning skills as well as 21st century tools, authentic contexts, content, and assessment. The manner in which this has been done is through many avenues of research, quantitative and qualitative techniques. All of the stakeholders thus far have been included in the reform process, except the very people for whom the system in being altered, the students.

It has heretofore been mentioned that students are being raised with evolving technologies and are capable of adapting to them more quickly than the educators who are trying to develop new, innovative ways to teach. This survey in this article emphasizes student perspectives, why they need to be engaged and achieve well in school settings.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers surveyed 400 middle grade students (6^{th}, 7^{th}, and 8^{th} grades) who participated in the North Carolina statewide after-school program. Stratifies random sampling was used to identify participants based upon geographed region, race, region, race, gender, grade level, and family income. Students from all counties completed questionnaires. Out of 63% of all participants received free or reduced lunch, The sample included: 49% African-American, 51 Caucasian, and 11 Hispanic, Asian, and other students. It should also be noted that over 85% of the students scored at or above the grade level on their state standardized math and reading tests.

Procedures and Analyses

Questions from 2 separate surveys to reduce the potential for "respondent fatigue." The surveys were then randomly assigned to participants. A five-member panel, including experts in instructional technology and middle grade educators generated the questionnaire questions. Reliability score, as I have said ranges between .82 to 93. Final survey data was analyzed using the following methods; descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson's chi square tests, and tests of significance. Students who could proide more information were interviewed for more contribution. These students who were interviewed gave information in a professional manner and the researchers were able to develop more than enough information for their research. For the second ineview the focus of the group sessions were transcribed by an external transcription service. Two researchers independently read and transcribed interviews and identified initial topics for coding the data. Themes were then developed. From the entire procedure of surveys covering every county in North Carolina , it was determined that from over 50 codes, 10 themes emerged from the data, and from those 10 four interpretive themes for research purposes.

The results of the surveys demonstrated statistical techniques that have been recently learned. Anova's were conducted to examine if students reported significant mean differences in their computer usage at the various locations. Students reported significantly more computer usage at school (M=3.46, SD .71) and home (M=3.11, SD=1.20). Other themes were included and the skills which were quantitively assessed, was also qualitatively created to gather the results of student perspectives of present-day education. The themes of the survey examined as thoroughly from utilizing technology use for sharing work and productivity, using the internet to find information over trying to locate a book, and technology usage for communication and entertainment. Specifically, the survey results indicated that: students used computers at home more than they did at school. He majority of students (75%-90%).

Reported that they possess basic word rocessikng and spreadsheed skills were learned in school, students ranked using computers in general and doing research on the internet as activities they liked best, and listening to teachers explain things and doing worksheets as activities they liked least, and finally, 86% of students reported that they use the internet to find information instead of trying to find the information in a book.

In all, students were concerned that their educators would not have the right kind of skills present, preferably computer. Second, students express a desire to be engaged and stimulated in activities while they were in school. Students were very clear in their survey about academic engagement through the use of technologies in project-based learning (Grant and Branch 2005). Students also gave explicit examples of how technology could be integrated in various academic areas. For Example, technologies in language arts (writing and research), social studies (research projects), math (problem solving); and science (science fair projects).

Students were also concerned about how educators were going to for the "future." Also, students considered specific technological applications, including word processing and web-based searching as enhancing their productivity in all academic areas. In all, students expressed a desire to utilize technology in their classrooms, including laptops. Our youth demonstrated a sophisticated sense of what is needed to be successful..

In conclusion, students want schools to look more like the real world in which they reside. They want modern features that technology has to offer in their classrooms; wireless connectivity and bright inviting sitting areas aht let students work wherever they are. Students also expressed a desire to work in an open=plan areas and interior windows windows connecting administrators to them. In other words, the students feel hat: "When We Use Technology, Learning Is Fun."

Article #2.

What Works Clearinghouse:First Things First