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ECI 546- Spires

Final Exam

Four years ago, I left the teaching classroom to stay at home with my kids and since that time, I've been pursuing my master's degree in Reading through the New Literacies and Global Learning program. Up until this point, all of my course work has focused on content knowledge and pedagogy-the two "pillars" in all education programs. It wasn't until I entered this course, that I discovered there was another piece to the teaching model; technology: a piece that today's students are desperate for, but one that many teachers neglect to use in their classrooms. Whether its absence is due to simple ignorance of its effectiveness in instruction, or due to intimidation of new and changing things, teachers have been known to avoid technology like the plague!

When I was teaching, the absence of technology was due to my ignorance of its effectiveness. In all my undergraduate classes, I had never been taught how to effectively implement technology into my classroom. Further, once into my teaching career, no professional development opportunities were offered that addressed the use of technology in the classroom. Granted, this was years ago, but from the comments made by my graduate colleagues, not much has changed. Dr. Spires' introduction to TPACK has given me a whole new perspective on my teaching instruction! In hind sight, my teacher self has been waiting for a model like TPACK. Thinking back to my time in the classroom, there were times when I was so excited about my carefully planned, pedagogically sound lesson or unit that I could hardly wait to start the week! Though, when all was said and done, most of my students seemed bored and un-engaged. Understanding that as a middle school teacher some of this just comes with the territory, I also remember thinking "there's got to be a better way". I fully believe that TPACK is the better (and best) way for effective teaching. If five years ago, my students were ready for instruction that used the technical tools they were using on an everyday basis outside of school, I can't imagine how desperate students are in today's classrooms!

This semester I had the opportunity to work with Jessica Nelson, one of my former colleagues from Centennial Campus Middle School. At the completion of our ILP project, I walked away with a number of lessons learned, but what had the greatest impact on my learning was the time I spent in her classroom. When I was teaching at Centennial, we had two desktop computers in each classroom. For projects that required research or word processing, we had to schedule a time for the media center. Currently, the 8th graders at Centennial each have their own laptop, a one-to-one classroom environment. What a difference a few years

makes! Learning the theory behind TPACK, and then experiencing TPACK in motion, in an actual classroom was priceless for me!

Implementing technology into your instruction, while keeping pedagogy and content in the forefront of your planning is a daunting task. I realize, that even in the most technologically advanced schools, such as Centennial, the professional support just isn't there. In Jess's case, despite having the tools available to all her students, actually using and implementing it into her instruction has been a trial and error process, but one that she is fully committed to. Recognizing this challenge is probably the first step to implementing the concept of TPACK into my future classroom-its hard work, but as in this case, I'm convinced that the benefits far outweigh the effort. Our ILP project is a perfect example of this; the students came alive when we introduced a new tool (in this case dipity.com). Their right-brained problem solving skills came to life when a "hiccup" occurred and they were eager to help iron out all the details of using the new tool. Most importantly, the increased motivation led to increased learning across the board. As Jess has explained to me, the more she uses technology in her classroom, the easier it becomes to plan, and the more comfortable she (and her students) are with its' presence. Though there are still the usual glitches that occur with the use of any type of technology, she and her students have learned to not let these hinder their learning-it's all part of the process!

21st century learners are ready for the TPACK model of teaching. They're desperate to be in a classroom where technology is seamlessly threaded throughout the instruction, just as it is in the real world. This semester, my eyes have been opened to the endless possibilities of technology integration and the vast amount of Web 2.0 tools that are available for use. Not only that, but the theoretical value of technology and its place within the TPACK model, have been validated by my first hand experience in a middle school classroom. We're living in an exciting time, where the concepts of neighbor, communication, and even reading have been completely redefined by the presence of technology. I'm anxious to be back in the classroom and seem to have developed a new commitment to technology and its new found place in my instructional model of teaching.