Integrating Technology into the K-2 IB Planners

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**Description**

A. L. Burruss Elem is a small Title I school located in Marietta, Georgia. Our school consists of approx. 498 students in grades K-5. Our student population is made up of 42% African American, 38% White, 13% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 4% multi-racial. Last year our gifted enrollment reached 105 students. There are two full time gifted teachers who provide resource, cluster, collaborative, and advanced content classes. Over 90% of our certified staff is gifted endorsed. Marietta City Schools offers a choice program for all of our students. This allows students to enroll in the elementary school of their choice, if allotments allow. Each elementary school is considered a Choice Academy that focuses on different themes. We are currently in our second year of the International Baccalaureate Primary Year Program (IB PYP) candidacy. Within the IB PYP program, our school is focusing on creating a comprehensive, rigorous curriculum using an inquiry based approach.

 The IB PYP teaches our students new skills to prepare them for the future and our ever changing world. To support our students we must enhance the traditional roles of instruction and include technology. By giving our students the tools to become inquirers, thinkers, communicators, reflective, balanced, open-minded, knowledgeable, caring, and principled citizens of the world, they will be able to function in our ever changing society. The capstone project focused on both the needs of our students and our teachers in expanding their understanding and use of available technology tools. Within this project I planned to meet and collaborate with the K-2 teachers, weekly, while creating handouts to accompany the new technology introduced, and also model and facilitate the use of technology to support and extend our students learning. I really believe that our teachers will gain the most from this experience by planning, collaborating, and sharing their experiences with each other. This open dialogue will increase all of our knowledge while enhancing and extending instruction.

 As an IB candidate school, our teachers use an IB planner to help outline their inquiry based units. Each grade level has six interdisciplinary planners that are culminating in action and also provide a global perspective and awareness to our students. Integrating technology into our IB PYP planners was the next logical step. I first began by becoming familiar with the K-2 IB planners and these teachers. Each grade level has a lot of strengths as well as weaknesses concerning technology. Our Kindergarten team is the largest team and they require a great deal of assistance, but they are eager to learn. This is the first year that the first grade team has worked together. This team has been teaching for a combined total of fifteen years. They may be a young team, but they are hard-working and eager to try new things. The second grade team is a relatively older team with a wealth of wisdom and it was tricky to get them on board with this project. The easy part of my capstone project was the collaborative planning time with my K-2 teachers. Due to our master schedule I have collaborative planning with them once a week.

I noticed that while the grade level teams were creating their IB planners that they were not utilizing technology to the fullest. I wanted to introduce them to WordPress or Weebly to show them how to they could create webquests or a collection of independent inquiry assignments for students. Unfortunately, since our school system purchased Discovery Education I decided to focus our energies on learning it and utilizing it in our classrooms. It turns out that this resource is an invaluable tool for our teachers and students. This interactive resource allows our teachers to create multimedia posters that can be used to provide our students with a variety of access points on our topics; it offers digital textbooks, professional development opportunities, STEM activities, video streaming, and Quiz Builder. This was a readily received resource and it could be easily accessed through our learning management system. I quickly learned that trying to create handouts for each resource was difficult and it wasn’t easy to manage. I eventually started using screen-o-matic to create short tutorials to help them navigate these resources. I also shared these links and resources on the weekly staff newsletter called the *Beaver Bytes,* so it would be available to our entire staff.

While working with these grade levels, I soon discovered that many teachers were willing to embrace my capstone project, but they found it difficult to execute on their own. Several teachers were eager to create boards to enrich their IB planners. It almost became second nature for some to embed videos and assignments for students to complete. It was great to see teachers assigning their boards to students and the products that they created. I did notice that the productivity tools were not as easy to manage as I thought they would be. For several teachers they were unsure how to manage a variety of activities in their classrooms. For example, several teachers had difficulty coordinating and using the Blabberize resource. This resource is relatively easy to use, but I do not believe that my teachers understood all of the requirements that students would need to do. We ended up enlisting the aid of two of our high school volunteers to help when the first grade team used this resource to display their historical figures.

I continue to work and share tools with my teams, but I find that it is easier to facilitate these meetings if I am able to share knowledge while modeling the use of several technology resources. I also found that it was easier to integrate many of these tools in my gifted classes. By showing my students how to use these tools they were able to help their classmates and teachers. For example, my second grade gifted students were studying about the wonderful state of Georgia in their IB planners. I decided to give this planner a more meaningful and authentic perspective. Each student chose a state that they were truly interested in. Using my Webquest, that I learned how to create in my ITEC 7445 class, students learned about their states history, statistics, famous individuals from their state, including landmarks and features. For their culminating project students had to create a visual tour of their state using Google Tour Builder. Students had to embed videos and pictures along with facts about their state. These students went back to their classes and really inspired their classmates to want to try Google Tour Builder within their current IB planner. A really easy resource that my first grade gifted students really enjoyed was creating videos using Spark. My first grade team used Spark videos to have the students visually identify with one of the IB learner profiles.

I did not stick with the list of resources that I originally planned on using, but that turned out for the better. I was able to locate other resources that fit with our IB planners and the needs of our students. I tried to introduce a balance of multimedia tools to my different grade levels. Each grade level seemed to choose resources that interested them professionally and what would engage and support their student’s learning. Some of the teachers preferred the productivity tools better than the Web 2.0 tools. I believe that this was mainly due to discomfort with managing a technological classroom and some resistance to change. I encouraged each teacher to keep it simple, to focus on one area and then branch out once their comfort levels increased. We will never be able to control it all, but we can put plans in place to limit the unexpected. In my opinion the project was a success and I was able to measure this through the student’s engagement and portfolios. Also, I saw a definite increase in our teacher’s willingness to try new resources. At the end of the school year, during my TKES summative evaluation, I asked my administration if I could create a Techy Thursday’s PLC. Within this PLC teachers will come and learn about multimedia resources, but they would then have to take these resources back to their classrooms and implement them. When they return they would then get a chance to share their findings and celebrations with their peers and even discuss troubleshooting. This would open the lines of communication and help us all learn from one another.

**Reflections**

 After completing this project, I have learned a great deal about myself as a facilitator, how to work with my collaborating teachers, and how to integrate technology into our curriculums effectively. It takes a lot of forethought to integrate technology into our curriculums. I have learned that many of our teachers view just using the Smartboard as integration. Technology integration involves more than just using a variety of technology. As educators we have to understand that technology is both a tool and a resource that can be used to engage our students while creating meaningful and authentic learning opportunities for our students. Before I began this project several of my collaborating teachers indicated that they only used technology for remediation or review, access to system programs, websites for inquiry, and presentations. There were only a couple of teachers that indicated that their students used technology to gather data, create products, share ideas, and communicate with others.

 As this project progressed, I saw a definite shift in all of our thinking. We worked together to integrate meaningful resources to enhance our inquiry based IB planners. We were able to integrate a variety of resources to meet the needs of all of our students. As my their thoughts and feelings concerning technology grew, so did my abilities to learn new technologies, collaborate with fellow teachers to select digital tools and resources, and model and facilitate the effective use of digital resources to support our students higher order thinking skills. A variety of multimedia tools were chosen to integrate into our planners. Some were later discarded due to teacher preference or after careful reflection. I tried to continuously support my teachers by meeting with them weekly and providing them with my video handouts. These video handouts provided them with extra support as they worked through any new technology. This also provided differentiation for my teachers because they could learn at their own pace.

 If I had to give advice to a fellow educator, it would be to really understand the resources that are available to you and always keep the lines of communication open. Looking back now I did not realize how valuable some of our district resources were. It took a little bit of research, but our district provided some invaluable tools that had recently been upgraded. Once I realized that these tools were available I had to really play around with them and manipulate them for my students and their needs. Working with a collaborating team really requires you to listen to one another and sometimes ask those hard questions to make a difference. Regardless if the outcome is positive or negative; sharing those thoughts and reflections gives each of us a chance to learn from each other. During this project I hope that we not only learned from one another, but we increased our levels of trust in one another.

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