ETI Reflection

CE5800

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As I start this practicum, I am confident in my abilities and look forward to the opportunity to show other professionals what I can do while being blessed with having those professionals provide feedback and discussion to help me create a stronger foundation for my future.

After 15 hours, I have gotten feedback that reinforces my abilities as an Educational Technology Integrator. I can manage behavior and keep students on-task successfully. I like that my mentor is looking to me to gain some new knowledge while being very willing to share everything she knows.

With week 2 completed, I find that it is difficult to separate my LMS and ETI functions. It seems that the best use of time is to combine pieces and this also seems to increase student engagement and interest while decreasing behavior issues. Netsmartz is a series of fun, short videos that help the kids relax around topics that could be very upsetting or worrisome. We are not offering time to play the games but games are available that stress the key points of the video presentations so these could be used as rewards when students complete all the steps in a multi-day project before the rest of the class is ready to move on. Also, this week I was involved in a district-wide professional development session on the use of Libguides and how to set them up. This was a peer-conducted session among LMS and ETI teachers at the 3 elementary schools and the LMS at the middle and high school levels. I think I understand this system and want to look more into the information available for borrowing to see how much time can be saved in setting things up for our students to use. My mentor is a little uneasy with this and wants me to go through it with her – now to find time when we don’t have anything else going on and a free workspace to use!

Week 3 began with my taking over the Kindergarten Library/Lab time based on an agreed upon topic of study. I began in the lab with a Word document on the large screen which I filled with the students’ answers to “What do you know about butterflies and caterpillars?” This is my pre-assessment which shows that these kids (at least in this class) know a lot about the topic. To keep the process moving along, I indicated that if we went through this quickly that I had a short Youtube video to show. The students were respectful, waiting with hands raised for their turn to speak, and watching as I typed their answers into the document displayed on the big screen. I think that watching words “appear” on a screen is a bit more mesmerizing than watching the teacher write the answers on the white board or easel paper. It also means that I never had my back to my students and because I can touch type I was available to interact and maintain eye contact throughout the process. After the KWL, we watched a 2 minute video on the life cycle of a butterfly and moved over to the story area for the read-aloud. I will add to the KWL (Know portion only) after the second book is read next week or the following week before reading the third book. We returned to the lab after the story and worked on Type to Learn Jr. It was challenging to get all the computers unlocked again with just me and 18 of them but the kids were very good about waiting patiently for me to get to them.

Day 2 of this unit was the same lesson for a different class and again the students were very aware of their butterfly/caterpillar information. It could be that the Kindergarten classes have started studying the topic and in my own library I would be more aware of what was happening in the classrooms so I could better support their teaching without providing redundant activities. Today the KWL was a little more difficult because my mentor was sitting with the kids and they were still looking more to her to be called on rather than me and without knowing all their names it was difficult to call on kids easily for their answers. It does help to have a second person unlocking the computers just as the story ends so the kids can get right on and get to work. With only 20 minutes for the library lesson followed by 20 minutes for a tech lesson, time is tight!

Day 3 of this unit – same lesson/different class – not much more to say!

Other than my Kindergarten duties, I am helping with the computer that is attached to the projection system which allows my mentor to stand in front of the kids and still point things out on the screen. There is always the website navigation and behavior management pieces along with helping kids with digital reading and note-taking to keep an extra body very busy.

Rather than continue with the weekly summaries, I’m going to switch to a grade level synopsis encompassing the remainder of my time at Pleasant Street Elementary School.

Kindergarten – read-alouds were supported by youtube videos, real-life artifacts (milkweed pods), and a Word activity that helped them understand drag/drop actions while assessing their understanding of the butterfly life cycle. Most students completed or were close to completion of the Type to Learn Jr. program.

First grade – learned about keywords and then completed a digital reading study guide using group brain-stormed keywords. The focus was ocean animals so we found a game on Sheppard software that classified different ocean animals. Before playing the game, we introduced the classification categories using books pulled from the library’s reference collection. Note to self: get more books categories other than mammals! It was a nice segue to the computer game and the kids really seemed to enjoy it. The final week, my mentor did a picture snip scavenger hunt from a digital book and we created picture strips (laminated for reuse) and mini-answer sheets in an effort to observe Earth Week and save on paper. I might create a set of cards for different books that kids could come take to their computer when they finish early.

Second grade – this grade was finishing a PLC project at the beginning of my practicum followed by a NH animal project. I helped setup for the classes and tried to make things run smoothly. It was interesting to see them copy a picture of their animal to a word document and then add a speech bubble with the animal “sharing” information they had learned through studying the nhptv website on their animal. They had lots of fun customizing their speech bubbles and making great posters!

Third grade – This grade used the snipping tool to cut/paste a picture of the life cycle they were studying into a Word document. Then they had to add labels for each stage, arrows pointing from the label to the stage, and 3 interesting facts. Great posters deserve great comics so this grade was the focus of my student learning project. We used their prior knowledge and created comic strips online to share that information. This culminated with a wonderful bulletin board displaying both their posters and their comics as means of “using technology to share our learning.” The bulletin board was completed just in time for parent/teacher conferences.

Fourth grade – was working on building prior knowledge while practicing digital reading and completing Cloze study guides in advance of classroom study of the space. Students worked on study guides from three online books and then entered a blog entry about one thing they learned taken right from their study guide. They then read through other students posts (and using the handy-dandy blogging checklist) and recorded one other fact that became a panel in a comic strip. In this case, students got extra practice in website navigation as well as navigating multiple tabs in Explorer while trying to find the post they wanted to share through copy/paste.

Fifth grade – this was the most revealing grade I think. Students were working on an endangered animal research project with the end result being a full-color brochure to be displayed in the 5th grade hallway. There are three classrooms with three teachers with very different teaching styles! Simultaneously, they were working in their classrooms on a big project about explorers. One class spent lots of open lab time working on their projects and seemed to be more adept at working quickly on the computer, but because this teacher was spending so much of her scheduled lab time on the explorer report, there wasn’t a lot of opportunity to have the students work on their animal research project outside our normal 40 minutes per week. That being said, her class did get further than one other class but did not have the completion rate of the third class. The third class has a teacher that seems afraid of technology and only brought her class in towards the end of their projects to simply type them up and insert pictures. Most of the research was done through books borrowed by the teacher from the library. While she seems a bit unsure of technology, she was very appreciative of the value of our animal research project and was very willing to bring her class down to work on it at other than scheduled times. The class that had the lowest completion rate is headed by a teacher that holds schedules very rigid. She is adept at technology and both my mentor and myself stepped back when she brought her class in for open lab time. While some teachers welcome additional bodies, this was not the impression projected here. I think that there might have been a better way to marry the two projects so that everyone’s needs were met if all three teachers would be willing to collaborate on the projects. I could see the animal research project being done exclusively both during Tech time and during assigned extra lab time teaching research methods and note-taking followed by brochure creation. Then, Tech time could be devoted to helping them gather the information and create the project needed for the explorer reports. This would give them the skills needed and then a real-life experience to use those skills. They might even be able to create a brochure to go with their report.

My mentor was keen on having each class of a grade at the same point each week. It does make it easier to keep track of who is where but then you have to run around and reschedule or drop some of what was scheduled when snow days/delayed openings/early release happens. I do love the idea of using digital reading as a way of pre-teaching concepts that will be coming up in classrooms and that collaboration is essential in order to take advantage of student opportunities to learn and make connections.

We did have one issue come up when I tried to do blogging with a 3rd grade class through Edmodo. One of the teachers commented that they use Kidblogs and everyone should use the same thing so the kids don’t get confused. I understand her point and know that in my own computer lab, I would have to advocate for a system-wide adoption of a program before using it with my students. Personally, I would want them to consider Edmodo because it is so much more than just blogging. I like the online submission of assignments and collaboration opportunities it presents to take blogging to a new level.

**High School Level**

Spending 30 hours at the high school level shed light on some issues that are unique to working with older students. At the elementary level, most students in class are at the same level of experience. Electives at the high school level that do not have technology prerequisites inevitably result in students at both ends of the spectrum of technological experience. Activities need to be designed to challenge the advanced student while not overwhelming the novice. Project-based learning provides opportunities for students who feel comfortable to strike out on their own into the tech field being covered by the course. One thing that was noticed is that the novice students who were somewhat floundering when surrounded with older, more adept students, tended to not ask many questions and therefore didn’t receive the guidance they needed. This was brought to the teacher’s attention when the majority of the students were out on field trips one day and those few students asked lots of questions and made giant leaps forward towards the minimum requirements of the project. So it is important to not only design for both ends but allow time for each end to receive the positive attention necessary without feeling like other students view them less favorably.

I was surprised that in this new age of technology and in a tech class that the teacher would have students answering the skills questions in their own hand. Done to force students to move beyond “cut and paste” answers, I might follow this example but would probably add a step with the kids scanning their papers and submitting the scanned document electronically. I would need to remind them not to destroy/lose/throw away their papers until they have received an acceptable grade to avoid the “I did it and submitted it!” when I don’t have a document to grade. Having the documents submitted online would mean that I would have less paper to track and grade (and possibly misplace!)

I loved that so many kids came in just to visit the teacher and that, during free time, even when a large number of students were in the room, everyone was respectful, quiet, and well-behaved. The atmosphere is friendly and supportive; very conducive to positive youth development.

Senior portfolios looked awesome but my concern is that after all that work, the students only have 30 days access unless they have the foresight to pay the yearly fee. That may change if the platform for the portfolios changes, but that is one of my big concerns about having students doing electronic portfolios. I know from my own life experience that there are way too many moments when I have that “if I only knew then what I know now, then I would have saved ***x*** so I still had it!” We can’t guarantee that our students will understand the value of their portfolio at this time and place in their lives and it would be a shame if all their hard work is not available to them when they finally see a value to it in their future lives.

**Overview**

I have been working with computers for almost 40 years and have seen the tide turn from impersonal, disconnectedness to an interpersonal shared experience. I moved away from computers a couple decades ago because as a programmer (or even a user) I was isolated from others. I got tired of talking to computers and longed for interpersonal contact. I think there are few interpersonal contacts more important than that of a teacher and learner and, as an Educational Technology Integrator, I look forward to combining my past with the future. Technology is not a panacea; it is a tool that is only as useful as the skill of the user. As an ETI, I will get to help future generations become proficient technology users by providing instruction and mentorship to students and collaborating with teachers to help them include technology to enhance and assist student learning.