

Integrating Corel Presentations into the Grade Four Curriculum

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Abstract

I was looking for a way to integrate a computer program that involved computer skills with the grade four curriculum. I chose to combine Corel Presentations and the curriculum topic Canadian Physical Regions. I wanted to know whether the students would be able to complete the assignment with success, or whether it would be too difficult and frustrating for them (as they had never used this program before). I found the majority of the students enjoyed working on this program and about two-thirds would prefer to use this program again to do another research project.

Biography

This is my second year teaching grade 4 (with the revised curriculum). I have been teaching for thirteen years - three years overseas, two years in Alberta and the remainder with the Grand Erie Board. I currently teach at Delhi Public.

Background

My current school is Delhi Public School, which is a Kindergarten to Grade six school. There are approximately 400 students registered in the school, who come from very diverse backgrounds. There are many students in the school and in my class who do not have a computer at home.

My class consists of 25 Grade four students, 15 female and 10 male students. There are no students currently on formal Individual Education Plans, however there are two who function below grade level. None of the students had ever used Corel Presentations before, although some had seen other presentations.

We access our computers through a lab which is a separate classroom that contains twenty-nine computers for student use. We have one working computer in our classroom. We are booked into the lab for two computer periods per six day cycle, with occasional use permitted during the rest of the cycle when available.

Rationale

I decided to use Corel presentations in order to expand the students' knowledge of available computer programs. In the past they have used WordPerfect and several of the "games" available (e.g. Math Trek, Math Circus, KidPix, etc.) as well as Typing Tutors, but they had not ever used this particular program. I also chose Corel Presentations because it involved keyboarding skills along with some more interesting skills, such as using transitions and background changes. I also wanted to integrate some of the curriculum so they would have a clear and relevant purpose for using it. I decided to use the Canada section of the Social Studies program, specifically the Physical Regions of Canada. This would incorporate a research aspect and a writing aspect as well as the knowledge gained about the different regions of Canada.

Hypothesis

How can using Corel Presentations integrate student learning in a relevant and meaningful way?

Procedure

I started by doing an example of what a finished product would look like. Since no one previously had the opportunity to use this program, they were all quite excited about it. They really enjoyed the presentation (not necessarily the content!) and were anxious to get started. I explained that they would have to get into a small group of 4-5 members and choose one of the physical regions of Canada. They would have to look up various topics about the region for example, climate, resources, interesting facts, from a textbook and record the information on a sheet of paper. I could have had the students use the internet to gather information, but the school computer lab is only available to us two to three periods per week. Therefore, the research could be completed quicker by using our textbooks in the classroom. When each group completed the “paperwork”, we went to the computer lab to get started on Corel Presentations. I initially helped them get the correct number of slides they needed (8). I helped them get their title slides completed, then they worked on their other slides. Because the groups were working at different speeds, the students who completed the work quickly became my helpers and taught the other students how to set up their slides and get started.

Once all the typing was completed it was time to show them how to jazz up their presentation. I showed them how to select a different colour background, how to choose their transition between slides and how to set the timing between slides. Again, the students who were finished early became my helpers to assist the rest of the class.

My original idea was to also have them include graphics on their slides, but there was a problem accessing the graphics at our school, and because the project was taking a long time already, we did not include graphics. Once their presentation was complete, we took turns watching each of the presentations.

Result and Analysis

I was really happy to see how excited the students were to use this program. They did their research fairly quickly because they had an incentive to finish as soon as they could. When I had assigned the same research assignment the previous year, without the incentive of Corel Presentations (they had to present to the class orally and on chart paper) the research took much longer!! They really internalized the learning on their particular region. I think it was because they read it, wrote about it, typed it and read it again (often several times) before they were finished. They read each others’ parts, edited spelling mistakes and other mistakes, and made sure it made sense and was logical before they presented it to the rest of the class. They were also very proud of their efforts. They enjoyed watching other people’s presentations as well, and although I am sure that they were more impressed with the visuals than the content, they were reading and listening to the presenter. I noticed that the students who are most nervous in front of the class with the students sitting at their desks seemed much more at ease standing beside their computer in the lab talking to their fellow classmates sitting on the floor around the computer.

A survey was given to the students when they were finished. (One student had moved, so there were 24 students who completed the survey). The results are as follows:

Did you like using Corel Presentations?

22 - yes 2 - no

How hard did you find it to learn how to use?

12 - easy 9 - a little hard 3 - hard

What was your favourite part of using Corel Presentations?

10 - choosing transitions 7 - changing backgrounds

4 - showing/watching 2 - typing 1 - research

What was the hardest part of using Corel Presentations?

14 - typing 6 - research 2 - transitions 2 - everything

How would you prefer to present your project?

17 - using Corel Presentations 7 - using pencil and paper

The students did enjoy working in Corel Presentations. Ninety-two percent said that they enjoyed using the program, and seventy-one percent said that they would prefer to do a presentation in this way rather than the more traditional way of writing on paper, or chart paper and presenting to the class. Only thirteen percent said they found it hard to use. The hardest part about using the program seemed to be the typing skills necessary to transfer their research onto the individual slides (58% reported). Their favourite part of using the program was reported to be choosing the transitions between slides (42%), changing the backgrounds (29%), and sharing their projects (17%).

I have learned through my efforts that Corel Presentations can be an effective tool and incentive in the grade four class. It can be used to integrate the curriculum into a highly effective medium for learning and for presenting.

Conclusions

Through this project I learned that Grade 4 students are capable of learning the skills to use Corel Presentations and that it is in fact a meaningful way for them to internalize curriculum content. I found this “fun” way of preparing and presenting the project was preferable for many of the students. I did find it interesting, however, that nearly one third of the students would prefer not to use this type of program to present a project, but preferred the paper and pencil approach. I think this is due to the poor keyboarding skills of many students, and I would like to try this again with older students whose keyboarding skills are better and see how much of a difference it makes. By doing this project, the students were engaged in a process where they combined knowledge gained through research with the knowledge and skills needed to utilize a new computer program. They learned through a new and fun approach! Overall I would say that using Corel Presentations and the Canadian physical regions together in this project was a success and I would enjoy the opportunity to integrate other subject areas into this program.

Next Steps

1. I think I would introduce them to the concept of Corel Presentations before I wanted them to do a project with it. I would teach them how to change backgrounds, transitions and timing, and how to insert graphics ahead of time, so that when it came time to do a presentation for Canada’s physical regions (for example) they wouldn’t have to spend as much time learning the basics for it.

2. I would put more emphasis on having the students learn keyboarding skills. Although I have had them working in Typing Tutors all year, I realized I have spent much too much time on home row and not enough on learning the other keys! Therefore, when it comes time to type in their research, it is a painfully slow process.
3. I would be sure to have the graphics readily available to use next time as that is another fun area to incorporate computer skills into the learning environment.