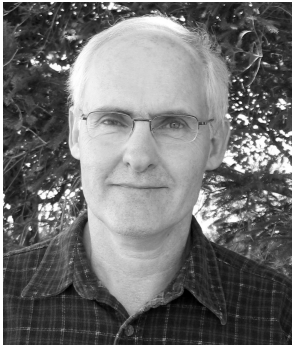


HyperStudio Challenge: How We Made Our Entire School Fit on One CD!

John Taylor

Biography



John Taylor is currently a Grade 7 teacher at Jarvis Public School. He has been with the Grand Erie Board for three years. Prior to that, he was a teacher with the Hamilton-Wentworth Board for 27 years. He received his Bachelor of Science from McMaster and his Bachelor of Education (Primary, Junior, Intermediate, Senior) from the University of Toronto. His interests include computers, photography, sports, wood working, and the outdoors.

Abstract

Using HyperStudio a Grade 7 class created an Interactive School Yearbook on CD. Students improved their computer literacy skills and the teacher found ways to incorporate a wider variety of software into the curriculum.

Background

I had heard a lot of good things about HyperStudio, and decided that learning to use the program and finding a classroom application for it would be my challenge for my Grade 7's for this school year. My first task was to come up with a reason or purpose that would attract the students, and get them interested in working on a project which was school related. Since I am interested in photography, I decided to make this year's project an Interactive School Yearbook on CD. I realized that in addition to its value as a curriculum tool, the CD could also be used as a fund raiser.

As I sorted out the details, it soon became evident that it would be a busy year. I would need to learn how to use HyperStudio, teach the students how to use the program, assign an Editor-In-Chief, and divide the class into small working groups. I chose two competent and computer-literate students to be responsible for special events, and the remaining students, working in pairs, would be assigned to cover individual classrooms.

Process

When I introduced the project, the students were quite enthusiastic. They wanted to start immediately, forgetting that it would be necessary to make detailed plans and schedules as well as practical arrangements with other teachers.

As a class we discussed the kinds of pictures that could be used in the yearbook. Each team would arrange with their assigned class to be kept informed if the class had any special art activities, outings, or displays that could be photographed, and to arrange times with the teacher for picture taking. I would talk to the staff about the project and explain how the students would interact with their classrooms. I was sure that the staff would be tolerant of any interruption caused by these photo sessions as they occurred throughout the year.

Slowly, things fell into place, and I discovered that I actually had a student who had some previous HyperStudio experience. He immediately became my Editor-In-Chief. His experience made it possible for him to assist me in helping other students with any difficulties they encountered.

Before we were able to take any pictures, it was necessary to teach the students how to use a digital camera, and how to download the pictures onto the computer. We began by taking pictures of sports activities and special events. As the students reviewed their photographic efforts, they realized that some work would be needed on their picture taking skills in order to improve picture quality in terms of lighting, focus, resolution and composition. There were a few times when we had to set up retake sessions.

Now I needed to teach them how to use Adobe Photoshop Elements LE. It was not something that I had planned on doing, but definitely necessary. Once they had learned how to eliminate red-eye, adjust the brightness, contrast and sharpness, and crop pictures so the photos would be better framed, they were able to use the corrected photos in their HyperStudio projects. They were most impressed with what they could do in Photoshop. Students quickly became interested in manipulating the pictures and actually obtained some interesting results.

We soon had some pictures with which to work; however, we could not link them in our yearbook, since we didn't yet have any class pictures. I talked with the staff and was able to set up a morning when all classes would be available for a photo session. Needless to say, nothing ever goes according to plan, and we were not able to get all classes done that morning. Another photo session had to be set up to complete the class photos as well as the team photos.

Although we kept working on the project on a weekly basis, it seemed to be going very slowly.

Since each class was looked after by a different set of students, each set of the class photos had been done in its own way in terms of layout and content. Our aim was to link every student in the class photos to a separate page featuring that student and some of his or her artwork, but in some cases the students decided instead to present the class in a slide show format. Next year a standardized format will be planned and adhered to for all classes.

Due to end of the year activities, such as track and field, the Grade 7/8 Ottawa trip, and kindergarten graduation, we ran into problems in meeting our deadline for completion. Our initial thought was to have the yearbook completed by the beginning of June. Once we completed the yearbook master, it needed to be proofread, beta-tested, duplicated and marketed, with the result that distribution of the finished project did not actually occur until the beginning of September.

Observations

At the beginning of the year, the class used school computers primarily for word processing, Internet research and remedial work. By the end of the year and of our CD project, the students had developed their computer literacy, increased their practical skills and learned to apply these skills across the curriculum. In fact, several of the students have been complimented by their Grade 8 teacher on their computer skills, and are serving as peer tutors in the computer lab.

The initial reactions of the class to the project varied from “When can we start!” to “This is too much work!” By the end of the project all were enthusiastic participants, every student in the class contributed something to the yearbook, and a number of them are clamoring to be on the yearbook team again this year.

In setting up the yearbook teams, I tried to consider personalities and work ethics. Within the first month, I noticed that we were not only making better use of the computers, but the students actually seemed to be working together better and staying on task longer. I increased our computer lab time to double periods. There were a small number of students who still found it challenging to stay on task, but fewer than with the other assignments given previously. By the middle of May, I had several students asking if they could stay in during recess in order to work on the yearbook. In fact, one student worked on his class photo assignment while he waited for the bus at the end of the day. He informed me that he really liked working in HyperStudio now that he knew how to use it.

I did hear a few complaints about groups not completing their task on time and one group even said that they wanted to drop out of the yearbook project because they didn't seem to be making any progress. With extra assistance from me and the Editor-In-Chief, within two weeks the group was back on track. They said they could see a lot of progress with their part of the project and now thought it was fun to do the work.

Conclusions

What started out as a relatively simple project; ‘How to use HyperStudio In a Meaningful Way,’ turned out to a much more complex task, involving several lessons on HyperStudio, Adobe Photoshop, how to use a digital camera, and picture taking in general. Now that we have completed the project the students are proud of the work they have done.

I was very pleased with the overall success of the project and with the efforts of every student in the class. Each one of the students made progress in terms of their comfort level in using the computer and the software we utilized to complete the assignment.

The amount of work involved in planning and organizing this project was well worth the effort to me. By the end of our project, virtually every student in the class was capable of taking pictures, editing the pictures and creating a working file in HyperStudio, with little or no help from others. They demonstrated a higher level of confidence in using the programs than I had initially expected. Several students expressed a desire to work on the yearbook again next year, even though they wouldn't be in my class.

From a personal point of view, I feel the CD yearbook project helped me to find ways to incorporate a wider variety of software into the curriculum and to engage the students in new and challenging ways. My own confidence in using HyperStudio and Photoshop Elements improved dramatically throughout the year, and I am now ready to further explore these complex and powerful programs.

Next Steps

After seeking input from staff and students, I have decided that some changes will be made to the planning of the project. I will try to:

- obtain class photos early in the school year
- increase instruction in using a digital camera; framing the subject, lighting, focus, uploading

- increase practice with Photoshop and work through more sample photo corrections with the students
- intensify the students' work with HyperStudio by using a part of our first CD yearbook as a sample to demonstrate some of the main features of the program
- set firmer and earlier deadlines for certain stages of the project (class photos early in the year; main framework of the yearbook by January; special events and sports events within two weeks after the events themselves)
- establish more detailed plans for marketing and promoting the sale of the yearbook, making sure that the project is complete and ready for distribution by the end of June

This should increase the success of the project with fewer year-end time constraints.

While we encountered certain difficulties, in the end our CD yearbook project was a huge success. Students, parents and teachers were delighted with the finished product and all are looking forward to our 2004-2005 Edition. My present Grade 7 class has already started to work on the new yearbook, and with the knowledge we have gained during the creation of the first yearbook, they will surely enjoy increased confidence, skills and success.