

Can 2nd Graders Benefit From Using the WWW?

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After presenting a workshop at a conference demonstrating how I teach 7th and 8th grade students to search and access information from the web, a participant came up and asked, "Have you done this with elementary school kids?" I said I hadn't. However, that thought quickly turned into action as I thought of my daughter's 2nd grade classroom at the next door elementary school. On returning home, I e-mailed her teacher and proposed the idea. She said great and I told her I'd get back to her when I knew there would be some open time in the Library Media Center. The LMC is currently equipped with 20 laptop computers that all go out on the Internet.

After spending a week with these 2nd graders, their teacher and I agreed that the excitement these students showed in finding information and learning and reading indeed validated the question: can 2nd grade students benefit from using the web?

The opportunity presented itself in the second week in January. The 2nd grade class would be looking for information about "wild weather". At my suggestion, each pair of students had chosen a topic of interest about wild weather. Students chose topics such as snow blizzards, El Nino, forecasting and flooding. Their goal was to find pictures and information that could then be used in some type of research report. The class was scheduled to spend an hour for 5 days in a row.

I had prepared by finding out what was available as far as weather and found that there should be enough information for all students to find what they needed. The next concern I had was presenting the information at a level they could understand. I wanted to make sure they could understand what I was saying. I use the Big6 process with intermediate school students, but decided this process needed to be simplified for 2nd grade. From various articles, I knew of the existence of the "Super 3" referred to by some as the Beginning, Middle and End, and others called these steps, Plan, Do, Review. I chose to use Plan, Do and Review since they are more active words. Everything I created on the web page lesson included these three words. This way, in addition to learning to use the laptops and the World Wide Web, they would also learn an information solving process they could then apply to any situation.

On Day one, I met the 2nd grade class at the neighboring elementary school to walk them over for the first time. As they arrived, there was lots of excitement in realizing they would each get their own computer and they would get to sit in "big" chairs! I explained how these computers all went out on the Internet and how all the connections needed to work for this to happen. I asked how many had been on the web before and three raised their hands. Then, they learned how to turn on the computer and then how to use the "accupoint" -- the mouse in the middle of the laptop. Having worked with adults, I knew this could be a major hurdle to overcome. With intermediate students, we would practice by playing the game solitaire on the computer, but I figured since we were going to use the web, these 2nd graders could learn to use the mouse in the context of various web

games. I created hyperlinks that linked to coloring, dot to dot, and hangman games. Within 30 minutes of entering the room, every student had learned how to turn on the computer, open up Netscape, how to click on hyperlinks and were playing a game they had chosen. Once again, I was reminded of the flexibility of the web...the ability of the user to modify it to make it easier for others to use. Every child was focused, every child was learning how the mouse worked, every child was learning how to manipulate the web. By the end of that first hour, none of them wanted to stop. I was amazed at how fast all of them learned to manipulate the mouse and how to use the web.

On day 2, the plan was to learn how to search, how to bookmark and to find information on their topic. To do this, students had to be taught how to use a search mechanism. Yahoooligans (www.yahoooligans.com) was the only choice for kids. The students arrived and day two began. We reviewed terms and then I told them to turn on the computers, start the program and go to the appropriate website to see what we were going to do today. I added to the website each day so students could read what we were going to do. As students went to the teacher website, they were shown the bookmark menu and how it worked. I told them we would need to do more bookmarking as we went along. I compared this to a bookmark they would use in a book, only this bookmark would save places on the World Wide Web.

They found they were going to learn how to search. They clicked on Yahoooligans and saw the search process on the web for the first time. I explained that there were two ways to search using Yahoooligans: one was by clicking on the broad topics and the second was to type in the topic and click on "Search". This point was reinforced each of the following days. Then they had to decide what subject area weather fit under. Yahoooligans has 10 major topics to click on. So they explored each of these areas. The students who went to the science section found weather there, while the others did not. This was an important piece of learning: realizing that knowing which topics find under which subject is important! Students were proud to know that weather was a science...a point they will probably never forget. In the "Review" step at the end of the day, I asked students to rate themselves by a show of their hands. They had to decide if they were "great", "good" or "still learning" the various aspects of what we had covered. Most rated themselves great in their ability to use the laptop and to work the web.

Students then clicked various subjects to get into the weather section and then found websites that matched their topics. They got excited when they got to one weather place that played the sound of thunder as it opened. They were equally excited when they found pictures and text about their topic. They would yell across the room, "Mrs. Hunter, come look at this!" At this point, they learned how to bookmark the important places. Some had a little trouble clicking, highlighting and then clicking again to bookmark. Having students sitting in pairs facilitated peer teaching and collaborating. They enjoyed showing each other what they had found and then equally delighted in showing each other how to get to a particular website. By the end of day 2, students had learned how to search and how to bookmark. Once again, over 80 percent of the students said they felt successful in searching the web.

Day three began with the objective of finding a picture that would fit their topic. Their challenge was that they could only pick one picture. Again, students applied the search process...going to Yahoo!igans and then bookmarking good places to find the best pictures. Then the task was to save each picture on a disk. This was done through the assistance of myself and the teacher. We each had several disks that we used to individually talk students through the steps of how to save and name the file. After each student saved the picture, they could then search for text information and bookmark it for saving the next day. Every student was successful in finding a picture. I had an 8th grade student who works in the LMC print off the pictures as students continued this process.

The goal of day four was for each student to pick the best text information about their topic. We had a discussion about what qualified as the "best" information. The students all agreed that it had to fit these three criteria:

- a) On the topic
- b) Information that was new
- c) Able to read most of it

This proved to be the most difficult part of the week for the students. They had several decisions to make. Several were impatient when they couldn't go right to information that talked about their topic. And, then they had to read the information and decide if they could read most of it or not. Some students couldn't find immediate information on their topic. We then entered different search terms and went to a broader search mechanism. Using Alta Vista and Northern Lights proved to be beneficial with teacher assistance. Eventually, all found pertinent information and then were able to save the information to a disk which was then printed out.

In four hours, students had gone from not knowing how to use a laptop or the world wide web to becoming fairly proficient in its use. A majority could tell you how to go to Yahoo!igans and how to find information on the web. On the final day, we reviewed the entire week. Students completed an evaluation survey where they marked Yes or No...this was also something they could take home to their parents to demonstrate what they had learned. Most students said they knew how to turn on the computer, open a program, search the web, find information and save information. They all agreed that they felt successful in finding information on the web and thought it was fun working on the WWW.

This weeklong lesson could have simply taught students how to use the computer and the world wide web, but having a specific purpose in looking for information about weather caused students to acquire a more intense understanding of how to find information and how to use it (This is called Information Literacy). Many have said that using the web is more for upper grade students. However, this experience validated the thought that as soon as students can read, they can begin making use of the web as another information source. The excitement in learning these students experienced was shared with their parents every night.

SURVEY

From Students: What did you like best about the week?

What did you learn?

Describe how you find things on the web.

FOR PARENTS

Dear parents - In an effort to learn more about how effective I was in working with your children last week, could you take a moment to answer a few questions and return to me.