

EasyTech smoothes the way for newly arrived students

Learning technology in context of core subjects helps ELL students build confidence, skills

PS 151
New York City
Dept of Education

800 students

Hispanic
49%

Asian
22%

African American
16%

White
13%

Gordon Graham has spent nearly two-thirds of his 14-year teaching career in New York City’s highly diverse PS 151, a K-5 elementary school located in Woodside, a community in Queens. In that time he has seen his school’s diversity grow with the number of immigrant families from all over the world, and with that, a significant increase in range of student abilities.

Woodside was once the American hub for newly arriving Irish immigrant families. Now the numbers of immigrants from dozens of other countries has grown, creating a school comprised of a rich mix of families from Greece, Russia, China, Japan, many Hispanic nations, as well as a large African American population. This provides the teaching staff with enormous challenges, not the least of which is that most students arrive with little or no English-speaking skills.

For Graham, the school’s educational technology specialist, computers become the “universal language” for his classroom.

“The computer is transcontinental. My goal is to use technology as an instructional tool to teach technology language and computer applications, but also to help most of my students learn the English language as well,” he says.

His best tool for that, he says, is Learning.com’s EasyTech, a K-8 technology literacy curriculum that does more than teach technology skills.

It also integrates that instruction into core curriculum, providing Graham with a rich and effective tool to help his young students get farther faster toward success as new learners in America.

In fact, his principal makes the computer lab a priority for new students arriving, and especially for those who have limited English skills.

“The amount of learning I see taking place in my classroom is four-score of any other demonstration-style programs. It allows each child to observe the lesson from his or her own point of view.”

– Gordon Graham
Educational Technology Specialist
PS 151, New York City Department of Education

“With limited English-speaking students, EasyTech allows them to come up to speed with their classmates,” Graham says. “We provide those students with extra time on the computer, and EasyTech is the first thing I turn to.”

Students who are learning English also enjoy EasyTech because it feels nonthreatening, Graham says. Its animation, friendly voices and characters

motivate and engage the students. And because it is self-paced, it allows for individualized instruction. It's also significant, Graham adds, that its technology instruction is in the context of core subject instruction, providing students with a leg up in, for example, vocabulary within math, science, reading and language arts that they will need in their regular classroom work.

As a technology specialist, Graham says he has found no other program as effective at engaging students and teaching them the critical technology skills they need so much for their academic success.

"The way EasyTech is designed is very significant," he says. For example, while English is one of the hardest languages to learn, the hands-on instruction in EasyTech, with its rich animation, demonstrates for the students what they need to know, right down to how and where to move the mouse. Then EasyTech lets students try.

"It's direct teaching: show them, let them try, let them succeed," he says. "The amount of learning I see taking place in my classroom is four-score of any other demonstration-style programs. It allows each child to observe the lesson from his or her own point of view."

Graham is particularly impressed with how EasyTech helps him teach one of the fundamentals – word processing. "Trying to teach word processing without this program is a nightmare. But don't be fooled. EasyTech is not a game, it's an educational tool and a resource."

And kids "love it," he adds. "I offer free time in the lab and they will voluntarily go to Learning.com to use EasyTech. I've never experienced that before. It's very exciting."

Graham is equal parts surprised and delighted that EasyTech has become a tool for the families of his students. Parents learn about EasyTech through Graham's newsletter he sends home, they sign on from any home computer or at the library, and use EasyTech's lessons to learn technology skills themselves. And it's not just the parents. "Siblings of my elementary kids, from the fourth grade up, are using it. I particularly see families using it to learn word processing, spreadsheet and Web-based applications."

Resources

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