

Technology Assessment of Lidra West Thomas: Narrative

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Lidra West Thomas teaches 4th grade Reading and English Language Arts at Centennial Place Elementary School. She is a new teacher, having taught only two years, but has completed her master's degree in education. Last year she taught 2nd grade, but feels much more at home with older students who can focus on more complex themes, text and language. In addition to being a classroom teacher she serves as one of two Ethics Ambassadors at the school and occasionally delivers mandated professional learning in this area. She has also delivered workshops to her fellow teachers about building a classroom culture of learning and support, and she is interested in continuing to grow as a school leader. Mrs. Thomas' classroom is loaded with print materials in numerous formats, and she incorporates group studies of novels into her unit plans.

For this analysis, Mrs. Thomas completed two different technology assessments developed by a collaborative professional learning community of elementary teachers. One survey, a *LoTI*-style assessment consisting of ten questions, focused on the extent to which Mrs. Thomas integrates technology activities into her daily teaching practice. The other survey, a ten-question adopter-level survey, described the extent to which she adopts the use of new technology tools to improve instruction.

Standards-based curriculum is the norm at Centennial Place Elementary School, and Mrs. Thomas has attempted to incorporate technology into her classroom lessons. Most research for any class assignment is completed with the Internet, and technology is widely used for reading assessment. Standards-based resources in multiple formats are available through our school network. She integrates technology in Common Core instruction several times a day, although typically with lower level practice or assessment activities. She frequently promotes ethical use of technology, including multiple communications media, with students, and reports that she -

monitors student interaction to ensure safe, responsible online behavior among students. One area of concern is that Mrs. Thomas reported only participating in technology-focused professional development about once a year. However, it is likely she considered only traditional, one-shot meetings provided by Atlanta district employees, and did not consider monthly professional learning provided by our Instructional Technology Specialist.

Our district's recent cancellation of school due to snow offered an opportunity for Mrs. Thomas to try a new technology tool. In our coaching discussions we have explored limited use of *Edmodo* with groups of 4th grade students, and she had expressed interest in trying more features of the site. She decided to try an online discussion about the novel 4th graders are currently reading, *Because of Winn-Dixie*, while on one of our "snow days." The day before the event, Mrs. Thomas and I discussed over the phone how she could give students a short assignment in *Edmodo* to help prompt their discussion. Then she used Remind101, a text-messaging system used by Centennial Place teachers, to notify parents when the online discussion was scheduled, along with instructions for students to go to the *Edmodo* site and sign up. Fourteen students actively participated in the online discussion and were disappointed the session lasted only an hour! Parents later reported to Mrs. Thomas that they had never before seen their children so actively engaged in an assignment (L. Thomas, personal communications, March 2, 2014). When we returned to school, we met to discuss what went well with the session and brainstorm ideas for expanding the use of *Edmodo* to other classroom activities.

As a result of this *Edmodo* experience and her responses to survey questions, I would characterize Mrs. Thomas as being in the early majority stage and implementation phase of technology innovation, as described in Everett Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovation*. She has decided to implement more technology activities into her regular instruction, and she is beginning to

evaluate how and to what extent technology supports student learning. When she hears about new technology tools, she is excited to try new technology with her students after careful research. She shares her experiences with her colleagues, helping to encourage them to become more innovative. In this instance, she had heard positive reviews of *Edmodo* and was willing to try it with a group of students. She studied the product and determined that *Edmodo* could enhance instruction by allowing students opportunities to collaborate using technology. Finally, she used social media and other communications tools to communicate with parents, teachers and others about learning activities.

Mrs. Thomas is dedicated to Centennial Place Elementary School's culture of collaborative teaming for student instruction, and welcomes the opportunity to share teaching strategies and expertise with her team members as well as other teachers throughout the school. Although modest about her own expertise, she is clearly a supportive friend to her colleagues and also welcomes their support as well. She is very comfortable with collegial interaction such as that in peer coaching. She tries to incorporate a technology component into her teaching at least once a week, although recently this has been difficult as her classroom Promethean Board is out of order awaiting service. Prior to this, Mrs. Thomas has tried to use video and interactive activities from *Promethean Planet* on the Promethean Board to help introduce and reinforce basic concepts, and collaborates with our media specialist to develop research activities utilizing both classroom and library resources. Another challenge that frustrates her is the fact that our district network administrators recently removed half of the desktop computers from every classroom in our school to address district equity issues (M. Thomas, personal communications, March 10, 2014). Although students can use computers in the school technology lab and the media center, lack of easy access to classroom computers hampers her ability to quickly access

technology to expand teachable moments in the classroom. Students in 4th grade often have to work in each other's classrooms when technology is needed.

We discussed ways to expand student collaboration and cooperation in the classroom through the use of Web 2.0 tools. Recent success with *Edmodo* has convinced her of the importance of using *Edmodo* with all her students from the beginning of next school year as a technology management and collaboration system. Although many of her students' projects and assignments are still completed with traditional media, this semester she added a technology component. For this quarter's final projects, Mrs. Thomas' students collaboratively created their final documents, writing poetry, prose, and drama using shared *Google* documents. She has seen students being more motivated to complete their work when they are expected to use technology.

Three areas for increasing technology implementation have become evident through assessments, observation and discussions with Mrs. Thomas. She indicated on the *LoTI* survey that she has never developed and used a standards-based lesson that incorporates communication and collaboration with community members outside of school to solve real-world problems. As Centennial Place transitions into a new instructional model over the next few months, this will be an area where we can expand efforts not just in 4th grade but with all grade levels. One support I can offer as a coach is helping to coordinate collaboration by identifying projects around issues that invite collaboration. Another area for coaching support for Mrs. Thomas and all teachers is the expanded use of assistive technology to help meet instructional needs of students with differing abilities. One very concrete way would be to model use of interactive electronic books already available through our library. These books make informational text accessible to struggling readers and English Language Learners and supports basic textbook-based lessons. Finally, Mrs. Thomas noted that she had only attends one formal professional development

activity focused on technology. Through technology coaching I can provide just-in-time, job-embedded support consistent with ISTE principles (Learning Forward, 2011) that meets immediate professional learning needs. I can also help her and others understand that professional learning can include many different techniques and strategies in addition to attending a workshop.

I have already met three times with Mrs. Thomas in coaching sessions. During the next two weeks before Spring Break we will meet two more times, once in her classroom and once in the media center, to focus specifically on enhancing student online collaboration and publishing, areas that she would like to enhance.

References:

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