

Dudley kids are digital learners

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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iPods, other media part of learning curriculum.

Youngsters with furrowed brows touch fingers to hand-held devices.

Once they've retrieved an answer from the iPods clutched in their hands, they yell it to the teacher who—from her desk—projects math problems onto the wall with a document camera.

“iPods rock!” one child exclaims about the portable media devices the class is using.

Welcome to the world of digital learning in Ann Foster's second-grade classroom and elsewhere in Gothenburg Public Schools.

Foster described “digital learners” and “iKids” as two phrases coined by various researchers who have recognized that 21st century students are immersed in a digital world.

Because young learners continue to spend many out-of-school hours in a world comprised of cell phones, MP3 players, computers and video gaming, she said learning has changed.

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Quoting from Dr. Michael Rodgers in “Teaching the 21st Century Learner,” Foster said a multimedia format pervades nearly every part of life—from television to audio, animation, and text.

Because students live in such a place, she said they expect a similar approach in the classroom.

“Teachers must abandon the notion that a lecture and reading assignment are enough to teach a lesson,” she said, noting that teachers must participate in the learning process. “They must learn to communicate in the language and style of today’s students.”

Foster’s second-grade class has been using iPods for reading, language arts and math since school started last August.

“The iPods capture their attention much more than an old-fashioned slate or a white board,” she said.

One way Foster uses iPods in the classroom is through iFlipr, an application for flashcards she said helps students better learn vocabulary words.

Each week, she creates a set of six flashcards, using vocabulary words and definitions, that correspond to the story students read that week and loads them on the iPods.

“The students enjoy this method of review,” Foster said.

Her favorite feature, she said, is the ability to add images and student responses that can be in flashcard mode or multiple choice.

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Foster chooses multiple choice prior to introducing vocabulary word definition to see what students remember.

Through the application, she said teachers can also create their own set of flashcards or search for flashcards that have already been created and shared via iFlipr.

Timed reading is another application Foster uses. The application is geared toward K-3 readers and offers story choices for students to read.

Foster has students read aloud to a buddy which is timed on iPods. Once finished, the story recalls fluency in words read per minute. Students can then see which

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