



## Turning the Tables — Students Teach Teachers

by Sara Armstrong

When middle schoolers Alison and Nat confer with their teachers, it's to talk about the lessons the students are preparing for student teachers as part of a new Generation www.Y program. The young people are part of a growing group in schools across the country who are sharing their own expertise to help make prospective teachers more aware of how students learn and the best ways technology can be used to support their learning.

### *Why Gen www.Y?*

Dennis Harper, former Olympia School District technology coordinator in Washington state, won a federal grant that allowed him to develop a program which paired students who are familiar with technology with teachers who aren't but know their subjects well. Not only did Harper and his colleagues discover that students in their program, known more familiarly as Gen www.Y, needed to have a solid understanding of technology tools and how best to use them, but they had to know something about working with adults.

Now, 4th– through 12th–grade students routinely acquaint teachers in their own classes, schools, and other schools with appropriate and interesting ways technological tools can enhance teaching and learning.

In Harper's view, it hasn't worked to require that teachers take the time to learn such skills as HTML programming to develop Web pages, how to find valuable information on the Internet, or how to scan pictures for inclusion in PowerPoint® presentations. Much more effective, he says, is encouraging students to follow their natural interest in technology and then bring them together with teachers whose expertise in subject matter provides content for projects involving technology.

### *Teacher Preparation Programs Participate*

New this year, students in Evergreen State College's Master in Teaching (MIT) program in Olympia meet regularly with middle school students. During the sessions, the young students demonstrate technology tools, instruct the teacher–education students in lesson plan design that incorporates technology, and answer their questions about kids, technology, and learning.

"It's very exciting to get a student's viewpoint," says MIT student Betty Hicks. "I have learned so much from Nat. As a teacher, I'm amazed at the quality of these kids! They're self–learners. They do it on their own time. I feel like I'm in an equal partnership. It gives me hope that I can take technology and bring it into my classroom."

Student teachers from nine colleges of education who are working with over 500 Gen www.Y students in 16 K–12 schools in Washington, Nevada, Kentucky, Ohio, and Idaho participate in a variety of instructional models. As part of college of education classes, aspiring teachers are required to develop Web pages that include lesson plans, Web resources, and a journal of their sessions with Gen www.Y students.

The contract for the Gen www.Y students at Washington Middle School who are working with the student teachers, on the other hand, lays out their responsibilities, including spending 10–15 hours of class time with an assigned Evergreen MIT student, participating in an interview, reviewing the MIT student's Web page to make it more "student friendly," and providing advice on infusing technology.

Middle schoolers Katie and Kiley worked together to plan and teach their lessons. During the semester, they moved from closely

supervised sessions to working on their own with their student teachers. Early topics included such practical ideas as planning ahead for technology problems, acceptable use policies, and appropriate technology for different age groups. Later, the girls encouraged the student teachers to work in groups to develop lesson plans which included technology, and were available to offer advice and help solve problems.

Evergreen State College's Kathe Taylor, project director for the Student Teacher Technology Education Partnership (ST2EP) that brings together student teachers and Gen www.Y students from across the country, agreed to take the position because she was intrigued with the idea of college teachers, K–12 teachers, teacher education students, and K–12 students becoming co–teachers and co–learners. "And I hoped we would challenge teacher education students' ideas of what it meant to teach," she said.

Because most people enrolled in teacher education classes today did not grow up with technology, those best suited to relaying how and what technology tools work are students, says Harper. Taylor concurs and takes the idea a step further: "A wonderful unintended consequence of this [project] is that the relationships developed between the teacher–education students and the Gen www.Y students have helped the teacher–education students understand better how kids learn. "Technology — and how to integrate it into a lesson — may have been the impetus for conversation. But technology has proved to be a discussion–starter about something far more important — that is, what makes students sit up and take notice, what excites them, what engages them in learning."

### *Teaching, Learning and Technology*

At the heart of any Gen www.Y partnership between adults and students is a project in which technology is used to enhance teaching and learning.

Last year, library media specialist DeAnne Barre's Gen www.Y students at McKenny Elementary School in Olympia helped teachers develop a number of projects. They produced school news with second and third graders using iMovie2, published student poetry on the Web for third grade, and did two library projects — a PowerPoint project on heroes and heroism and an annotated photo album of the native garden at the school, planted and maintained by students.

Sometimes the Gen www.Y kids take curriculum from the teachers and develop Web pages or PowerPoint presentations that will be used by teachers with their students. Sometimes the student/teacher partnership results in a lesson, enhanced by technology, that the teacher uses with her students, who then produce a report or presentation using technology tools. Sometimes, Gen www.Y students end up actually teaching younger students, such as Amanda, who helped partner–teacher Gail Santora's kindergartners learn KidPix so they could draw pictures of the insects they were studying.

In every case, Gen www.Y students develop a project proposal with their teacher partners which includes objectives — for the partner–teacher's students, the partner teacher, and the Gen www.Y student — as well as needed hardware and software, procedures, assessments, and links to state standards. The proposal is read and commented on by a Gen www.Y consultant, and the student also produces a final report after the conclusion of the project.

Whether they'll be working with student teachers or teachers at their own school, Nat and Alison and Katie and Kiley and students across the country often come to school at 7 a.m. or stay late to become Gen www.Y students.

In a letter to his teachers at the end of the year, program grad Yogesh offered an explanation for such dedication: "You helped me a lot in technology but also improved my leadership skills." And he learned the power and joy that comes with collaborating to improve lessons created by veteran and prospective teachers.

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### *The following Web sites appeared in this article:*

Generation www.Y: [www.genyes.org/genwwwy/index.php](http://www.genyes.org/genwwwy/index.php)

Dennis Harper: [www.glef.org/php/people.php?id=C514210](http://www.glef.org/php/people.php?id=C514210)

Evergreen State College's Master in Teaching (MIT) program: [www.evergreen.edu/mit/](http://www.evergreen.edu/mit/)

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