Evaluating the Fruit of Your Labor

Talbot Bielefeldt, senior research associate for ISTE's Research & Evaluation Department, discusses ed tech initiatives and ISTE's Classroom Observation Tool

Spring is the season when year-long technology and professional development projects in schools bear fruit in new learning activities. ISTE's Research & Evaluation staff spends weeks on the road observing classrooms and collecting other data on educational technology initiatives. Washoe County, Nevada, is one such destination.

Washoe County, which includes Reno, has devoted its federal Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) funds to installing interactive whiteboards throughout the district. This year, Washoe invited neighboring Pershing and Douglas counties to participate in its program. Washoe provides central professional development and technical support—no small task for a program that extends from the Sierra Nevada foothills and Lake Tahoe to the northern Nevada desert.

This project provides a unique opportunity to observe teachers at different stages of development. Evaluators used the ISTE Classroom Observation Tool (http://icot.iste.org, featured in ISTE in Action in *L&L*, June/July 2008) to document classroom instruction and technology use. What ISTE found was that teachers—even those who had to overcome technical glitches—liked using the whiteboards, and students were engaged when the whiteboards were in use. It was rare to see any "backrow nappers" during observations. The whiteboards enhanced presentations by both teachers and students. "Recitation at the board" was a common classroom activity in which students demonstrated solutions to problems or called up examples of work.

What ISTE found was that teachers—even those who had to overcome technical glitches—liked using the whiteboards, and students were engaged when the whiteboards were in use.

ISTE also noted that the more teachers used whiteboards, the more likely they were to turn control of the technology over to students rather than using it only to augment their own lectures. Many of the experienced teachers and the technology coordinators in the districts are already looking to the next step: wireless slates that allow students and the teacher to interact with the whiteboard from their seats. Remote manipulation of the whiteboard holds the promise of moving beyond the lecture/recitation model to turn the technology into a collaborative learning space.

The Washoe/Pershing/Douglas partnership was one of four EETT competitive grants funded through the Nevada Department of Education. ISTE is also conducting evaluations of projects in Clark, Nye, and Churchill counties. Churchill County is implementing the eMINTS professional development model, Nye County is establishing a mobile middle school science lab, and Clark County is further developing its system of site-based Educational Computing Specialists.

The Nevada EETT programs are among a dozen evaluations ISTE is working on around the United States this year for grantees under U.S. Department of Education, National Science Foundation, and private initiatives. For more information on ISTE's evaluation consulting, contact Talbot Bielefeldt, senior research associate, ISTE Research & Evaluation at research@iste.org, or call 1.541.434.8937.

—Talbot Bielefeldt has been an editor and program evaluator for ISTE since 1988. He is currently senior research associate in ISTE's Research & Evaluation Department, working on studies of science education, distance learning, and technology integration.