Computer Software, Language Experience, Reading and Language Development Strategies

Over the past ten years I have been developing teaching strategies which have been in turn developed from ideas and other strategies learned through out this time. I have drawn most of my ideas from three main sources, and they are:
1. Mount Gravatt Reading and Language Development Scheme
2. E.R.I.C.A. (Effective Reading in Content Areas)
3. First Steps Language Development

I have instigated a program where students in my care can use the computer technology they have at home, in the School Resource Centre and in the school computer laboratory to complete activities based on the above programs. Students complete activities on the technology available and submit their completed work on their 3.5" disk.

Language Experience Programs and the Microsoft Encarta 95/96 Encyclopaedia Software Package.

With the ever increasing number of families providing their children with computer technology, I felt it necessary to develop a program to enable the children to use their computer and classroom skills while using the three reading and language strategies.

With the huge range of reference material available on Microsoft Encarta 95 and '96 an ideal opportunity arises for the use of computer technology in addition to the already well developed E.R.I.C.A., First Steps and Mount Gravatt strategies in place in my classroom. I am, as a teacher, mindful of the fact that not all students have access to this technology at home, therefore no pressure is placed on those without this resource. However those students who do not have a computer at home do have access to the various outlets in our School Resource Centre and to sixteen Acorn computers in our school laboratory. To add to these, each class has at least one Apple Macintosh computer, or an older 386 or 486 IBM compatible machine in the upper grades. Those students who do not have a computer at home are given a hard copy of the necessary texts and related activities described here.

I chose two of my social studies themes to begin with. Exploration and Discovery and Space are fascinating Year Four social studies topics and many resources are available in our school. I have developed a program which allows children another way of expressing their skills, understandings and knowledge in these units. The use of a simple computer disk allows students the freedom of expression which they possibly have never been allowed previously.

The system I use is quite simple. The children are provided with a copy of a disk which contains text and several “worksheets” via the Microsoft Word program. The students simply complete the activities and “copy and save” their file on their own disk, then submit their completed work and a hard copy is printed out for display in the class.

Those children without computer access complete the printed out worksheets.

These activities are based on the various reading and language development strategies I have used in my classroom over the past few years. Very little of the content has changed only the medium for students to access and produce their work.

This further integration with computer technology gives an example of a selection of strategies used in my classroom.

a) Brainstorming.....

Students compile a list of words and phrases related to the theme or topic being covered. All words or phrases that are relevant to the topic are written onto the blackboard. Students compile their own list after reading the recommended text produced using Encarta 95/96.

b) Modelling a Big Book....

Students take part in a discussion and introduction activity reading through a "Big Book" which is related to a theme or topic. Using Microsoft Word and other programs children can make their own "Big Books".

Teacher, South Thornlie Primary School
c) Interesting Word Chart or List.....
Students with teacher, compile a list of new and interesting words related to the theme or topic being covered. These words are used in several other spelling activities, for example, word sleuths, word squares, word puzzles, hangman etc. Children can make a list of their own words taken from the related topics they discover in the various reference programs on their computers.

d) Think Sheet......
The “Think Sheet” tests the students’ ability to identify key sentences and concepts. It also tests the students’ ability to convey their understandings through written language. Students’ grammatical skills are also examined through the use of this strategy. Sequencing skills are also practised, therefore, this type of activity integrated the objectives within several subject areas, specifically, social studies, formal english, mathematics and reading.

e) Three Level Guide......
The three level guide is designed to develop students’ ability to think at three levels. The first level, the Literal level, is the ability to draw from the text the literal meaning of the author’s writing. The second level, the Interpretive level, develops the students’ interpretation of the author’s writing. The third level, the Applied level, allows the children to explore and apply content objectives, main ideas, concepts and generalisations beyond the text.

f) Cloze Procedure.....
This strategy allows the children to make use of their knowledge of subject content words and contextual clues within the text.

g) Sentence Reconstruction........
This strategy is used to further develop the above mentioned skills, but also further develop their sentence inversion skills. The students revise their knowledge of word parts: nouns, adjectives, verbs to be identify the beginning and end of a statement. Children can further develop their “copy and paste” skills during these types of activities.

h) Key Sentences........
These sentences are generally the first in a paragraph and children discover that they are the sentences that summarise the topic being discussed in the paragraph.

i) Projects or Assignments.....
Students revise many of the skills taught during teaching using these strategies. Reference text taken from either self sourced text, the text from one of the “Big Books” or from material they have read in the Encarta Program, World Book, or any other computer reference software program.

The above activities are all produced using Microsoft Word and Excel. All the information required can be easily researched in the Microsoft Encarta 95/96 or any other computer reference software.

Microsoft Powerpoint can be utilised to produce overhead sheets to help introduce, reinforce or summarise topics or concepts. I have several students in my class who have already begun to experiment with Microsoft Powerpoint, Corel Draw, Microsoft Word, Works, various word processing programs and other clip art software programs. Students are producing assignments, research topics, class-work or home-work etc on many of these programs.

This method of encouraging “electronic” media in my classroom has become part of my home-work and home assignment (project) policy initially and as it is developed it will become further integrated into my classroom program.