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## **Generation Y in Maryland Supplemental Evaluation Report 2002-2003**

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Over the past seven years of development, the Generation Y program has incorporated a number of evaluation methods designed collaboratively with the Evaluation Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory ([www.nwrel.org/evaluation](http://www.nwrel.org/evaluation)). During the period of the initial five year Generation Y Technology Innovation Challenge Grant, the evaluation methodology included paper and online surveys, interviews, focus groups, site visits, observations, and other methodologies. Currently the program includes a streamlined evaluation system, integrated into the Generation Y online facilities, to collect and report data on the program within each administrative unit (e.g., a single school or district, a state, a consortium of districts, or any set of schools that have been sponsored through a particular funding source).

These evaluation tools and the resulting information are provided to fully participating schools as part of their Generation Y services. The resulting data describe the implementation of the program, the demographics of participants, the perceptions of the program held by various categories of participants, and their reports of many outcomes related to the program. In order to increase the reliability and validity of these findings, data on key questions are collected from students, Gen Y coordinating teachers, and GenY partner teachers each term as they progress through the course.

For the 2002-2003 school year, a summary of these data from Maryland schools is provided in a separate document. That report includes information on the curriculum projects developed by collaborative teams of Generation Y students and partner teachers, as well as their personal and professional observations and opinions, and data reported by the Generation Y coordinating teachers who conducted the classes in each school. For comparison, similar data are included in a national report, which also highlights various descriptive data about the program at the national level.

As a supplement to these data sources, in Spring of 2003 the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) conducted a set of brief interviews with Generation Y state and district coordinators and Generation Y coordinating teachers from a sample of schools. A total of seven interviews were conducted, stratified to include teachers from elementary, middle, and high school Generation Y classes. These interviews were designed to gather additional information about the initial implementation of the program in Maryland and the initial outcomes associated with the program. The interview protocol began with general questions and proceeded to more specific questions regarding issues that have proven to be important in previous evaluation work with the program.

The findings from these interviews are summarized below. Each of the interviewees had only recently begun working with the Generation Y model of student engagement and technology integration; the program was begun during the spring 2003 semester at each school.

## **General Impressions**

Teachers and administrators were asked first about their general impressions of the Generation Y model, based on their initial semester of working with the program. Every respondent gave very positive comments when offered this open-ended chance to provide feedback on the model. Even teachers who experienced some barriers or difficulties in their first attempt to implement the model were very enthusiastic about the model itself and the potential for implementation in their schools. Several teachers spontaneously commented that the program was effective for both students and teachers, anticipating the more specific questions that followed.

## **Collaborative Partnerships and Curriculum Projects**

Respondents were asked about the projects developed by GenY students and partner teachers, and about how these partnerships worked in their schools. Of particular interest in beginning programs is how Generation Y teachers go about recruiting students and partner teachers, and forming and managing the collaborative partnerships. These questions are crucial to the operation of the program, and are initially crucial to the reputation of the program in each school and the future viability and success of the model.

As is common, several GenY teachers reported some difficulty at first in recruiting partner teachers, due to an initial perception of teachers that participation would add unduly to their work load. One teacher experienced difficulty because some partner teachers dropped out of participation late in the semester, due to contract issues and a desire to limit all extracurricular activities -- leaving their students suddenly with no collaborator after weeks of project development. However, all those interviewed reported that “those teachers who did it were pleased with the results” – even those who dropped out late in the term. Only a few of the partnerships were reported to be “rocky.” GenY teachers generally took an active role in monitoring and facilitating the partnerships.

Gen Y teachers reported a variety of strategies for recruiting partner teachers and students and matching them in teams. Some recruited teachers first, then matched students to them; others recruited students first and then matched them with teachers. Some used a personal approach based on their own relationships and knowledge of teachers and students in their school, while others used a “broadcast” method of soliciting participation, or asked administrators in their school to help with recruiting and the formation of teams. Everyone interviewed had enough success with teachers and students to fuel the further development of the program in their schools

## **Perceptions of Program Impact on Teachers**

In order for the Generation Y model to work properly, both teachers and students must benefit from involvement. Teachers were asked whether Generation Y appeared to be a viable and successful method for providing teachers with technical support and professional development in the area of technology integration. All respondents perceived the model as being very helpful for teachers; most commented that the model allowed each teacher to work and learn in a customized fashion that met their personal learning needs and fit with their particular classroom teaching situations. One respondent commented that the time savings for teachers and the actual timely production of “finished-product lessons” was more important than the professional development delivered to teachers by the program.

## **Perceptions of Program Impact on Students**

All respondents reported perceiving the program as having a very positive impact on students. Their comments, highlighted below, are representative of the kinds of findings typically reported by Generation Y teachers:

- Students were very engaged and enthusiastic about participating in the program, and voluntarily worked many extra hours on their projects.
- A number of students with histories of poor attendance and motivation responded very well, evidencing higher attendance and interest in school as a result of their involvement. For example, one school intentionally focused on students considered at-risk for dropping out or skipping classes, and recorded a 98% attendance rate.
- Teachers perceived increases in student confidence, poise, leadership, and self-efficacy.
- Students learned a great deal about what teachers do, resulting in increased respect for teachers and increased interest in becoming teachers.

## **Future Development**

Several teachers discussed the disrupted school schedule during 2002-2003, and hoped for an earlier start to their Generation Y classes and fewer disruptions during the coming year. Most were looking forward to running the class as an elective during the regular school day rather than as an after school activity. One teacher thought the program might not continue because there were no funds available to support the class during the regular daily schedule at his school.

Most respondents expected to have greater partner teacher and student involvement in the future, and to produce more sophisticated collaborative curriculum projects. Two teachers wanted to simplify their situations by either reducing the GenY class size or having two students work together with a partner teacher on each project. All respondents were planning minor adaptations to make the program more successful in their particular schools.

Elementary level teachers reported a desire for the Generation Y PORT facility to have a simpler version for elementary students.

The statewide coordinator reported interested in developing more opportunities for regional networking among Generation Y teachers, as well as more opportunities for students and partner teachers to showcase their projects.

## **Summary**

The seven Generation Y teachers and coordinators interviewed for this supplementary report had experienced a variety of levels of success in implementing the model in their schools. However, all reported very positive perceptions of the potential for the model to benefit both students and teachers. They perceived benefits for teachers in professional development and technical support for technology integration, as well as for saving time in the production of new, standards-based, technology-enriched lesson plans. They perceived benefits for students in motivation, engagement in education, opportunities for leadership, and self-efficacy.

It is common for Generation Y teachers to experience difficulty the first time they attempt to implement the model in a particular school. Although some respondents reported difficulty recruiting partner teachers or fully implementing the model in their schools, in general the program in Maryland seems to have had a very successful beginning. Many teachers had good outcomes with their first GenY classes, and many who had limited success believe they will be able to run a complete and effective GenY program during the next school year.

The evaluation methods currently included as part of the Generation Y services are designed to provide data primarily on the implementation of the program in particular schools, and the immediate outcomes produced by participants. As additional feedback for program coordinators, the observations and perceptions of various categories of participants regarding impact on students and teachers are gathered and reported, providing triangulated data from various points of view. These streams of data are designed as integrated, cost-effective parts of the overall Generation Y program services. More rigorous quantitative evaluation of the impact of Generation Y programs could be undertaken with attention to several issues:

- **Fidelity vs. Flexibility:** The program is designed to be adapted to a wide variety of situations, and puts a premium on local adaptation. The core idea of the program is implemented in very different ways depending on the needs of particular schools. This makes it somewhat difficult to specify the construct that is being evaluated, especially when examining the program across a group of schools.
- **Focus vs. Ubiquity:** The program is usually not focused on a particular grade level or discipline; rather, students and partner teachers work on a variety of curriculum development projects, in various disciplines, throughout the school. This gradually raises the level of technology integration throughout the school, leading to a more ubiquitous, seamless use of technology that isn't visible quickly by examining test scores in a particular subject area.
- **Different Outcomes for Different Participants:** As a corollary to the two items above, the program as implemented in a particular school may address many different outcomes for different particular teachers and students. It is common, for instance, for some partner teachers to be "computer-phobic" individuals who need a great deal of basic assistance and encouragement, while other partner teachers in the same school are advanced computer users who want help with more sophisticated classroom integration projects. Likewise, some students may benefit because they are "at-risk" students who would otherwise have little motivation to attend school; others may be gifted and talented students who need greater challenges and leadership opportunities.

If Maryland wishes to conduct a more comprehensive supplementary evaluation study for the 2003-2004 academic year, it is recommended that planning for this study commence as soon as possible in order to allow for a more rigorous and thorough evaluation design and process.