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Generation Y in Maryland Supplemental Evaluation Report 2003-2004

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Introduction

Over the past eight 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). 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 2003-2004 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 2004 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 six interviews were conducted, including two coordinators, two teachers of elementary school Generation Y classes, and two teachers of secondary Generation Y classes. These interviews were designed to gather additional information about the implementation of the program in Maryland and the 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. Most of the interviewees were in their second school year of working with the Generation Y model of student engagement and technology integration. The program was begun during the spring 2003 semester at each school, and most of the interviewees had been with the Maryland Gen Y program since its inception.

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 Generation Y program. Some provided additional information about specific implementation issues in Maryland.

Most teachers and coordinators reported that the program was running well and there were no significant problems this year. Most commented that the program was “great,” and that they had received good support from the GenY staff and from technology coordinators in Maryland. Most commented particularly on positive effects for students in areas such as self esteem, critical thinking, and engagement in school.

One teacher, despite an overall positive impression, reported being disappointed in several implementation issues this year. These included having less involvement on the part of parents, partner teachers and coordinators than in the previous year, inadequate technology resources, and a reduced stipend for teachers. This teacher reported that partner teachers continuing from the previous year were enthusiastic, but partner teachers new to the program were “less gung ho,” and that everyone seemed to be more busy and have less time for the program this year.

One coordinator was concerned that in some schools, partner teachers “only use technology when they have a Gen Y student with them, as opposed to learning how to use it on their own.” This coordinator has been working with GenY teachers to make sure that partner teachers view the program as a professional development opportunity, for their learning, in addition to a model of collaboration with students.

Several respondents indicated that the Generation Y program has been used to support other professional development efforts in the area of technology integration, and also will support district efforts to meet the NCLB-mandated elementary reading and eighth grade technology proficiency requirements.

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.

GenY teachers continued to recruit and develop relationships with partner teachers. 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 required matches in which the GenY student was already in a class with their partner teacher, so that finding time to discuss their collaborative project would be easier. Some used a personal approach to recruiting, based on their own relationships and knowledge of teachers and students in their school, while others used a “broadcast” method of soliciting participation at staff meetings or through staff mail, or asked administrators in their school to help with recruiting and the formation of teams. Some teachers reporting shifting their projects so that multiple students, as many as four, worked on a single partner teacher. Everyone interviewed had enough success with teachers and students to fuel the further development of the program in their schools.

Overall, respondents reported that the partnerships and projects went well and were more differentiated, complex, and successful than last year. Gen Y teachers would like to have more time to monitor and participate in the meetings between students and partner teachers, because sometimes partner teachers and students need some coaching or assistance to facilitate their communication or the design and implementation of their projects. Nevertheless, respondents described the partner teachers as being generally “overjoyed” or otherwise pleased with their partnerships and collaborative projects. As noted above, one teacher reported that even though the program was successful this year, partner teachers new to the program were somewhat less enthusiastic than returning partner teachers, and everyone seemed to have less time for their projects.

Two respondents noted that the PORT online interface was further improved this year, and was not an impediment to the program, though it is still “tedious” and “time-consuming” for some students and partner teachers to complete, especially those who were participating in the program in an after-school format.

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.

Partner teachers became “more familiar with things that can be done with technology” and “more motivated to take more professional development on their own to learn more about technology.” All respondents perceived the model as being very helpful for teachers. There is a perception that teachers who are already “tech savvy” are most likely to participate, but that they benefit from the program and learn more about technology integration. Other less technology-experienced teachers may not yet be comfortable using technology on their own – they want a GenY student or technology coordinator to assist them in class – but they are making progress. Teachers see Generation Y as something that helps them and adds to the curriculum – “doesn’t save any time, but lets us do new and better things.”

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 and parents alike were very engaged by the program and their specific projects, resulting in greater attendance, motivation, and family involvement in school. Students were very engaged and enthusiastic about participating in the program, and voluntarily worked many extra hours on their projects. “They like doing something that will benefit other kids and last after they graduate – they’re very proud of their work, and inspired other students to participate.”
- Teachers perceived increases in student self-esteem, confidence, poise, leadership, and self-efficacy.
- Students experienced great satisfaction in being able to help teachers, and were often surprised that their teachers didn’t already know certain things about technology. Students learned a great deal about what teachers do, resulting in increased respect for teachers and increased interest in becoming teachers. For example, students had to learn how to teach others (teachers and other students) rather than just “do it for them.”

Future Development

All respondents indicated some uncertainty about future funding for their programs, but were enthusiastic about the continued success of the model in their schools.

Most respondents had plans to further “market” the program to gain greater partner teacher and student involvement in the future, and to produce more sophisticated collaborative curriculum projects. Some were anticipating scheduling changes that would result in some changes in their Gen Y classes. One teacher reported plans to elicit more parental involvement by including parents in training sessions and providing refurbished computers to some high poverty families. Two teachers reported they would not be continuing in this role next year, and were uncertain who would take over the program at their schools.

Summary

The Generation Y teachers and coordinators interviewed for this supplementary report reported very positive experiences with the program. These findings echo the results of interlocking online surveys of students, partner teachers, and Generation Y teachers in Maryland (included in a separate report). The interviewees perceived benefits for teachers in professional development and technical support for technology integration, and for students in motivation, engagement in education, opportunities for leadership, critical thinking, confidence and self-efficacy.

A number of respondents indicated uncertainty about funding for the continuation of the program in their school(s), and some anticipated possible changes in assignment for Generation Y teachers. These changes could affect the success of the program, because in many schools one or two years of initial startup time are needed to get the Generation Y teacher and partner teacher accustomed to the model, and to customize the model for their building. In order to achieve the maximum benefit from the program, every effort should be made to support the sustainability of the program, and to insure the stability of those Generation Y teachers who have been effective in this role.