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EDU570: Computers in the Classroom
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Review

Thinglink

<https://www.thinglink.com/action/imageUpload>

3rd

Language Arts

Content:

Description:

Thinglink is a tool that is used to create interactive images. Using this tool will allow the teacher to take an image and make it an interactive experience for each student. Videos, text, pictures, or voice recordings can be embedded to the image. Once you have registered for an account, you can search other users' images for inspiration. When you are on the website for Thinglink, there are tabs that can be chosen. If you choose Stream, you have an opportunity to see the images that are being used by the people you follow. Clicking on "Me" will allow you to see what your personal usage looks like. For instance, you can view how many images, channels, touches, following, and followers you currently have. While in Me, you can create new images or edit your current images. You can view your personal STATS in the STATS tab. The STATS give you a view of how many followers have viewed, hovered, or clicked your published images. You also have the option to browse featured images. Under the Students tab, you can set up accounts for your current students. Once your students have an account, they can access selected images you have created to add their tags or images when working in a selected channel. When you click the Create tab, you have an opportunity to make the image interactive. The images that you would like to make interactive can be uploaded from your personal hard drive, Facebook, Flickr, or by using a URL address/link.

Technical Quality:

This website is easy to access. Little computer experience is needed when using this website. Thinglink is both user-friendly for the teacher and the students. There are tools that can be accessed keep teachers organized. Teachers can manage their images by organizing them into different classrooms. Students can only access the image if the teacher invited them to that classroom. There were no apparent "bugs", but a technical difficulty I experienced was trying to upload my own images. There are no obvious help tabs on the website, but I was able to find directions from other users on their blogs. Navigating through the website was simple. The tabs are located on the top right of the page. Each tab has a different clear role that each user will quickly pick up on while using the website. The tabs are labeled with pictures and words. This will be useful when students are accessing the website, especially ESL students who may depend on picture clues. Aesthetically, this is a pleasing website. There is little to distract the user. The only words or pictures on the website are the pictures tied to the tabs.

Use of Technology:

This website will add to the students educational experience in many different ways. Students will have a way to work collaboratively, in and out of the classroom, on many different class assignments. The goal of this tool is to create an interactive experience unique to each student. This can easily be accomplished through uploading pictures, embedding videos or other links to assist with learning or to showcase accomplished work. Students are given an opportunity to be creative and showcase their learning to their teacher and classmates. After playing with this tool, it is a simple task to upload a picture of a student and then tag completed work to create an interactive portfolio for that student. Thinglink can be used as a portfolio or for a way assess students formatively or summatively. Using Thinglink as a way to showcase students work will motivate the students and make them more accountable for their work. Using this tool as a portfolio would be a great way for students to create and monitor their goals for a given content. Thinglink would be a great alternative to assessing students formatively or summatively. Teachers can become creative with the assessment they give to the students. Students' responses will be more creative because their options will not be limited.

Role of Students:

Students will be empowered by this tool. Different learning needs can be addressed using Thinglink. Having the option to embed video, pictures or written text creates many different ways for students to possibly respond to the teacher's image or to create an interactive image of their own. Students are given the opportunity to think out side of the box to represent their learning as it makes sense to them. This tool does not limit the student to creating one product. Students can create interactive images for any content area. Some examples of student work that I liked are creating book reviews. Doing this, students of all ages can upload videos and personal reviews of a particular book they are reviewing. I really liked the idea of using this tool as an icebreaker in the beginning of the year. The teacher would have pictures of each student uploaded as an image. Each student would be asked to create tags that would describe him or her. In a history class, an interactive timeline could be created using Thinglink. With the timeline of the image, tags along the timeline could contain important pictures with descriptions or YouTube videos of important events. I believe this tool would be a great tool to promote collaboration in and out of the classroom. Any of the assignments stated above could be done collaboratively. Allowing the students to be creative and represent different events, or their opinions on a given topic using tags such as pictures, videos, text, or other links will allow the students to think outside the box and will help the student value their thinking and learning process.

Role of Teacher

The teacher can take one of two roles. The teacher can have prepared images on his/her Thinglink that can be accessed by the students. The teacher can create an interactive image to help teach a lesson, or an interactive image can be used to

assess the students' learning. There are more options available to the teacher if s/he chooses to pay and upgrade their account. There is a tool to manage the students' work. By creating classrooms, students can view, create, or respond to different images in their classroom. The teacher can view the completed work of the students within each classroom. There does not seem to be a user guide present on the website.

Classroom Usage:

This tool can be used in many different ways in the classroom. It can be used to bring a lesson being taught alive and engage the students through various tags like videos or pictures. Students can create individual images by using their sign in name or Gmail account. If there is a group project being completed, the students within the groups can work on one image together in the classroom or separately out of the classroom. If the students were working on a collaborative project out of the classroom, I think it would be beneficial to have a chat option so the students can discuss the role of each participant or just to keep constant communication with the members of the group. I do believe this could fit into the curriculum in many different ways. Thinglink would compliment the curriculum by bringing the curriculum alive. Using Thinglink will help keep the students focused throughout a lesson or throughout their learning to create deeper connections to the content that is being taught. As stated above, I believe Thinglink could be used in the classroom in many different ways. For example, I plan to use Thinglink with my students who are currently reading Poppy by Avi. Having read the book, the students will be expected to use the image I created to analyze the main characters from the book. They will be asked to come up with character traits for three of the main characters and use text evidence to prove these claims. The way they choose to show their response is up to them. They can get as creative as they want!

Critical Summary:

Thinglink would be an asset to any classroom to teach interactive lessons in many content areas and to all ages. Thinglink can be used to assess the students both formatively and summatively. This is a useful way to have creativity assist students in making a connection to the concept that is being taught. Using this tool as an assessment will give the students an opportunity to be creative independently or collaboratively to show if they have mastered the objective. The strength of this program is that it is a tool that can be used by those who are tech savvy and those who are not tech savvy. Those who are not tech savvy may struggle with the program at first, but once you get the hang of the different ways to tag, the possibilities are endless! I like that this tool allows users to upload from their personal hard drive or they can import from facebook, Flickr, or embed a URL address. Facebook and Flickr are popular tools many people can access easily. Many personal pictures can be obtained through facebook and Flickr. Having the ability to embed a URL address adds to the interactive experience. One shortcoming would be the lack of support available on the Thinglink website. When I could not figure out how to upload my images to add as a tag, I had to Google the

question and get help from a blogger. Having a FAQ tab would be useful and would make the learning process much easier for any user.

Overall Rating (On a Scale of 1 to 10)

8.5

Explanation of Rating:

I gave Thinglink an 8.5 because I found it time consuming to go search elsewhere to figure out how to make an image truly interactive and personal. Having to look outside of the Thinglink website, I felt, was interfering with my own creativity. I would search the question then weed through the search results to find the simplest explanations so I could get back to creating my interactive image. Other than little help on the website, I believe this would be a hit in any classroom. Using Thinglink will appeal to many different learning styles as this tool brings images and lessons alive with other images, videos, songs, or other important relevant links.

Glencoe Online- Explore Virtual Math Manipulatives

http://www.glencoe.com/sites/common_assets/mathematics/ebook_assets/vmf/VMF-Interface.html

3rd

Mathematics

Content:

Description:

The Glencoe Online- Explore Virtual Math Manipulative tool allows teachers and students to have access to math manipulatives that are traditionally used in classrooms Kindergarten through eighth grade. This tool features three dropdown menus. From each dropdown menu the teacher or the student can choose the appropriate grade, a background, and different manipulatives available for use. Along the bottom of the screen other tools are available such as Text Box, a hand to manipulate the tools that are being used, a pen tool, straight-line tool, ruler, stopwatch, protractor, timer, help menu, options to erase the screen or objects on the screen, and finally a print option. You will see a white screen until some selections are made from the drop down menus.

Technical Quality:

Accessing the software was very easy. Clicking onto the URL brings you right to the only screen that will be used while using the software. Since the URL is a direct link, to the software, I believe little computer experience is needed. With some modeling by the teacher, the students should be able to independently navigate through this software, to help them manipulate different tools when working on specific math concepts collaboratively or independently. The teacher may need to use the help menu to become familiar with how to use the different manipulatives. For example, when I explored the help menu when using the base blocks, I discovered you are able to break apart the ten stick, hundred block and thousand block. The help menu provides simple directions that are accompanied by pictures. The navigation of the software is very simple. The options to choose are not

overwhelming and are organized to allow easy access. The graphics that are used are a replica of the manipulatives that would be used during a math lesson. The backgrounds also consist of work mats. These work mats consist of different charts and grids. I do not believe the features are distracting. Having a very plain layout provides less opportunity for the student to become distracted. Everything presented with this software has a purpose and there is nothing added to the screen to make it eye catching.

Use of Technology:

This software is a good use of technology for many different math objectives. Using virtual manipulatives allows for students to observe, manipulate and explain how to solve different math problems. In our school, one goal we are working towards is having the students be able to explain their thinking. Having the manipulatives will assist the student to make observations to better explain how they arrived at an answer. The use of this technology will enhance learning through creating meaningful problems on the students' appropriate abilities. For example, if a student does not have a good foundation in place value, they would need to work with representing numbers using the base ten blocks before they could begin decomposing and composing numbers. This can be achieved by allowing the student to manipulate the base ten blocks to create and represent different numbers.

Role of Students:

I believe the students will be empowered by using this software. For the students that struggle with a concept, this will allow the student to work with manipulatives to creating a better connection to the concept that they are struggling with. Since this is on the computer, each student will have the option to work independently and privately. Working independently and privately will allow for less anxiety of other students. With less anxiety, students can work at their level without worrying others will make fun of their current ability. For students that are comfortable with the concepts, having the manipulatives will assist them in becoming better writers about their thinking. They will be able to observe their manipulatives and write about their observations. This software can be used independently, in small groups, or a whole group. Using this software in small groups or as a whole group will allow students to participate in meaningful discourse on student work. Having meaningful discourse will allow for learning through connections and hearing other perspectives. This software will help students value their thinking. Having the option to work independently with this software, the student can be relaxed while working with a concept he or she is struggling with, without having the other students aware of their area of struggle. Working on a computer or tablet provides some privacy to allow for learning at the students level and at a pace that makes them feel more comfortable.

Role of Teacher

When implementing this software, I believe it is important that the basic use and navigation is modeled for the students. When the students are working with a

particular work mat and manipulative, it would only be beneficial for the teacher to model how to access the work mat and the manipulatives. I do believe because of the simple layout, most students will not need the teacher to model how to navigate the software after the initial use. The teacher can modify the level of the manipulatives that are being used by selecting a different grade level or type of manipulative. The teacher cannot add anything more to the software other than the options that are available in the drop down menus. There are no internal management tools to help the teacher monitor the student work. The students only have the option to print the screen they are working on. The help menu is available and like the software, the manual is simple to allow quick directions. The text is not wordy and there are pictures provided whenever possible. Having the simple text accompanied by pictures allows for the students to also use the help menu with ease. The help menu has three tabs: general instructions, toolbar, and manipulatives. Having the tabs allows the student or the teacher to find what they are looking for quickly.

Classroom Usage:

This software would be used in the classroom to accompany different math lessons. Students can use this individually in the same way manipulatives would be traditionally used. Having the manipulatives available virtually allows the students to have access to many different manipulatives and work mats. The students can work in partnerships and in small groups, but would have to share one screen. Having to share one screen when working in partnerships or small groups will make it difficult to ensure each student is actively participating. This software would be great when paired with an interactive whiteboard. It will serve as a great visual to aid the concepts being taught. This software is completely aligned with the curriculum. For example, when in third grade, student must be able to represent a number in many different ways. This can be accomplished by using the base ten blocks and the work mat. Using this software, the student will be able to see the base ten blocks to create a number. Then the students have the option to represent the same number in many different ways by breaking apart the base ten blocks.

Critical Summary:

The Glencoe Online- Explore Virtual Math Manipulative tool is a quality tool that can enhance learning in the classroom. This tool is useful to show what a concept looks like using manipulatives to allow students to creating deeper connections to the concepts taught throughout the year. I particularly like the simple layout of the software that allows easy navigation for both teacher and student. I also feel having the variety of manipulatives and work mats available for every student will allow for concrete connections with a concept. Unfortunately, many schools run into the problem of not having enough manipulatives for every student in the classroom. With this program, this is not the case, unless there are no computers to access. I also think the help menu's layout is simple and effective. It is a quick reference that will not take much time away from learning and exploring if one should need assistance. One weakness I feel that does impact this software is the lack of a way for the teacher to keep track of how the students are using this program. There is

no way to submit student work. One possible way around this is to have the students print their work, but this would be time consuming. It would be convenient and helpful for both the teacher and the students to have a way to manage and assess student progress. One other shortcoming I noted was the difficulty of using this in a small group. I believe that if each group could all share the same page on different computers or tablets this would allow for more time using and applying rather than deciding who is going to be the student using and manipulating for the group.

Overall Rating (On a Scale of 1 to 10)

9

Explanation if Rating:

I gave The Glencoe Online- Explore Virtual Math Manipulative a 9 because I have had an opportunity to use this in my classroom. This tool has allowed my students to concretely see and manipulate different tools to help with their ability to independently apply the concepts that are being taught. I have observed the meaningful conversations students are able to have by using this tool. I have also witness students having "AHAA!" moments throughout their conversations with the use of this tool.