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SkillsTutor Use in Title I Elementary School

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### Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires the use of technology to increase student achievement and requires the use of educational programs and practices that are proven successful through “scientifically based research” (United States Department of Education, 2004). In order to meet the requirements of NCLB and to maintain federal funding, the Coweta County School System (CCSS) implemented a tutorial program throughout the school system. The CCSS subscribed to the SkillsTutor program in 2006, and it was implemented during the school year. The SkillsTutor program, produced by Achievement Technologies, Inc., is an online tutoring program emphasizing increased student achievement on state and national tests. This reflection will examine the use of SkillsTutor within a Title I elementary school.

## SkillsTutor Use in Title I Elementary School

### The Setting

Atkinson Elementary school is located 30 miles south of Atlanta, Georgia in Newnan. The school is located in the historic downtown area serving students in Kindergarten through fifth grade. According to the school demographic data, 61% of the 434 students received free and reduced lunch during the 2007-2008 school year classifying the school as a Title I school. In the same year, the school served 8% of its students with a Limited English Proficiency, and Special Education students comprised 12% of the student body population. Based on the Atkinson parent e-mail database, it is estimated 40% of the students do not have internet access from home or the parent's workplace.

Due largely in part to Title I funding, technology resources are plentiful on campus. On average, each classroom has 3 computers, 1 black and white laser printer, and 1 inkjet color printer. The school is equipped with 17 Promethean ActivBoard interactive whiteboards and 10 sets of ActiVotes. Three laptops, 3 digital cameras, 3 scanners, and 3 video cameras are available for teacher and student use when needed. Atkinson Elementary houses two stationary computer labs and one mini lab in the media center. Each stationary lab has a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, 1 projector, 30 computers, 1 inkjet color printer, and 1 black and white laser printer. The first lab is for independent use by teachers and their students, and the second lab is supervised full time by a certified teacher. The Atkinson Faculty and Staff also includes an Educational Technology Support Specialist (ETSS), 38 certified staff members, and 25 classified staff members.

### Innovation Implementation

The CCSS purchased a four year subscription to the SkillsTutor program in June 2006. In July 2006, the ETSS from each Coweta County School attended SkillsTutor training for one day. Each CCSS Principal selected one teacher with technology and curriculum experience to attend a SkillsTutor training the day before pre-planning. The certified teacher supervising and teaching in one of the computer labs was selected to be trained. The ETSS and the teacher learned how to log in, create classes, make activity assignments, generate reports, and use the program one hour each week per student. The ETSS scheduled training during teacher planning time in the first month of school and taught the certified teachers in the school how to log in, create classes, assign activities, and generate reports. The computer lab teacher volunteered to instruct all students on log in procedures and use of the program. The principal asked teachers to find one hour a week for each student to use the SkillsTutor program in the independently used lab or on classroom computers. The school with greatest amount of time using the SkillsTutor program would be recognized at the system wide principal's meeting each month.

During the second month of school, the ETSS printed labels and made log in information cards for every student in the school. The ETSS created classes, assigned all activities on each student's present grade level, and placed a link to the SkillsTutor website on the school webpage. The computer lab teacher taught all students in grades K-5 how to access and use the SkillsTutor website. Each student received a parent letter explaining the advantages of the SkillsTutor program along with log in information and directions.

During the third month of school, the computer lab teacher gave each homeroom teacher a label to place in each student's school/home communication log. The label gave specific instructions for accessing the SkillsTutor program from home. In January 2007, students were

selected based on certain skill weaknesses to attend morning and afternoon SkillsTutor sessions. The students were asked to participate in the program one day a week until the CRCT in April.

At the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, the same training and notification procedures took place for teachers by the ETSS and for students by the computer lab teacher. Schools continued to be recognized at monthly principal meetings for the most use of the SkillsTutor program. In addition, posters and written directions were displayed in the independent computer lab assisting teachers and students in accessing the SkillsTutor program.

#### Analysis

The implementation of the SkillsTutor program has not been successful in Atkinson Elementary School. The Achievement Technologies representative and principal recommended using SkillsTutor one hour per week. During the first full year of implementation, 2007-2008, Atkinson students only used SkillsTutor an average of 6.5 minutes per week meaning most students were not using the program the minimum one hour expected. The absence of SkillsTutor use can be contributed to the lack of several factors according to Ely's Conditions of Change model.

Ely states the first condition of change must be "dissatisfaction with the status quo" (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 60). The SkillsTutor program was implemented due to mandated requirements made by the NCLB Act. During implementation, teachers were learning and implementing the new Georgia Performance Standards and a new method of teacher evaluation. The need for SkillsTutor was not recognized as an improvement over the "status quo" (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 60) by teachers when they thought the new Georgia Performance Standards would address any previous curriculum concerns.

Another factor in the lack of implementation of SkillsTutor is based on Ely's second condition of change, "the people who will ultimately implement any innovation must possess sufficient knowledge and skills to do the job" (Ellsworth, 2000, pp. 60-61) and fourth condition of change, "implementers must have time to learn, adapt, integrate, and reflect on what they are doing" (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 61). Even though teachers received training, it was held during the first month of school. Elementary school teachers have an excessive number of tasks in preparing their classrooms, lesson plans, and materials for the first month of school. In addition, grade level meetings, distribution of supplies, scheduling with support teachers, and many more meetings are held. Atkinson teachers were preparing for back to school conferences within the first month of school and a Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) review during the school year. Due to the multitude of responsibilities at the beginning of the school year, teachers didn't have time to practice or reflect on the knowledge they possessed.

Several of Ely's conditions appear to be interdependent. If the eighth condition of proper leadership does not exist then conditions five, six, and seven would not seem to be present. Ely's fifth condition, "rewards or incentives [must] exist for participants" (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 61), was not present when teachers and students were not recognized when the program was used regularly. Student achievement represents the finest reward for teachers, parents, and students. In this case, students were not given the opportunity to achieve when teachers did not use the program because teachers were not "buying in" (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 65) to the program's advantages. Due to lack of computer and internet access, many students did not have the opportunity to utilize the program outside the school building. According to Ely's seventh condition, "an unqualified go-ahead and vocal support for the innovation by key players and

other stakeholders is necessary” (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 61). The interest level and need for the SkillsTutor program should have been assessed by a stakeholder committee before adoption of the program. The formation of a stakeholder committee could have provided more vocal support. At the time of implementation, the principal was a pioneering leader who had innovations other than SkillsTutor high on his priority list. Therefore Ely’s sixth condition was not present when SkillsTutor use was not greatly “expected and encouraged” (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 61) by the principal. Even though schools were recognized for SkillsTutor use, the Atkinson principal’s own priorities trumped the CCSS priorities leading back to leadership as a vital condition.

#### Discussion

If a change model had been used to implement the SkillsTutor program, Atkinson Elementary would have probably used the program more. A committee of stakeholders, including the primary leadership of the school, could have been an integral part in planning, promoting, and implementing the continuing advantages of the SkillsTutor program. Ely’s third condition was present in this school, “the things that are needed to make the innovation work should be easily accessible” (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 61), but the extreme absence of the other seven conditions overshadowed the overwhelming availability of resources.

### References

- Ellsworth, J. B. (2000). *Surviving change: A survey of educational change models*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology, IR-109. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 443 417).
- United States Department of Education (2004, July), *Overview Four Pillars of NCLB*. Retrieved February 15, 2009, from <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/4pillars.html>