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Please and Thank You: Using Technology to Teach Literacy and Manners

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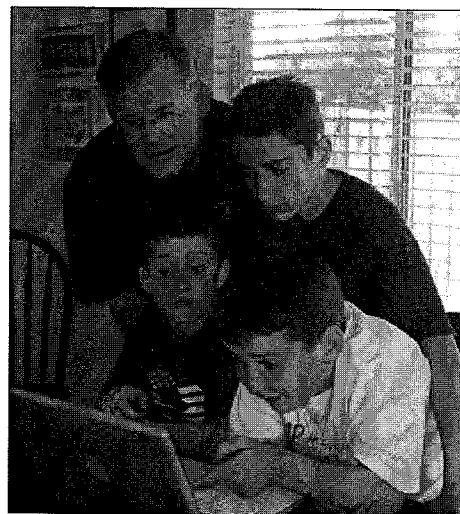
As a mother of three boys, I have had to find creative and meaningful ways to encourage our children to write thank you letters for gifts they receive. A variety of user-friendly programs for creating letters, cards and banners are available for computer users. Such programs enable "technology-impaired" people like myself, to easily produce creative notes, letters, and even videos. Since my sons are extremely active, tapping into technology that quickly lets us create is critical. Therefore all of my suggestions in this article are those that enable us to quickly and easily use technology to send thank you letters and such to family and friends.

When I began teaching my children how to write thank-you letters, I did a great deal of the typing and had them fold and stuff the envelopes. Now that they are older, they can do more of the typing themselves and create longer documents. Our ongoing attempts to utilize the computer

to increase literacy are becoming evident as the boys increase their typing skills and build their literacy schema.

One of the first computer literacy thank-you letters we did was based on visuals. When the boys were younger, we always took individual pictures of the children at our son's birthday party, or we took a picture of our son and his friend together. After the party, we had our son help us upload the pictures to the computer and print each one. We then had the kids help us type on labels: "Dear Friend, Thank you for coming to my party!" with the "I love you" symbol and name. On the back of each picture we attached one of the labels and had our son write his name. No matter how legible the signature was, we accepted and praised him for his writing. In addition, we printed out another copy of the pictures as a keepsake, and had our son try to write his friend's name on the back.

One of the quickest and simplest thank-you cards to create has been "Awards of Appreciation." Microsoft has a program that allows users to



create such a project. After picking the most appropriate certificate or award template, our son typed the name of the individual child, friend, or family member who had sent him the gift, or if it was a couple, like his grandparents, he would address it to Grandma and Grandpa. We printed a document for each person, and our son then signed his name at the bottom. We always printed each document in higher quality color ink, and

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How to Create an iMovie Project (Mac)

Getting Started:

1. Open the iMovie program in your Applications folder ('08 version)
2. Choose File>New Project
3. Name your new project

Importing Video:

4. Click the import button to open the Import Window
5. Click Capture
6. From the "Save To" pop up menu, choose a disk where you want to store the recorded video and choose how you want to organize your recorded videos into the Event Library by selecting "Add to Existing Event" or "Create New Event."
7. When you're ready to begin recording, click OK. iMovie begins to record immediately.
8. To stop recording, click "Stop" anytime, or if you are done recording, click "Done."

It is important to keep your video between one and two minutes in length, so the file will be small enough to e-mail.

Creating Your Video:

9. Select your video clip from the "Source Video" window.
 10. Click the "Add To Project" button to move your video clip to the "Build Your Project" window.
- To preview your video clip, push the play button.

Sending Your Movie:

11. Choose Share> Export using Quick Time.
12. Select where you want to save your video to.
13. Open your preferred e-mail browser and attach the video clip as well as pasting it directly in the e-mail body.
14. Address the e-mail to the desired recipient and send.

Technology can be used to teach literacy and manners

Continued from page 13

depending on the season, we changed out the color of the paper. For example, red or green paper was used when sending out Christmas thank-you letters. Several parents later told us that their children felt extremely special upon receiving their "awards" and thanked us for sending such a clever note! This positive feedback reinforced further letter writing with our son.

Another technological technique that worked well in developing literacy for our older son was the use of a web cam. We recorded him signing in American Sign Language (ASL) a generic thank-you message using the iMovie application on my Mac. Eventually we could send the message to all of our family and friends at the same time. This technique was easily modified to create individual videos for each person. We then compressed the file size for manageable messages (on page 13 is a step-by-step guide to how to do this). I asked our son to review his signing and transpose it into written English, and of course, we were there to help him if he needed scaffolding in regards to his writing. He successfully translated the video from ASL to written English, which not only encouraged his signing and literacy, but also enabled all of our family and friends, signing and non-signing alike, to enjoy both of his skills. We then e-mailed the file as an attachment as well as pasting it directly in the e-mail body to ensure that each recipient could open or download the movie.

This particular technique was extremely successful in communicating with our family who lived far away because they were able to see our son. This allowed our family to feel more connected and they could reply back via e-mail. This process of exchanging e-mails between family

members became a wonderful tool as our son was encouraged to not only write the thank you note, but also to read the responses.

I have a doctorate with a tri-disciplinarian focus of literacy, bilingual-bicultural education and Deaf education. When I step back and analyze the ramifications of marrying literacy and technology, I cannot help but think of all the rich literacy-building skills that are interwoven into the fabric of the examples above.

What parents may or may not know is that we are empowering our children with reading and writing skills by doing simple fun exercises while "playing" on the computer. As a mother, I am wary of allowing my children on a computer given the many dangers of the Internet, but a project like this allows them to safely access the computer and have fun. Children are also developing the computer dexterity they will need as adults in this rapidly growing age of technology, while simultaneously learning "old fashioned" manners! Ultimately, however, by combining learning, literacy, and technology, in an entertaining mode, our children are able to build the skills they need in becoming literate.

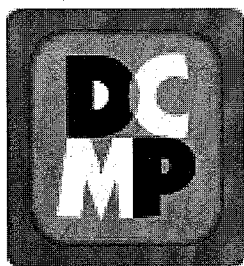


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