

IN THE CLASSROOM: Program shows the write stuff

Roosevelt Middle School students are motivated to practice skills with the My Access Web program.

By Ani Amirkhanian

Ever since laptop computers were introduced to Javier Guzman's eighth-grade English class at Roosevelt Middle School, students have been more motivated to practice their writing skills, Guzman said.

Students practice their writing with the use of a Web-based program called My Access that provides them with guidelines and suggestions for writing.

"The technology is meant to enhance the education that teachers provide," Guzman, 36, said. "They prefer to start writing on computers than using pen and paper. They get more focused."

My Access is designed to score essays on a scale of 1 to 6. Students are scored in areas such as content, development and analysis. Once an essay is scored, an explanation of the score is given to help students determine where they need to improve in their writing.

On Monday, students wrote essays on themes in literature. After reading "The Third Wish" and "The Monkey's Paw," students chose a theme to write an essay on.

Karina Ortega, 14, wrote her essay on "The Third Wish" and after finishing her first draft, she returned to work on her thesis statement.

Karina wanted to compare the themes in the story and relate them to the characters, she said.

Using My Access, she clicked on the menu option that read "My Editor" and checked her spelling and grammar.

"It corrects you and shows you stuff that you missed," she said. "And it shows you how to write a better thesis."

One of the goals of the writing exercise is to teach students that writing has a beginning, middle and end, Guzman, who has been teaching for 14 years, said, adding that the key is that students understand that there is a structure to writing.

"The older they get, the better they get at masking the formula," he said. "What masks the formula is their own voice as writers."

For 13-year-old Adrian Orozco, writing an essay with the help of an online tool kit such as My Access gives him the opportunity to improve on his organizational skills.

When he completes a paragraph, Adrian reads the guidelines on organization and uses the thesaurus to avoid repeating the same words.

"Using the thesaurus helps me understand words that are not clear," he said.

But before using the computer to write, students discuss the story's themes, plot and other elements with Guzman. They construct their thesis statement and then begin writing on the laptops.

The program comes with pre-writing and pre-organizing tools that guides students throughout the essay writing process, Guzman said.

"It encourages them to be more critical about their own writing," he said.