

EVALUATION OF CUSTOM TYPING AND KEYBOARD SUCCESS

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Evaluation Of Custom Typing And Keyboard Success

In Park County School District #6, teaching keyboarding to elementary school students is a district-mandated requirement. The technology director located a product that was web-based, inexpensive and was Mac compatible. The product, Custom Typing, was purchased and Park County School District # 6 (Park Co. S.D.#6) has been using this product for four years.

Budgetary constraints are hindering the purchasing of any new products for the district. However, the district does have access to typing manuals, specifically, Keyboard Success, approved by International Society of Technology Educators (ISTE). In this evaluation, I have to evaluated student progress in Custom Typing, the current keyboarding program, and the alternate keyboarding program, Keyboard Success for Elementary Keyboarding (manuals.) Park Co. S.D. #6 currently has keyboarding manuals in every elementary school. Pairing up a keyboarding manual and a word-processing program, which is available in every school might be a practical solution.

This evaluation illustrates the student's progress in both programs. The evaluation also determines which method improved student keyboarding skills; computerized or manuals. And finally, the evaluation establishes which program the students prefer. This evaluation will provide data for Park Co. S.D. #6 that will result in the most suitable keyboarding program for all elementary students.

Program Description

Custom Typing is a computerized web-based keyboarding program. Custom Typing is for adults and children. Custom Typing is the adopted district wide keyboarding program. Custom Typing allows the administrator (Media Specialists) to decide whether the student will practice teacher uploaded lessons,

Custom Typing

Custom Typing, a product by Custom Solution© is a web-based computerized keyboarding program. Custom Typing is a strictly typing, no frills program. It takes students from home row lessons to ten-key lessons. It does not provide students with any document formatting type lessons. The program does provide one keyboarding game for the students; keyboarding soccer, which the students enjoy. Custom Typing is accessible from any computer that has an Internet connection, which allows students to practice their keyboarding at home. Custom Typing costs the Park Co. S.D. #6 \$1200.00 for the entire district's use for one contractual year.

Keyboard Success

Keyboard Success published by ISTE is a keyboarding manual designed for elementary students. The manuals provide students with many lessons from basic home row to beginning letter writing. In this evaluation, the students completed their lessons using Zoho Writer, a web-based free word-processing program. Any word-processing program would suffice. I chose Zoho Writer because the students had existing Zoho accounts, which allows them to practice their keyboarding at home. This allows both test groups to have the same opportunities for keyboarding practice. The manuals cost \$6.00 per manual. A teacher's package, which includes a teacher's lesson manual, two keyboarding posters, and six student manuals, cost \$36.00. An average elementary keyboarding class has approximately twenty students. The district would need to provide one teacher package and the additional student manuals needed per elementary building. The estimated cost would be \$120.00 per elementary school.

The objectives of each program are to teach students how to become proficient typists, beginning with the home row keys and finishing with more advanced skills.

Evaluation Method

The evaluation activities were: a speed/accuracy typing pre-test and post-test. The students completed the pre and post tests three times. Their scores were averaged and the mean score was included in the data. Students were also surveyed. The survey included questions about their likes and dislikes of each evaluated program and questions that addressed their gained proficiencies while using each evaluated program. The total evaluation was completed in eight forty-five minute class sessions.

The objectives are (1) to determine which program; computerized or manuals, allow student the biggest gains in their keyboarding speed and accuracy, (2) to determine which keyboarding program students prefer, which translates into student's wanting to improve their keyboarding skills through daily practice.

The evaluation control groups are 5th grade students ranging from age ten to age eleven. Each group is part of a different fifth grade classroom. The students are diverse in their learning abilities and disabilities. The control groups were chosen due to their similarities in student population meaning, each group is equally represented with students on Independent Learning Programs (IEP's), English as a Second Language (ESL), At-Risk and Gifted Learners. There are approximately twenty students in each class.

The evaluation took place over five class periods, which took three weeks to complete. Students did know that they were evaluating a keyboarding program.

To evaluate both keyboarding programs, students were pre-tested each control group and post-tested each control group. The pre and posttests consisted of three typing speed tests. The pre and post-tests were an web-based 2nd party program with no affiliation to either keyboarding programs being evaluated. The pretests were conducted at the beginning of the evaluation. The students were only tested on the home row keys. As with most typing speed tests, the final words per minute are calculated by

taking the words per minute minus the errors made. The adjusted words per minute are the scores included in this evaluation's data. I averaged the adjusted w.p.m. scores for each student. The mean control group score is the final data, (see Table 1.) The percentage of gain was then calculated for each control group.

Students were also required to complete a survey about their keyboarding program. The survey asked if the students felt that their designated program helped them become a better typist, and other questions specific to their efforts during this evaluation, (see Table 2). I found the data from the student's survey extremely valuable.

The entire evaluation process consisted of five class periods of keyboarding practice using Custom Typing a computerized, web-based keyboarding program or Keyboard Success a keyboarding manual designed for elementary typists and Zoho Writer word-processing program to record their lessons. I pre-tested the students at the beginning of the evaluation for one class period and post-tested for one class period. The student survey took approximately twenty minutes per student. Some students needed help with reading the survey, which added extra time and required extra help in the computer lab.

Results

Assessment Performance

Each control group performed three typing speed tests, a pre- test and a post-test. Group one had nineteen students and group two had twenty students.

The pretest performed was a typing speed test on the home row keys. The students completed the same test three times. Their scores were then averaged. The average pretest score for group one was 10.1 words per minute. The average pretest score for group two was 10.5 words per minute.

The post-test performed was the same typing speed test used for the pretest scores. The students in each group took the posttest three times with an average score in group one of 12.1 words per minute and an average score for group two of 11.2 words per minute. The percentage of improvement from

pretest to posttest scores for group one was 1.2% and the percentage of improvement from pretest to posttest scores for group two was 1.07%.

The comparative data showed group one had higher total overall growth using the Custom Typing computerized program. Group one increased their typing speeds by 1.08%.

(See Table 1)

Table 1

Class 1

Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores by Objective

	Pre-Test Objective				Post-Test Objective			
	1	2	3	Totals	1	2	3	Totals
Mean	8.8	9.3	10	9.4	12	11.6	12.8	12.1

Class 2

	Pre-Test Objective				Post-Test Objective			
	1	2	3	Totals	1	2	3	Totals
Mean	10	10.1	10.6	10.2	11	11.1	11.4	11.2

Student Survey Responses

Students in both control groups were asked to participate in a survey conducted using Survey Monkey, a web-based survey tool. For most of these students this was their first opportunity to use such a tool. The questions addressed each keyboarding program and the student's practice habits.

The survey regarding Custom Typing showed that students believed that the program helped them become better typists with an overwhelming 21 out of 21. When asked if they had practiced keyboarding at home 17 out of 21 students did not practice keyboarding at home, five students did practice keyboarding at home. Students were asked what was the most enjoyable part of Custom Typing, 13 out of

22 students surveyed thought the lessons were enjoyable, followed by the teachers uploaded lessons, the ability to be self-paced and finally the graphics.

The survey regarding Keyboard Success showed that 17 out of 21 students felt that Keyboard Success help them become better typists. When asked if they had practiced at home 17 out of 20 students surveyed said they did not practice at home. Three students did practice typing at home. When asked what they liked best about the program two items received equal statistics. 7 out of 21 students enjoyed using Zoho Writer as their word-processor and the students enjoyed practicing their keyboarding, (probably because of Zoho) both questions received the same statistical ratio.

Both control groups were asked if the program they were using was challenging, if the program helped them become better typists, was the program fun and finally would they choose their program over the other program. The questions below show the percentages of students who agreed with the statement. The remaining percentages fell into two other categories; I somewhat agree and I don't agree. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Survey Results for Custom Typing and Keyboard Success

	Class 1		Class 2
Custom Typing is challenging	64%	Keyboard Success is challenging	65%
Custom Typing helped be become a better typist.	100%	Keyboard Success helped me become a better typist.	63%
Custom Typing is fun.	64%	Keyboard Success is fun.	60%
I would choose Custom Typing over Keyboard Success.	64%	I would choose Keyboard Success over Custom Typing.	51%

Teacher Responses

The two participating 5th grade teachers were interviewed and asked their opinions of the educational value of Custom Typing and Keyboard Success. Both classroom teachers believe that their students have become better typists using test programs. They do believe however that their students enjoy Custom Typing over Keyboard Success. Custom Typing has more of a computer game type feel to

it, which appeals to the students.

“ I believe that students will practice keyboarding more if they are enjoying the program and the program is more like a computer game.”-Mrs. Barrus

Both teachers did agree that although the students do enjoy Custom Typing more than Keyboard Success, they believe that Keyboard Success has many advantages.

“Keyboard Success forces students to gain word-processing skills by using a word-processing program.”-Mrs. Sybert

“When using Keyboard Success, students learned how to choose fonts, font size, font color and set up paragraphs. Students also had to track the keyboarding lesson from the manual, which is hard for some students to do, but is a realistic skill needed in writing papers and research.”-Mrs. Smith

When asked to choose a keyboarding program, the teachers would prefer students learn how to type by using manuals so as to gain word-processing skills as well as typing skills.

Program Review

Both keyboarding programs evaluated are grade level appropriate, although neither program ideal for elementary students. In order to gain sufficient grade level skills in keyboarding students need to want to practice their keyboarding. Students also need to have short bursts of daily practice in order to fine tune their existing skills. Each program has its positive and negative aspects.

Discussion

Custom Typing and Keyboard Success are two suitable keyboarding programs for elementary students. The pre and post-test data shows that student typing speeds improved marginally by using Custom Typing. Students also preferred Custom Typing over Keyboard Success.

Custom Typings biggest assets are the computerized nature of the product. Students also like the self-paced lessons and computer graphics, although very simple, better than no graphics at all. Students that excel in keyboarding like that they can go as far with the program as they are willing to go. If students prefer Custom Typing they will be willing to practice typing using the program.

“Students are accustomed to being entertained by vivid graphics, without vivid graphics, students become bored very easily”-Mrs. Barrus

The downside of the program is that some of the lessons are very difficult due to wording in the paragraphs, which are required to pass in order to go to the next level. This is very frustrating for students with lower reading levels.

“Too many of our current 5th grade students do not read at a 5th grade level, Custom Typing lesson's are often written at an adult level of reading, which makes it very difficult for our students to stay focused.”-Mrs. Sybert

The survey data shows that the students believe that Custom Typing improved their keyboarding skills. More than half of the students also believe the program was challenging, fun and would choose Custom Typing over Keyboard Success. However, the survey showed that students believed that Custom Typing was less challenging than Keyboard Success.

Keyboard Success is not entertaining in the least. It is merely copying text into a word-processor. Students did enjoy choosing the font size and color. Most students did have a difficult time tracking text in the manual and typing the text in the word-processing program. The majority of students became bored very quickly. However, the classroom teachers believe that the students are gaining valuable skills using a word-processing program while typing.

The survey data showed that the students did find the program challenging. More than half of the students surveyed also believed the program helped them become better typists and was fun, but only 51% of students believed the program was better than Custom Typing.

So in conclusion, although the data in the survey was very close in most aspects, the typing speed test did show marginal gains in student scores using Custom Typing. Students unanimously preferred Custom Typing over Keyboard Success. My own observations were that students were having a very difficult time tracking text from their manual and typing the text into a word-processor. I also noticed that students were not as engaged using Keyboard Success. My suggestion is to keep using Custom Typing until the district can afford to purchase a more game-like keyboarding program.

Proposed Budget and Actual Costs

(Actual Costs)

Personnel

Professional salaries:

Lisa Smith: 5 days x \$250/day	\$1,250	
(Lisa Smith: 8 days x \$250/day)		\$2,000

ESTIMATED TOTAL PERSONNEL	\$1,250	
(ACTUAL)		\$2,000

Miscellaneous

(Communications, supplies, postage)	\$ 25	
ESTIMATED TOTAL MISC. FEES	\$ 25	
(ACTUAL)		(\$ 30)

ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET	\$1,275	
ACTUAL TOTAL BUDGET	\$2,030	
DIFFERENCE	-\$ 720	