EDTC 6320: Project 3

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Meeting individual student needs at exit level TAKS tutoring

The **No Child Left Behind** Act (NCLB) requires states to administer tests that measure student proficiency with respect to the state's academic standards. In Texas, our standards are measured by the TAKS test, whose objectives are stated as TEKS. Texas teachers are required (although the State is careful not to mention it this way) to teach the TEKS that are then measured by the TAKS assessment. Educators are required to attend training sessions and, in some school districts, show evidence through submitted lesson plans of applying the TEKS. Students are required to pass the exit level TAKS test, given initially at the end of their junior year, in order to graduate from high school. The problem we are addressing lies with preparing the students that have failed initial TAKS tests and are in need of tutoring. Remediation is necessary; some schools offer specific TAKS remediation classes to seniors and others offer after school or Saturday tutoring which is led by teachers. The goal of both of these situations is to prepare students to meet expectations on the TAKS test.

Schools now must also worry about their students meeting a higher standard than in 2005 as the new minimum percentages for passing in 2006 were released by TEA in June 2005. Data has shown a progressively higher number of students passing each year, but there still exists a measurable amount of teens failing one or more tests prohibiting them from meeting state expectations.

Passing standards for TAKS
Comparison of 2005 to 2006

	2005	2006
Reading/ELA	50%	60%
Social Studies	50%	60%
Math	35%	40%
Science	25%	35%

Add links here to TAKS data for 2003-2005
http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/results/swresults/taks/2005/gr11_05.pdf
& jpeg of TAKS requirements

Preparation of lessons for students must be individualized to concentrate on the objectives they are failing. Teachers have to prepare for each student's specific needs whether they are teaching a TAKS remediation class during the school day, taking on after school TAKS tutoring, or preparing for a Saturday tutoring session. This preparation should be based on individual student needs aligned with the objectives on which they did not meet standards during their initial TAKS tests. Even though administrations in school districts distribute TAKS reports so that instructors can see how each student answered each question, performed on each objective, etc., it still represents an enormous amount of time to prepare individual tutoring programs for the students. Some teachers read the reports and then may or may not create a unique tutoring plan for each learner.

Alternative Options:

- Teachers prepare individualized programs of study for students failing the TAKS assessment
- Students prepare for the retaking the TAKS assessment with a teacher prepared plan covering all TAKS objectives despite individual student needs
- Students prepare for the retaking the TAKS assessment by studying from a general TAKS objective workbook
- Students prepare for the retaking the TAKS assessment by using online diagnostic tools to analyze past test performance which then generates individualize tutoring systems

Option one would require assistance from administration, aides, and instructors in order to produce an effective plan based on student-by-student needs representing many hours of work and therefore a high

cost. Option two does not target what a learner actually needs; in actuality, it may reproduce a system that already did not work for these students. Option three would not motivate students to learn. Option four represents a specific plan that would fit the student needs and require little to no guidance from an instructor.

Issues

Our group's interest in this topic is based on observations that teachers do not use the technology that exists for TAKS tutoring which would make them more effective for the students. Technology can help address individual student needs necessary to meet standards on the TAKS assessments. While this is important to all students, regardless of their proficiency, it is especially important that it be applied to those retesting at the exit level. Online systems exist that assess and isolate weaknesses and then formulate tutoring programs for learners.

Many campuses and districts still prepare students for retest in a generic manner, pulling out previous lessons to reteach or by getting out all of the free workbooks that came with their curriculum and handing them out to the remedial students. While this does accomplish some reinforcement of the TEKS and TAKS strategies, it doesn't address the specific needs of each learner. It is true that not every student has access to a computer at home, but there are choices in instructional plans that can accommodate the learners. These range from the aforementioned classes during the instructional day and after school tutoring, to sending students home with a precise instructional packet.

One system has students take an online diagnostic test that then generates *"***immediate** feedback on the TAKS objectives they missed and need additional support and learning materials to review" (Reyes). This system then guides students through online tutorials. Another system has students/teachers enter in the numbers from the Confidential Student Report (or school reports) and a "Personalized Study Guide" is created in a PDF document giving students a customized packet created by software that has analyzed the student's unique needs (McGraw-Hill). Both of these options represent solutions that are free of cost. There are many software packages available for purchase to consumers and schools that replicate the free alternatives described above. All of the options offer assessment at different stages of the tutorials and then adjust the tutorial from that point.

Research

Since the TAKS test and its subsequent tutoring programs are relatively new, there are not many studies completed showing the effectiveness of programs. However, virtual learning in general has been reviewed extensively. These reports show students are motivated learners and enjoy their online experiences. According to Education Week's "Technology Counts 2003" report, there were 16 states with virtual high schools already established, or with plans to establish schools. Students involved in these virtual schools liked the convenience and administrators said virtual courses were the most popular (Parker). Studies also show that in order for our children to "succeed in our technologically intense … futures a new form of educational practice, one that builds on children's native learning abilities and technological competence, must replace our existing methods" (Jefferson County Schools). Children not only like the online programs, but have "native abilities" that make using the programs an inherent aptitude for them. The Jefferson County School study further states that our children have been born to the future and we are educating them in the past if we do not match schools to our children by integrating technology into educational practice.

Link to Deep Water ISD Site

Deep Water online TAKS math activities - http://www.dpisd.org/~dwe/html/fourth_math/math_taks.htm
Deep Water online Math racing http://www.funbrain.com/cgi-bin/osa.cgi?A1=s&A2=2
Deep Water online All subjects http://www.dpisd.org/~dwe/html/links.html
Additionally, the TAKS assessment looks like it will be moving online in a couple of years. Students in Vidor, Texas were one of a handful of campuses that tested the new concept in March, 2004. Students taking the test commented that they "liked it better than the Scantron test forms…and that it made taking the test easier." Another great feature for students was a warning if they skipped a question. Administrators, teachers, and students in Vidor were excited when they received test results the same day

(Dwyer). Klaus Schmidt's research has shown that a "combination of online learning with traditional classroom instruction could diversify teaching and learning alike." Combining the teachers that are hesitant to use technology with online tutoring programs seems to be a match for students in the future, but for failing exit level teens, that future needs to happen now.

Even though the TRACK tutorials were designed for students to use on their own, some innovative teachers have found that integrating the tutorials with their curriculums were useful (Carnevale). It not only supplements what the teachers are already presenting, but gives students an additional resource. Students are benefiting from the program whether their access is through integration in the classroom or as an independent user, because it is "self-paced, and it identifies individual weaknesses" (Carnevale). The Brazos ISD Technology Times specifically speaks to the TAKS TRACK system calling it very flexible and responses from their students, parents and teachers have been positive. TRACK provides a diagnostic test and TEKS objective tutorials for: Algebra and Geometry, Biology and Integrated Physics/Chemistry (IPC), English Language Arts, and Social Studies. It can be used at home, in the classroom or any place with Internet access.

But we still have the problem of the technologically hesitant teacher. Alamo Heights ISD has implemented Macromedia Breeze, which tutors teachers in new presentation methods. A technology team there creates and delivers multimedia training and instructional content to staff and students online. The teachers are trained online and in 45-minute face-to-face tutorials based on specific needs. They then walk out with enough knowledge to develop enhanced PowerPoint Presentations incorporating interactive multimedia content. The instructional technology specialist on campus uploads the information for the instructor and e-mails the method of access to them (Martinez). Once results are available as to the effectiveness of TAKS tutoring software and online tutorials, teachers may be more apt to take advantages of the opportunities presented to them in technology as offered in places like Alamo Heights ISD. Martinez goes on to say that one of the "greatest advantages of Breeze is that it gets the technology out of the way and lets teachers do what they do best: teach."

The existing free tutorial systems not only benefit the students, but most of the systems are coming up with expanded features for the teacher and student. McGraw-Hill has taken their Grow Network and expanded the uses to not only help the learner, but has come up with "train the trainer" materials which UT Telecampus expects to add to their TRACK system soon. UT has added an asynchronous feature with a 24-hour turnaround on questions and feedback to essays submitted online. Students who failed the TAKS writing portion in February were able to retest in April and received their results in May with the other TAKS results. Feedback in 24 hours or less is certainly more motivating and gratifying than waiting a month or more.

Acceptance for online tutoring programs is growing, but teachers are the ones who need to make their students not only aware of its existence, but also its benefits. Many school districts and public libraries, such as Milano ISD, Spring High School, Irving High School and Austin Public Library, to name just a few, have added links to the programs, showing public and administrative support for the programs. Teachers' workloads have increased each year, but this is one area where it can lessen and the students with real graduation needs will not suffer for it, but should profit from and enjoy the experience.

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