

Students in San Diego continuation school find success with Inspiration®

Better writing from sometimes-reluctant learners attributed to Inspiration

Part of the power of visual learning lies in its clarity. "When the material is done well, viewers seem to absorb the meanings almost intuitively," says Hoppy Chandler, a high school teacher in San Diego, California. "Understanding happens with less effort."

A few choice words, symbols, and links smartly arranged into a diagram like those created by Inspiration are "very effective in explaining complex concepts or conveying ideas," he continues. "And the format is so different from the norm that students want to look. They can't help but learn."

In addition to teaching, Chandler serves as Twain's Digital High School coordinator, and has been involved with an ILAST state grant for professional development. He continues to provide technology support and training for his colleagues. Chandler has used Inspiration for more than 10 years and also trained "thousands" of his peers in its use. He's a champion for the visual learning tool. This software lets people build diagrams and outlines with "amazing speed," he notes, and for an endless variety of purposes. His own applications, for example, include planning lessons, making handouts for students, and creating training materials for other educators.

"What I like best about using Inspiration is that as fast as you can type, you're generating

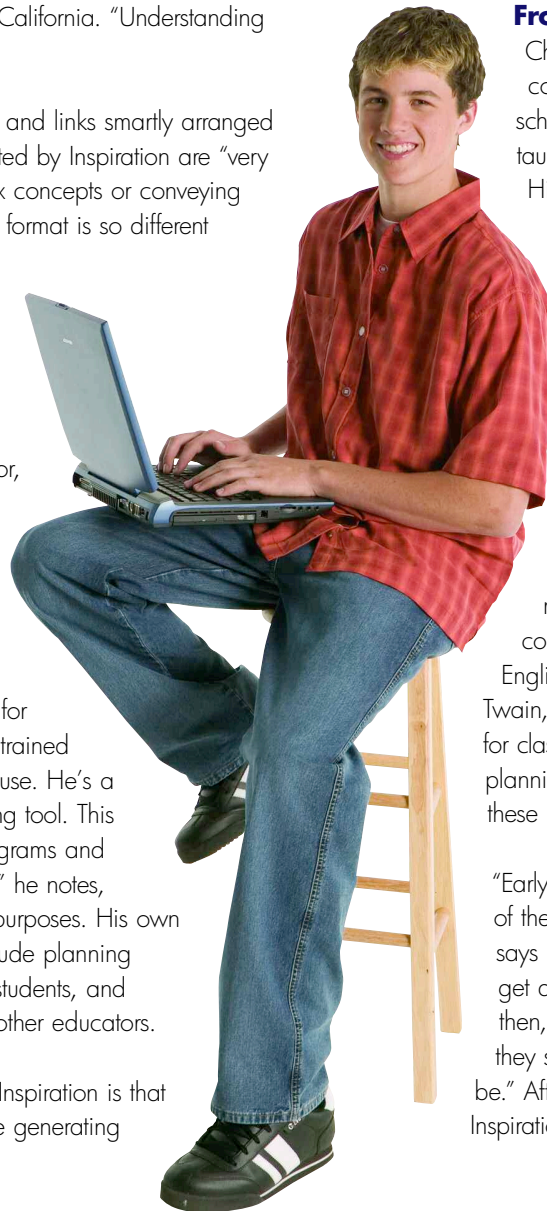
ideas; you're brainstorming. Call it 'mind on task' time; it's invaluable! Then—and this is truly liberating—the program automatically reorganizes it for you as elements get added, deleted, modified, and moved around." explains Chandler.

From balkers to believers

Chandler's enthusiasm for the software is compelling. Two San Diego City Unified schools, Lincoln Senior High, where he taught previously, and Twain Junior/Senior High, his current campus home, have purchased dozens of copies of Inspiration for students and staff to use. "I've even gotten a few administrators intrigued enough to at least fiddle around with it," chuckles the veteran teacher.

Twain is a continuation school, enrolling from 650 to 1,000 students in grades 7-12 drawn from all over San Diego. It has older computers, mostly Macintoshes, and licenses for 65 copies of Inspiration. Chandler teaches English and social studies to grades 9-12 at Twain, and his students use Inspiration routinely for class work—especially for writing and planning projects. In the beginning, however, these reluctant learners are known to resist.

"Early on I have my students do a genealogy of their family with an Inspiration diagram," says Chandler. "They usually balk until they get about halfway through the project, and then, suddenly, it's 'oh, I get it.' That's when they start to see how useful this program can be." After creating their family trees using Inspiration's library of more than 1,250 symbols,



Chandler encourages the teens to bring in family photographs. Once digitized, the photos can replace symbols, making the final project a unique personal history worth saving.

"Another sure-fire way to hook someone's interest is my two-minute drill," says Chandler. "I show how to go from Inspiration to a PowerPoint slide show in just three steps (create, export, open) in less than two minutes! It's pretty slick."

Chandler emphatically singles out Inspiration's positive impact on students' writing. With one click, Inspiration instantly transforms diagrams into outlines. In a traditional hierarchical outline, students quickly organize the flow of information and structure their writing. And since it's simple to move topics around, Chandler believes his students are using some of the time they save to think and to reflect about what, exactly, they want their words to convey.

"They clearly do better writing with Inspiration," he states simply. "It takes two or three assignments for them to realize that—and a lot of motivation on their part to follow through—but now their written work is starting to actually say something. They are bringing their stories to life."

"Instead of wasting precious time with formatting, you (or your students) can spend that time thinking about your ideas."

Inspiration reveals student's talent

One student's experience illustrates how Inspiration projects can open new doors unexpectedly. Twain Junior/Senior High requires its students to pass a senior exit interview, a verbal examination by a panel of teachers in which students must demonstrate some of what they have learned.

As Chandler recalls, this particular student attended the continuation school because she had become a mother at about age 14. For her exit interview, she gave an oral history presentation on the Holocaust. She had started off with an Inspiration outline, he says, though she took it farther by exporting her work to a presentation program. "This student stood up in her exit interview and just wowed all of us," remembers Chandler.

"She knew her material cold, and was polished and poised, a real natural speaker."

By happenstance, the district's Superintendent Technology Advisory Committee, including the superintendent, were on the Twain campus soon after the student's presentation. She was asked to give her presentation again. "She spoke for 45 minutes, entertained questions, and just knocked them out," says Chandler, who was at both sessions. "And it all began with Inspiration."

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