

Usage Profile with 5th-6th Grade Teacher Catherine Hawkins
Summary Observations of Beamz Over 5-Year Period



Catherine Hawkins is a 5th and 6th grade teacher at the Innovations Public Charter School, a K-8 school of 285 students in Kona, HI. She is a pioneer when it comes to using Beamz technology, and was one of the first to witness the evolution of the Beamz' first life-size prototype into its current portable model. Hawkins worked with inventor Jerry Riopelle's wife years ago when she was introduced to the musical device. She immediately got hooked on the idea of using it in her classroom. An educational grant made this dream come true five years ago.

Classroom Use

“When I first acquired the Beamz in my classroom, I was a 1st and 2nd grade teacher. I set up the Beamz in the corner of my classroom and used it as a station for different activities – mostly with counting, skip counting, rhyming, poetry and language arts. We also use it for fun, an incentive, so when my kids are doing well, they can earn the privilege of using the Beamz as a reward.” Mrs. Hawkins never received formal training on the Beamz technology, but rather used her teaching instincts to incorporate it into her regular academic lessons.

“When I moved to 5 and 6 grade a year ago, I continued to use it as a station in the classroom allowing students to use it to rap poetry, make music, and also reward them use of the Beamz if they completed other required work. We also pulled it out for the whole school a few times to use in our play pavilion. Kids could create and use the basic musical backgrounds to make their own songs. This was a big motivator for our students and they continue to ask for it.”

Easy to Use

When asked about the overall ease of use, Mrs. Hawkins was quick to say, “It is very easy for kids to navigate! They totally get it. I'm not technical so it's been great to watch them connect to this innovative technology. It's a great thinking tool.” Mrs. Hawkins continued, “I had a 5 year old who did not need any direction. She knew how to find the songs, how to add beats and other instruments, where to go... She just got it like within 10 minutes. Then that child was able to go on and teach other peers. I'm amazed at how when children immerse themselves in the technology world how advanced they are in their thinking and their ability to navigate.”

Motivation and Engagement

Mrs. Hawkin's class uses technology all the time for research and writing. "We have Tech Tuesday every week. For the younger kids, the Beamz is such a motivator for them to get their other academic work done. For instance, poetry units are hard for little kids. They have a rubric of what they need to include in their work, and they work so hard to achieve it when they know they are going to be able to use the Beamz to recite the poem to background music."

Over the past five years, Mrs. Hawkins has found the greatest impact of the Beamz is its ability to increase engagement, one of the biggest challenges for most teachers. "It's great for engagement, coupling it to use as a carrot. When kids don't know what to do, they work extra hard to try to figure it out if they can earn Beamz time. Beamz has a domino effect of increasing confidence, and always increasing engagement for the next time we have a lesson."

Mrs. Hawkins added, "Kids that are checked out need something extra to engage them. There is always a group of them in every class. Beamz allows you to add multimedia to teach concepts, timing, patterns, and use as a way to enhance what you are already teaching. Kids are drawn to it. It's an amazing tool!"