Computers encourage childrens’ natural curiosity

Five year old Vinny DaCosta knows a lot about computers. “I know how to shut it down. I know how to get into Google. I can send emails. I know how to draw pictures on the computer, and I really like it,” he says.

A little young to be so competent, you might think. But Vinny’s teacher, Mary Lynn Kary, at Centennial School in Wetaskiwin, says that’s just what needs to happen.

“When our kids come in asking if the smart board is an iPad, and they can’t imagine what life was like before apps... well it tells you the world is changing,” says Kary.

“This is the world for them. In the future they aren’t going to live without computers. Our children need to know how to use technology and make it work for them.”

Children in Kary’s class each take turns managing the smart board, asking each other for help when needed. They do art work, math and language arts on computers as well, each time having their work saved to their own folder on Google Drive.

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Cell phones and tablets in class...

How Clear Vista School’s bring-your-own-device policy is helping students

It’s not every day that you witness a bunch of junior high boys chattering excitedly about their school assignment so much, that they’re interrupting each other to add comments about their work.

But that’s exactly what happens if you ask Jesse, Ashton, Jacob, Turner and Jadon, who were grade nine students at Clear Vista last year, about a language arts / social studies project they completed. The young men took on the challenge of designing their own society, imagining what resources they’d need, where to place key services, and how the economy and government would function. This was in advance of a novel study. Sound like something a teenaged boy would enjoy?

Well the boys did like it; so much that they gave up their recesses for two weeks to work on the project.

Key to their enthusiasm was the school’s recent move to allow students to bring their own technology to school. “Bring Your Own Device”, or “BYOD” for short, allowed the group to utilize a popular app they all were familiar with: Minecraft.

“Every day we had time, we added something new to our village,” says Ashton Turkington. “We added to it block by block, every recess and every chance we got.”

“We all enjoy playing video games,” says Turner Brooks.

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Five Clear Vista students pose in front of the Minecraft avatar versions of themselves, in the Minecraft world they created for a school assignment.

What you’ll find inside:

p.3  Why is technology important in today’s classroom?

p.4  Chromebook pilot program shows tremendous promise. Learn how the program impacted students, parents and teachers at 3 different WRPS schools.

p.7  Tips for parents: Turn your child’s love of technology into a way to connect with each other.

p.8  Back to school registration information
How do you teach a child in kindergarten how to use a computer?

“Children pick up the little things we do every day and emulate us,” says Kary. “In our classroom we make a point to say out loud how we get into certain files, get onto the web and search for images in google. So even though it’s not part of the Kindergarten curriculum, they are picking it up and using those skills in the lab.”

“They are engaged and they love it. Children have a natural way of extending their own learning. They explore fueled from their natural curiosity,” she says. “Computers just open the doors for them.”

Excitement about what technology can enable, filters throughout Centennial School from Kary’s kindergarten students right up through the higher grades. Layton Smith, who was in grade three last year, has flourished with new opportunities that come with technology.

“I like that I can use Google Docs at home, and look at how to use it,” says Layton.

Why Clear Vista is allowing cell phones and tablets in class

Schools all over Alberta face the issue of what to do with cell phones, tablets and other personal technological devices that make their way to school in the pockets and backpacks of students.

Until 2014, Clear Vista School’s rule was the same as many others: that the devices needed to be put away during class. However, Kirwan recommended the school take a different approach.

“The devices are here anyway, so let’s see the opportunity,” says Kirwan. “We thought, why don’t we teach the students how to use technology properly, as a tool to enhance learning?”

At the start of BYOD, Clear Vista School invited the RCMP to talk with students about the dangers that come with the online world. The school also outlined expectations and rules that would be followed, as well as potential consequences.

The change hasn’t come without bumps, but according to Kirwan the students have adapted well. “It’s not as big of a deal for them as it was for us,” says Kirwan. “They’re comfortable in the digital world.”

What has been a big deal is how students are responding to learning opportunities with technology in hand. “The students are truly engaged,” he says. “We like that because engaged students leads to success for students.”

The five society-creators who used Minecraft are just one example of engaged learners. Having technology in hand. “The students are truly responding to learning opportunities with technology properly, as a tool to enhance learning?”

Children’s Natural Curiosity

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Continued from p. 1

Cell phones and tablets in class...

“Minecraft is set up so you can create exactly the world you imagine.”

“There are so many options of what you can make,” enthuses Jadon Swanson.

“You don’t need a skill for Minecraft,” explains Jacob Peek. “You just need an idea.”

And their virtual community is evidence the boys have plenty of ideas. From the lava pit for garbage, the windmills for energy, the centrally located hospital and the rain that falls every day, the boys have a pretty good understanding of what a successful community requires.

The boys’ teacher, Chris Kirwan is pretty impressed with the boys’ work, as well as other students’ assignments that utilized technology newly available.

“I thought last year’s assignments were good, but this year’s took the cake,” says Kirwan.

This year, his class was assigned to create model houses as a part of the building unit. Students photographed their completed projects, placed the photos into a Google folder, and were assigned to critique and comment on each other’s work online.

“I thought it was fun and I liked seeing all the comments,” says Layton.

Layton’s teacher, Wanda Fonteyne, agrees with other teachers that a major advantage of technology is the level of engagement among students. For example, “on the first day I showed them how to email me, I got 66 emails by the end of the evening,” says Fonteyne.

Fonteyne sees real promise in technology in helping students become more collaborative. “Like with our building project. Traditionally we’d have students share their project orally while everyone quietly watches. This past year, sharing it online and having students make comments is just a different way of approaching things, but it increases opportunity for collaboration. Plus the students really liked doing it that way.”

Additionally, teachers say computers provide a distinct advantage in being adaptable to various learning levels. It allows teachers to differentiate their teaching to suit students who have already learned the material, as well as to those who are just starting to understand it and those who are struggling.

“It’s differentiation at its finest,” says Kary.
One only needs to look around to know that the way students interact with the world around them has changed. Computers, internet and cell phones, not to mention all the other technology out there is now commonplace.

“Technology isn’t going away,” says Cordalee Fiveland, School Technology Team, Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools. “It’s a part of life, and we need to help students understand it and use it to their advantage.”

“We want students who are excited and engaged in their own learning. Technology is one of many tools we can use to help us achieve that.”

Brian Taje, WRPS Associate Superintendent

It sets out what Alberta needs in its future citizens, and the beginning stages of how to get there.

- Engaged thinkers
- Ethical citizens
- Entrepreneurial spirit

(For more information: inspiring.education.alberta.ca)

In WRPS, technology supports the efforts of educators and aligns with Inspiring Education. Technology in WRPS:

- Supports learning that is focused on the needs of each student
- Is research based. Innovation is encouraged, but changes in our classrooms are based on research about what works.
- Becomes comfortable and understood by teachers through ongoing learning and professional growth.

Why is technology important in today’s classroom?

Alberta’s “Inspiring Education” has school divisions across Alberta, including WRPS, focused on helping students become:

- Engaged thinkers
- Ethical citizens
- with an Entrepreneurial spirit

Our approach with technology aligns with Inspiring Learning.

As you look through this publication, we hope you’ll feel excited about the direction we’re going. As always, if you have questions, please ask us! Your child’s teacher, the principal, or someone at our division office would be happy to speak with you.
Chromebooks get thumbs up from students, parents, teachers

Jacob Morrell had a pretty cool year at school last year. And Jacob’s Mom is pretty impressed too. She says a new pilot program has changed his entire educational experience.

“Jacob has always struggled with spelling and staying on task,” says Shawna Morrell. “But Jacob is really smart in other ways. The problem is he hasn’t always seen that. Because of his struggle with spelling, he really thought he was stupid, even though that wasn’t the truth.”

“Homework was really hard,” says Morrell. “We would try our best to help him through his assignments at home, but they took an extraordinary long time. It was discouraging for everyone.”

Who knew something as minor as a computer could change things so much? In Jacob’s grade five year, his class at École Parkdale School in Wetaskiwin piloted the use of Chromebooks in their classroom. There was enough for each student to have one to use, when the computers were in their classroom. The purpose of the pilot was to learn what was effective about the technology and its impacts with students. The teacher thought the computers would increase the level of engagement, but she didn’t realize how positive it would be for Jacob.

Who knew something as minor as a computer could change things so much? In Jacob’s grade five year, his class at École Parkdale School in Wetaskiwin piloted the use of Chromebooks in their classroom. There was enough for each student to have one to use, when the computers were in their classroom. The purpose of the pilot was to learn what was effective about the technology and its impacts with students. The teacher thought the computers would increase the level of engagement, but she didn’t realize how positive it would be for Jacob.

Chromebooks have made it easier for teachers to provide feedback to the students and for parents to be included in the conversation.

“[Using computers] has boosted his self-confidence. I don’t have to push him as much at home. It’s wonderful. The difference in our home is ten-fold.”

Shawna Morrell, parent

“Now I have access to all of Jacob’s work,” says Morrell. “I can instantly see what he’s done, the teacher’s comments about his work, and how well he is doing, so I know what to help him with.”

Additionally, not only is Morrell able to help her son at home, she has noticed Jacob is more independent.

“It has helped me with spelling,” says Jacob. “Whenever I think I’m wrong, I can easily google it, or if I get stuck, I can email one of my friends to ask for help.”

“Jacob is doing more of his own work,” says Morrell, “and that has boosted his self-confidence. I don’t have to push him as much at home. It’s wonderful. The difference in our home is ten-fold.”

“Jacob’s writing mark has skyrocketed,” agrees Nicole Côté, Jacob’s teacher. “It’s the biggest change I’ve seen this year.”

Côté is also very pleased with the response of the rest of her class to the pilot. “It’s made a big difference in the way I teach,” she says. “I can make the lessons more interactive. I like that I can provide immediate feedback. Also, the students are more independent and they want to do homework.”
Chromebook Pilot shows tremendous promise

CB McMurdo School sees engaged students in Chromebook pilot

A grade three class at CB McMurdo School took on the Google pilot at their school last school year. The students are just as excited as their peers at Ecole Parkdale.

Matthew Bleakney, a grade three student, says “I like our classroom with computers. It’s quite fun for kids. We can do more stuff like create documents.” Matthew says his favorite part is sharing what he’s created with his peers. “Instead of writing it down on paper, I press ‘share’ with whoever I want and press ‘send’. Then boom, they’ve got it! It’s easy.”

Matthew, like most children, also really enjoys playing games on the computer, even if they are math based.

“Pieces of paper are not always fun,” he says. “But this is fun. Not all of the time, but most of the time it’s fun learning.”

Fellow student Kaelyn Hillier says it was hard at the beginning getting used to logging onto the computers. “The first time we went on, there were so many instructions. We had to do the right password and everything. But after a while I got it.

It’s very, very easy now,” she says.

Matthew and Kaelyn’s teacher, Angela Dearing, is as impressed as her pupils after the year-long pilot.

“While I find technology to be beneficial in many ways, when it comes to teaching and learning, the most amazing thing is the increase in student engagement. I did not anticipate them being so eager.”

“In all my years of teaching, I have never seen my students so engaged as when they are using computers,” she says. “My students race to complete their other work if they know they have an online assignment to do for me.”

Dearing believes computers encourage children’s natural curiosity, “especially in science and social studies, where they can go online to do their research.”

For instance, in grade three, students throughout Alberta learn about Tunisia and India. “Being able to go online, my students have gone beyond students from previous years. With a computer they can explore as deeply as their interest takes them.” Dearing says, “That’s what engaged learning looks like; kids excited about learning and being self-motivated.”

Good for students of all abilities

Another advantage with computers is the ability to reach students of all abilities. The advanced students are easy to challenge with so many options available online. Also, the students who struggle have more support.

“The ability to use voice features is incredibly useful for students who are emergent readers,” she says. “Being online makes it easy for non-readers to find videos, pictures and more to complete other assignments like in social studies or science.”

Dearing says one of the problems in the past with computers is having the students save their work to the right location. It often got lost. Now, with the Google Drive, student work never gets lost. “Students can work on their stuff from anywhere. My students are all Google gurus, and have an incredible understanding of Google Drive.”

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Online safety a critical component

All of the work on computers in WRPS classrooms is backed up with appropriate training in online safety from the start.

“We spend a lot of time talking about surfing the internet safely, what to do if you navigate to a page that isn’t appropriate, never communicating online with strangers, and many other aspects of cyber citizenship,” Says Dearing.
Engaged students come to school more... Another positive benefit of Chromebooks

The Chromebook pilot was also received positively in Wetaskiwin Composite High School last year.
“The students love using them,” says Doris Gare, Science teacher, “and I love it too.”

She’s used the technology for a wide range of assignments, such as looking up the parts of a cell. The student used their Chromebooks to connect to the internet and find diagrams of the cells, which they used to help them shape playdough into a 3D model.

In the past students would have gone to the library, “but now they’re in their own environment and their own space. Its more convenient and less time consuming,” says Gare.

Even with students who generally are more challenging to motivate, the computers are engaging. “They’re more excited to learn,” says Gare, “And that’s what we want; we want them interested in science, wanting to know more and research more.”

For instance, Gare had her Science 14 students looking up nutrients in food and exploring the impact good food can have. Instead of turning to a text book, students utilized a professional life insurance website and filled out online questionnaires that estimated each student’s life expectancy.

“They found it humorous and interesting to change the factors,” says Gare, and as a result, they were completely engaged.

Devin Netzlav, a grade 10 student, says “Its way better than doing book work in science. Seeing how long I could live is way more interesting.”

Gare says another big impact of computers this year is student attendance. A number of students who have struggled to be in school have started coming more.

“When it’s interesting, you want to come to school so you know what they’re talking about,” says Devin.

An excellent feature of GAFE is that all work completed is saved automatically “in the cloud” (on Google servers located worldwide) so it can be accessed anywhere students can use internet. No more “I lost my homework”.

Some might ask “is it safe for my child to use Google?” According to one expert, Dr. Christine Sexton, CIO, University of Sheffield, “The scale of Google’s operation is that they can afford to spend much more on security than we can. In fact, they can afford to spend more on security than most governments.”

Here’s the GAFE website description of how they keep student work (data) safe: “Google Apps for Education includes dozens of critical security features specifically designed to keep your data safe, secure and in your control. Your data belongs to you, and Apps tools enable you to control it, including who you share it with and how you share it. http://www.google.com/enterprise/apps/education/benefits.html.

For more detailed information please go to our website www.wrps.ab.ca and visit “Privacy Matters” under the “Technology” tab.

WRPS has training sessions planned before school starts this year, to ensure staff who will be using the new technology are ready to go.
Help! My child loves technology... and I don’t!

Ever find yourself in this situation? When your child loves technology and you don’t, it can make you feel disconnected with your child.

Ever find yourself saying something similar to this?: “All kids do nowadays is text and play games. Darn technology is ruining kids’ ability to communicate and connect with each other!”

This is a common situation and a common feeling for parents who did not grow up with social media, iPads, tablets, gaming devices, internet, cell phones etc.

Parenting is an already challenging journey that seems to be increasingly difficult when it’s complicated by technology. As long as parents keep thinking technology simply complicates things; it will. If you want to be close to your technology-loving child, consider giving these steps a try.

Steps for adapting to technology:

1. Open your mind
   Parents of the Net Generation need to open their minds. Why do our children love tech so much? What does tech do for them? Think about your child specifically. In which techie ways are they spending their time? What are the goals and rules of the game or app? Why do you think your child enjoys it so much?

2. Communicate with your child
   Instead of glancing at Minecraft and dismissing it as annoying or useless, spend some time with your child and see what they are building. With the enormous amounts of time they spend building these worlds, they are proud to show you. In Minecraft, your child is in charge of creating WORLDs, actual worlds, without anyone else telling them what to do, which is a pretty powerful use of imagination!

3. Use technology as a way to connect
   Instead of allowing technology to disconnect you and your child, use it to connect you. Children love when they know more than their parents. It’s ok to swallow your pride and have your child teach you. You can earn a lot of “parent-credits” by trying out some new apps and skills that your child wants to teach you. Time spent with your child is always an investment.

4. Build household rules around technology
   Ideally, rules for tech would be developed in conjunction with your child so they feel they are a part of the solution and it’s not something that is happening to them. Children flourish with established routines. Pick the amount of tech time you can live with as a parent and create a schedule that works with your families’ activities. This may change and fluctuate with the seasons, which is fine. The schedule can be flexible but having a schedule will help ease tension when the topic of tech arises and your child asks “can I go on my device? For example, knowing that Saturday morning until 11 a.m. is their tech time might accomplish a couple of things: they could stop pestering you constantly about playing on their device, knowing when they will get tech time might allow them to relax enough to enjoy other activities, and they might even get up earlier on Saturday morning!

5. Develop your own skills
   Work at being connected – there are many good websites that aim to help parents be the best they can be. [www.media.smarts.org](http://www.media.smarts.org) is an excellent resource for parents (and teachers) to check out. With topics from which movies to watch and which apps teach computer coding skills; there is a ton of information for parents to gain.

Resistance is futile; technology is here to stay. What we can do as parents is learn more about it, help our children manage the time they spend on devices and on which activities. Also, when not on devices, continue searching for and providing alternative, social and interactive things that your child can do. Like throw a baseball, sort their hockey cards, skipping, you know… how we did in the old days!

Submitted by Cordalee Fiveland, WRPS School Technology Team
REGISTRATION information

Alder Flats  August 27 & 29
Buck Mountain August 25 & 26
C.B. McMurdo August 5 & 6
Centennial August 25
Clear Vista August 25
Early Ed. & Family Wellness Center (Preschool program)
Scheduled orientation visits will be arranged.
Contact the school after Aug. 25 to arrange a time. 780-352-0224
Ecole Parkdale August 18
Ecole Queen Elizabeth August 26
Falun August 27 & 29
Griffiths Scott August 26
Gwynne August 26
Lakedell August 26 & 27
Millet August 26
Norwood August 27 & 29
Pigeon Lake August 25 & 26
Pipestone August 29
Wetaskiwin Comp. see right
Winfield August 27 & 29

Wetaskiwin Composite Information:
RLS, ALS and GOALS students will register on September 2nd when they arrive for the first day of school.
New students who need to register at WCHS will be accepted on August 25th by appointment. Please call 780-352-2295.
Students who are already registered, pick up timetables, books, locker assignments and pay fees.
No timetable changes occur on these days.
August 26th  Grade 12
Last names A-L  9:00 – 12:00 noon
Last names M-Z  1:00 – 3:00 pm
August 27th  Grade 11
Last names A-L  9:00 – 12:00 noon
Last names M-Z  1:00 – 3:00 pm
August 28th  Grade 10
Last names A-L  9:00 – 12:00 noon
Last names M-Z  1:00 – 3:00 pm
Off campus students can register for storefront programming on September 2nd at 4802A – 50th Avenue (Eastgate Mall)

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