

Bits and Bytes

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Message from the President

Ryan Layton

When I began to write this message, I had yet to go and cast my ballot for the federal election, but I did so by the end of the day. To properly perform this civic duty, I needed to be well informed. I had to take the time to research the issues and platforms so that I could decide which party or candidate would best represent my own beliefs and values with regard to our country.

We are extremely lucky to have this opportunity in Canada. We are free to view political information, research parties and then vote however we feel is best. Transparency of information is something that we, as Canadians, pride ourselves on, but with such freedom comes the question of how open we should be, in particular with access to information in our schools.

Many school districts are evaluating their levels of Internet filtering. Some districts have opted to have a large amount of filtering for staff and students, which blocks information on a regular basis, while others are filtering very little (only spam, phishing and pornography). A few others have even created a tiered filtering system for teachers and students in different grades. While I am not here to advocate any one policy, I believe that we need to ensure that staff and students are well equipped to handle the media they might be exposed to online while at school or at home.

Media Literacy Week took place November 2–6. From the website (www.medialiteracyweek.ca), we learn that “Media Literacy Week highlights the importance of teaching children and teens digital and media literacy skills to ensure their interactions with media are positive and enriching.” As staff, teachers and administrators, we all need to ensure that we are providing opportunities to talk about media usage and that students are able to safely access online media in our schools.

As I have said before, the best support students can receive to protect them from negative interactions with technology and the media are the relationships we build within the walls of our classrooms and schools. When students feel the connectivity of those associations, they will feel comfortable talking with mentors if they come across something questionable. Please continue to be the responsible consumers and producers of media that our school communities need. ■



**EDUCATIONAL
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COUNCIL**

of the Alberta Teachers' Association

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Edcamp

Parkland School Division

Nicole Lakusta



On Saturday, September 26, about 90 educators attended the Parkland School Division (PSD) Edcamp (#EdCampPSD70), held in Spruce Grove at Greystone Centennial Middle School.

With an introduction from PSD superintendent Tim Monds (@tmondsPSD70) and a keynote address from Holy Spirit Catholic Schools superintendent Chris Smeaton (@cdsmeaton), the morning started off with important insights

into providing the best education possible for all students. Participants were thinking about their own learning and how to include all students by tapping into student-centred, personalized learning opportunities.

Participants spent the rest of the day connecting with each other through sessions titled "Twitter," "Project-Based Learning," "Coding for Littles," "Genius Hour," "Visible Thinking," "Tech Playground," "Maker Spaces," "Social Media to Engage with the World" and "Mindfulness." Lunch involved a fun twist, with three lunch trucks to choose from and 30 minutes of physical literacy with Miranda Niebergall (@mniebergall1).

ETC executive members Danny Maas (@dannymaas) and Nicole Lakusta (@nlakusta) were on hand to share the professional learning that our specialist council continues to offer to teachers in Alberta.

Edmonton

John Korassa



On Saturday, October 3, Edcamp Edmonton took place at Lillian Osborne High School. Educators from all over Edmonton came together to learn, discover, lead and engage with other passionate educators to further their professional practice in a wide array of topics.

Teachers were encouraged to connect with each other using the Twitter hashtag #EdcampYEG. Those who were not already on Twitter were quickly shown how to create an account and were tweeting before any of the sessions even started.

Edcamp is an education-focused gathering meant to initiate dialogue between teachers in order to foster community, curiosity and genuine learning. This type of professional development forum typically starts with educators gathering



their thoughts about what topics they would like to learn more about or lead sessions on. From there, the day's schedule is built and shared with participants, who can go to any session that interests them. Participants can drop in on one session, and if it is interesting, they can stay. If they would rather leave and try another session, they are welcome to do that as well.

Over the course of the day, Edcamp Edmonton participants attended up to four sessions from a varied list of topics. Some of this year's topics were the gamification of learning, Google Docs, makerspaces, second languages and French immersion, assessment and differentiation with technology, blogging, and digital citizenship.



What really stood out to me about Edcamp Edmonton was how willing everyone was to share their talents, as well as resources (using Google Docs). Participants also used Google Docs as a place to make notes, which meant that they could share their notes with each other. Google Docs also allowed participants to share their e-mail addresses, Twitter handles and topics of interest with each other, so that professional connections could continue after Edcamp.

ETC executive member John Korassa (@johnkorassa) was on hand to share the professional learning that the ETC offers to teachers in Alberta. ■

Does the Paperless Classroom Exist?

John Korassa

Ever since I can remember, that mythical classroom that has gone paperless has been often discussed but never seen. However, this might be changing! The introduction of Office 365 and, more particularly, OneNote Class Notebook allows sharing and collaboration between students and teachers in a safe and secure online environment.

Class Notebook even allows students to share their work with the teacher only, while remaining in the same notebook and without changing any settings. By default, each notebook has three distinct areas where users can work. In the collaboration space, teachers and students can work on and edit content together. In the content library, teachers can publish classroom materials, and only the teacher can edit anything that is uploaded. Students can only view the material in the content library, but they can copy material from the library and place it in their own private area for viewing. This private area is called the student notebook, and here students can take notes, work on projects, complete homework and include anything else they would like to work on, knowing that it will be viewable only by their

teacher. This brings us to a feature of Class Notebook that I absolutely love.

Imagine that a teacher gives the class a homework assignment and wants to check who has done the work, as well as leave some formative assessment for students. By creating a class notebook, the teacher has automatically created a roster of students and can access the roster to view students' work. The best part about the roster is that students' names appear in bold only after work has been done in a particular area. For example, the teacher can set up a homework area or a project area and will be able to see immediately who has worked on the homework, without having to check each section manually.

This brings us to another feature of Class Notebook—the ability to leave feedback right in students' documents. I will discuss that feature in the next issue of *Bits and Bytes*, so stay tuned!

So, have teachers finally found the paperless classroom, that mythical creature that has been discussed for years? Probably not! But have we found a clue pointing us in the right direction? Maybe! ■

Call for Articles

*B*its and Bytes would love to publish various articles by Educational Technology Council (ETC) members. If you attended a wonderful technology conference, would like to review a product (such as software, a Web 2.0 tool or a tablet) or have an article to recommend, contact John Korassa (john.korassa@ecsd.net) or Gail Reid (g Reid@esl-almadina.com). ■

Technology Tools for French-Language Learners

Chelsea O'Leary

With the abundance of Web 2.0 tools available for use in education, it can be difficult to determine which tools would best support French-language learners. Often, students learning a second language, especially in the first few years, require assistance with both reading and writing. Three tools to support those learners are highlighted here: Read&Write, iTranslate and online French–English dictionaries, and iOS/Android apps.

Read&Write

Read&Write (available through a Google Chrome extension or CD software) assists students with reading French text online. All students need to do is highlight some text and press play, and the program will read it for them. Students can have the program reread the text as many times as they like.

This tool is especially helpful when students are trying to read more complex texts, such as biographies on Wikipedia, or researching scientific terms. It can also be helpful for students who have not yet developed reading strategies or vocabulary in French. Not only are students supported with reading in French but they can also practise listening to spoken French, which is an important experience for second language learners.

Schools that do not have access to this tool can consult the website: www.texthelp.com/North-America/Our-products/Readwrite.

iTranslate and Online French–English Dictionaries

Writing or speaking in a second language can be difficult if students do not have the vocabulary needed for the topic being discussed. The iTranslate app (<http://itranslateapp.com>) or an online French–English dictionary can be useful when used correctly. These tools should be used to translate one word at a time, not a whole sentence. Translating a whole sentence can result in the meaning being changed or, at least, becoming a little confusing. (For an example, check out the video *Fresh Prince: Google Translated* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMkJuDVJdTw.)

An advantage to using an online dictionary is that you can also look in the French dictionary and find out what type of noun (masculine or feminine) a word is, which is helpful for choosing the correct article. I often use this tool to verify the articles in my written French. A recommended online dictionary is Reverso (<http://dictionary.reverso.net/french-english/>). You can type in the word and then select from various options (such as finding the word's definition, synonyms or English translation) without having to type the word again. An alternative online dictionary is the well-known Larousse (www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais).

It is important to have students think in French when writing or speaking, instead of translating in their minds. Translating material is difficult, even for skilled writers. That is why authors hire

translators to convert their books into another language and why the House of Commons hires interpreters to translate the speeches of members of parliament as they are being delivered.

iOS and Android Apps

Several great apps that can be used to support French-language learners are on the market for both Apple and Android technology.

When choosing an app, it is important to plan how the app will be used to enhance learning. The apps shown here were selected for elementary students, and they can be used in multidisciplinary and creative ways. Students use these apps to demonstrate learning and understanding, rather than merely practising or reviewing facts. The apps give them more options for representing their learning, as not all students prefer to demonstrate their understanding through written text.

These apps can also be used at the secondary level in either French or English instruction.

If any of these apps are new to you, I recommend trying them out to see how they can be used in your classroom. ☺

Chelsea O'Leary (@Chelsea_OLeary) is a teacher with the Calgary Board of Education.

Recommended K-6 Mobile Apps

Audioboom	Book Creator	Comic Life	Doodle Buddy
Explain Everything	Google Drive	Google Earth	Green Screen by Do Ink
iMovie	i-nigma	Kahoot!	Kidblog
Paper (by 53)	Pic Collage	Popplet	PS Express
PuppetPals HD	Seesaw	Skitch by Evernote	Sock Puppets
Stop-Motion	Tellagami	Toontastic	Word Clouds

Coding and Literacy in Career and Technology Foundations

John Nedd

Career and technology foundations (CTF) is a new program of studies under development by Alberta Education. Alberta school jurisdictions had the option of implementing CTF for the 2015/16 school year. The CTF program of studies has no grade levels, and its outcomes apply from Grades 5 through 9. CTF allows students to explore their interests and passions and to make personal connections to career possibilities and technologies in a variety of occupational areas through meaningful and engaging real-world challenges. CTF is flexible and adaptable, and it supports interdisciplinary learning opportunities and the development of cross-curricular competencies. As students design, create, appraise and articulate their responses to CTF challenges, they are also developing literacy skills.

One way CTF can be used to develop literacy skills is through the computing science (CSE) occupational area. When designing a solution to a CSE challenge, students are often working in a programming environment, where grammar and storytelling—key elements of literacy—are important. If students don't have an overall idea of what the program is going to do (its story), and if they don't use the correct grammar, their program won't work.

Microsoft's Kodu, for example, is an excellent programming environment that reinforces the grammar and storytelling elements of literacy. Students can create an interactive game by programming the actions and responses of individual characters. They can also program the game environment that the characters interact in and with.

In Kodu, all code statements follow a simple grammar. They start with a When condition and are followed by a Do condition. The choice of

tiles available at any point is determined by what tiles have been used previously. This is the grammar of the Kodu language. Here is an example:

(Line 1) When: see none apples Do: move turn quickly.

(Line 2) When: see apple red Do: move toward.

(Line 3) When: bump, apple red Do: eat.

With Kodu, storytelling is an integral part of the overall design of the program. After students have developed some basic skills in programming characters, creating landscapes, and programming how characters move and behave, the next step involves moving out of the programming environment and writing a story. The story they write becomes the basis for the Kodu game that they create.

The elements that go into making a great Kodu game are the same elements that make a great story. To create a game, you need a protagonist, an antagonist, and side or peripheral characters that help or hinder the protagonist. A great game has a setting, a mood and, above all, a plot.

As a CSE challenge, a driving question could be "How can a gaming program language be used to represent a concept from another subject area or discipline?" Working in small groups, students could brainstorm concepts from math, English language arts, social studies, art or physical education to base their game on. Then, they could learn some basic programming skills and develop the story they want to tell. Finally, they could translate their story into the Kodu programming language to create their game. All the while, whether they realized it or not, they would be honing their literacy skills. ■

John Nedd is a teacher with Edmonton Catholic Schools.