

Teachers tell of technological adventures in classroom

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Staff member remembers pre-Internet.

Roxanne Whiting knows the world without the Internet.

The Gothenburg High School English teacher also remembers when the Internet, still in its infancy, was not allowed for research when she was in college.

Whiting said it's difficult for students to comprehend life without the Internet which she shows in some of her classes.

"I teach them how to do research the old way in the library and it's hard for them to fathom," she explained. "They want it instantaneously."

When Whiting was hired to teach English at GHS two years ago, she used what she describes as "now archaic" methods to prepare for classes.

"I sat down with my books and notes," Whiting said.

Since then, she's learned how to create multimedia presentations using the Internet.

"That has made my teaching so much easier," she said. "I can pull up presentations someone else has done on a subject and tweak them to fit me."

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“The amount of information available has really made it easy.”

Creating multimedia presentations are also required for all of her classes.

For example, senior English students recently used Google Docs to develop multimedia presentations about an aspect of the civil rights movement.

Google Docs allow for the creation and editing of documents online while collaborating simultaneously with other users.

“Everyone has access to the material and there are more opportunities for students to share with each other,” Whiting explained. “Changes can be made simultaneously on the screen with both students working at the same time.”

Before using the technology, she said student feedback and revisions were gathered by students making them on paper.

Students would also have to retype and redo work when collaborating with others in the class.

Still, Whiting said technology is not perfect.

Slow Internet access or problems with the computers themselves can occur.

Format can also be affected especially with Google Docs as words may appear on the page that cannot be deleted.

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While learning about new technology and applications in the classroom, Whiting said she feels supported by the technology staff and administration.

However she said the administration is not yet open to the use of cell phones in the classroom.

Although challenges exist, Whiting said she attended a recent seminar where teaching the proper use of cell phones was also described as an opportunity.

“If you can teach students the appropriate procedures and uses, it’s a benefit to society as a whole,” she said. “I think cell phone use in the classroom may be the next thing we’ll have to tackle.”

If given a chance to select technology not yet available, Whiting said her dream would be to write a grant and receive money to buy iPod Touches.

Holding the device in their hand, students can use an iPod Touch to search online, create multi-media presentations, flash cards for study guides, listen to educational podcasts and more.

iPod Touches could mean that students wouldn’t have to sign up for time in the school computer labs.

Internet sites like Grammar Girl, that offers short grammar lessons to improve writing skills, could be downloaded to iPods.

“There are tons of things you can do with iPod Touches,” she said.

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Mobi Boards, or interactive mobile boards, are also helpful devices, Whiting said.

They are said to be a tool in which teachers and students can concurrently interact with each other and work on the same digital content.

Although technology is not a replacement for teaching, Whiting said it's extremely important in education.

"That's the world students are living in," she said. "We need to prepare them for more possibilities in the future."

In Dudley Elementary, third-grade teacher Kim Sudbeck showed her students how to use Clickers.

"They love Clickers," she said. "Using them is easier for some kids who struggle with paper and pencil."

In addition to using the remote-control devices to answer questions and receive instant feedback, Sudbeck said her students use the elementary computer lab and create multimedia presentations.

"We also do a lot of things on the Internet," she said.

Sudbeck said the kids love to use technology.

"I feel it's very important if it's used effectively," she explained. "Sometimes the challenge is incorporating all of the new technology into curriculum, learning to use it right and teaching the kids to use it correctly."

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Sudbeck said she didn't know if technology would replace teachers someday but computers could take the place of paper and pencils.

"For some kids, typing is easier than writing on paper," she noted.

Sudbeck considers herself somewhat technologically savvy but said keeping up with technological changes can be challenging.

She added that the technology staff and administrators encourage teachers to learn about as many technological tools as they can.

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