

Crabby introduces you to innovative teachers



Crabby Office Lady

I recently visited seven teachers around Seattle who are working hard to ensure their classrooms are places where learning and technology go hand-(or mouse-) in-hand.

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WARNING This column carries an NKA (No Kids Allowed) rating due to graphic teacher language and strong scenes involving learning techniques. (Frankly kids, it's mid-July. You don't really want to start thinking about back-to-school yet, do you?)

Now that the kids have scurried off to get into who-knows-what kind of summer trouble, let's talk school. If you're a parent (as I am), you're always thinking about the quality of education your child is getting. You remember school yourself: Those endless Faulkner sentences, the cutthroat spelling bees, that distinctive aroma of the school cafeteria that will never leave you....

Well, the times aren't just a changin' — they've changed. I visited three schools here in Washington State, the goal being to get an idea of how some innovative teachers are using Office in the classroom. Then I figured I could pass this information right along to other teachers out there who just might get some ideas from their creative colleagues.

The wee ones

This Mary Kate Olson (with an o, not an e) is neither a twin nor a teen actress who has grown up in front of the camera and has spent her summer in the tabloids. No, the Mary Kate Olson I'm going to tell you about is a beloved kindergarten teacher at Olivia Park Elementary in Mukilteo (muk-ul-TEE-oh), Washington.

Last May, I paid a visit to Mary Kate's rambunctious classroom. Mary Kate believes that when you're working on a project that involves 26 5- and 6-year-olds, "simplicity is the key." In between addressing all the little hands shooting up in the air with requests for help or permission to go to the restroom, Mary Kate demonstrated the class's work-in-progress.

Art folios

Art folios, which are Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations that illustrate some of the things each child has created and accomplished during the school year, are a part of Mary Kate's kindergarten curriculum. Mary Kate helps the kids create their own presentations, and at the end of the year, the students get to take home a copy of their art folio on a CD.

The 4-5 slide presentations are a combination of:

- A videotaped snippet (complete with sound, recorded right from PowerPoint) of each child reading from a book. Now, this is a big deal since most of these kids have just learned to read.
- Quotes from the kids. (Kids do say the darndest things, and it's so fun to embarrass them with this stuff when they're around 13.)
- Photos of the kids doing what they do during their day at school.

On one of the class's computers, Mary Kate showed me one completed presentation from the previous year. Frankly, any crabbiness that had developed when I got lost in my drive over to the school that day quickly vanished.

But wait — the real tear jerker was yet to come: One of the kindergartner's father had been on the U.S.S. Lincoln in the Persian Gulf during the school year, and he hadn't yet received the news that his son had learned to read. The teacher and the child teamed up to create a presentation which they then sent to Dad on his ship. (After that story, I was unable to write anything remotely crabby for more than a week.)

Today's lesson from the kindergartners

Use PowerPoint for videos, sound, and images to create a year-end presentation that will make your students, their parents, and Crabby proud.

The first graders

After waving my tender goodbyes to the kindergartners, I headed down to Jessica Evavold's first grade classroom. While Jessica's students were only a year older than Mary Kate's, they already looked like old pros when it came to creating projects on the computers.

First grade performances

The first graders were in the process of creating their year-end project, which was to research, write, and create a presentation about a specific animal. The students' duties include:

- Working in teams
- Researching an animal using books and the Internet
- Taking notes on paper
- Making drafts of the final project
- Typing up the project from within PowerPoint
- Drawing or painting a picture of the animal, taking a photograph of it, and adding it to the presentation.
- Presenting the finished piece.

Pretty fancy stuff for first graders!

Jessica's class was also working on compiling comments and memories from each kid and putting them into a PowerPoint presentation, complete with photos.

Today's lesson from the first graders

Have the kids team up on these big projects; learning to work together — from doing the initial reasearch to the final presentation of the project — is a skill they'll use their whole lives.

Links from the Olivia Park Elementary educators

- [Olivia Park Elementary School](#) (The school's Web site can't show you individual student projects. You can, however, get an idea of what the various classrooms are up to and how the teachers are using technology to stay connected with students and parents.)

The third and fourth graders

At Alice V. Hedden Elementary School in Edgewood, Washington, book reports are a big deal for Elaine Smith's third graders. They not only have to read and really understand their books, but they also have to have some pretty sophisticated skills when it comes to using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. And Elaine is just the teacher to help them with this: She conducts technology workshops for other teachers.

The book reports

Elaine sets up a book report outline template in Word and asks the kids to start from there. After the template has been filled in with the correct information, the kids export the Word document into PowerPoint.

Elaine says she likes to start in Word so that the students won't be seduced by the bells and whistles that PowerPoint offers, such as animations, transitions, etc. Her goal is to make sure that the content is the focus. (Good thinking, Elaine.)

Some of the skills the students develop working in Word:

- Using menus
- Navigating through the page
- Choosing a printer
- Using the thesaurus/spell checker
- Formatting
- Using and manipulating text boxes
- Exporting to another program

Next up: Ladd Wolfe's fourth graders, also at Hedden, who were taking the plunge into PowerPoint presentations about sea creatures.

Sea creatures

When I went into Ladd's room, all the kids were paired up, diligently working on their reports about sea life. Some were busily searching through books and magazines, while others were working on computers.

Ladd had asked the students to first "storyboard" the presentation; that is, do an initial mock up using the template he created before actually working in PowerPoint. This technique was similar to what Elaine was doing with her kids and their book reports.

The results: Ladd sent me an example of one of the final presentations, called, simply, "Limpets." While you may think you're not in the least bit interested in limpets, I, for one, learned quite a bit. The two boys who wrote this report made fine use of headings, backgrounds, images, animations, and slide transitions to teach me about limpets. The report was so nice, in fact, that I remained glued to my seat with interest, just as a limpet clings to a rock. (If only I could say the same about most of the slides I get to see at business meetings...)

Night of the Notables

The fourth graders were also preparing for a special evening called "Night of the Notables." Each student was creating a PowerPoint biography report, which he or she would then present to an audience.

The example Ladd sent me was on Amelia Earhart, and the young lady who created this report made good use of backgrounds, clip art, slide transitions, animation, and even sound. (Did you know that Amelia came in third at the First All Women's Air Derby? Louise Thadden was the big winner that day.)

Today's lesson from the third and fourth graders

Get your students excited about doing reports by introducing them to some of the fun stuff that Office programs offer. But make sure they're learning the core Office skills—good writing, typing, page layout, use of menus, and other basics—before they start messing around with the fancy-schmancy stuff. Beauty is, after all, only skin deep. Same goes for book reports and, apparently, limpets.

Links from the Alice V. Hedden Elementary educators

- [Miss Smith's Third Grade Class](#)
- [Mr. Wolfe's Fourth Grade Class](#)
- [Alice V. Hedden Elementary School](#)

The high schoolers

After my tender moments with the elementary school kids, I wasn't so sure I was prepared to take on the teenagers of Mount Si High School in Snoqualmie, Washington. Situated in the shadow of gorgeous Mount Si, the high school was made famous by the T.V. show "Twin Peaks" — it was the stand-in for the old stomping grounds of Laura Palmer, the dead girl.

But I digress.

This school knows what's what when it comes to using technology. I met with three teachers at Mount Si, each using Office products in a variety of ways.

What do digital media, American lit, and AP calc have in common?

Maggie Lucking holds class discussions about Hawthorne, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald. Joe Dockery teaches video production, digital imaging, animation foundations, and animation production. Gayle Smith has a class full of math whizzes. What tool could these teachers possibly have in common? Why, Office, of course!

The teachers' lounge

When I arrived at the school, Maggie, American Lit teacher for juniors and seniors, whisked me into the sacrosanct teachers' lounge. Having never actually entered this holy space, I imagined a smoke-filled room of gossiping, snacking educators. While I don't want to give away all the secrets, I can tell you that what I found may shock and surprise you: It was virtually empty, save for one cheery teacher who was putting the finishing touches on some birthday treats for a coworker. (And on her way out, she shouted over her shoulder that she has her students create children's books using PowerPoint.)

Maggie began by explaining a bit about Mount Si's [eFolio/ Culminating Project](#), a Web-based portfolio whose purpose is to document students' best work during their high school years and their self-evaluations of that work. We then talked about some of the ways in which she, her students, and other Mount Si teachers use Office every day.

- Maggie creates her class calendar using Microsoft Publisher.
- Students take notes, make lists, and write reports in Word.
- Revision marks in Word are also a key feature to have in a lit or writing class.
- Soccer rosters are created in Excel.
- All the teachers use Microsoft Outlook® with Microsoft Exchange Server and have access to Outlook Web Access (OWA) at home. (Can you imagine being a teacher and being plugged in like that whenever you want?)

Joe's digital media classes

Sure, Joe's students are tuned in and turned on to the hottest new trends in animation, video production, and imaging. How could Office possibly fit in?

- Production plans and scripts, reflections, and self-evaluations are all created in Word.
- Teacher handouts and brochures are created with Publisher.
- The video production class films the yearly kindergarten concerts at Fall City Elementary (awwww....). They create DVDs for the parents, and of course DVDs need covers, which are created using Publisher.

Gayle's Advanced Placement calculus class

Let me say this right off the bat: I bombed calculus my junior year. Of college, that is. So when I wandered into Dr. Smith's class, I wondered what I could possibly find there that would be of use to this column. Eggheads creating Excel macros to do their homework for them and 98-pound professional Access database hackers? Hardly. These kids weren't just smart; they were creative (and good presenters, to boot).

At the end of the school year, each AP class (calculus, literature, european history, etc.) culminates with a nice grueling test called the AP exam. Gayle asked her students to create PowerPoint presentations that would coincide with this. Strangely enough, these kids didn't seem fazed in the slightest by this workload. I had the opportunity to witness a couple of these presentations.

What I prepared myself for were dry explanations of nonhomogeneous equations or the Picard Iterative Process. What I got were insightful, organized, well-presented, and entertaining talks about game theory and Aristotle. Huh? I still learn something every day. (Of course, retaining it is another matter.)

Today's lesson from the high school educators

No matter what your subject speciality is, Office programs such as Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Publisher can provide the backbone of your teaching plans.

Links from the Mount Si High School teachers and students

- [Mount Si High School](#)
- [About Mount Si High School's eFolio/ Culminating Project](#)

A final note

While this column is somewhat longer than my usual weekly ramblings, I barely scratched the surface of what some of you teachers out there are doing when you have access to technology. So, please, share your experience and your ideas with your fellow teachers. In fact, why don't you share with me some of the ways you're using Office in the classroom. If I get enough useful ideas, I'll include them in an upcoming column. Write to me with your ideas at crabby@microsoft.com, and, please, don't forget to share those treats in the teachers' lounge.

"Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself." — Chinese proverb

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Was this information helpful?** tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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