

# Teuton Focus . . . .

## iPads, laptops enhance core language arts curriculum

Chalk on child-sized slate boards, quill pens and ink wells, No. 2 pencils and Big Chief tablets, disposable/erasable stick Bic pens and spiral notebooks, computer labs, laptops, card files and shelves of library books, the Internet...

From the time children began attending organized schools, new and evolving technology has provided ever-changing tools for students to gather information and express their thoughts about what they were learning through reading and writing. Inman Junior/Senior High School students are experiencing the next wave of technology. During the spring 2011 semester, all junior high students were provided one-to-one laptop access, and this fall all high school students were provided an iPad 2, the latest Apple tablet product. But, according to the secondary Language Arts faculty, even with the new technology options, it's still business as usual in their classrooms -- with a twist.

"The content has to come first with clear objectives for what the students are to be learning. We're not doing an activity just because there is an application available for it. (The use of the technology) has to fit in with our learning objectives," Brandi McWilliams, who teaches English I and English III at the high school, said.

That belief is echoed by the rest of the secondary language arts faculty, Tami Garst, who teaches seventh and eighth grade language arts, and Greg Froese, who teaches English II and English IV, as well as college level Composition for Hutchinson Community College and yearbook.

"I'm still teaching the 'old way'," Mr. Froese said. "My curriculum hasn't changed. I still lecture in class and make the kids take notes. The iPads have just become another tool for the stu-

dents to use. It may alter the way we do some things. It makes it a little easier in some classes, some a little harder."

But, the way the students operate in Mr. Froese's class is a great example of how having the iPad available has made some subtle changes to what he considers a traditional curriculum.

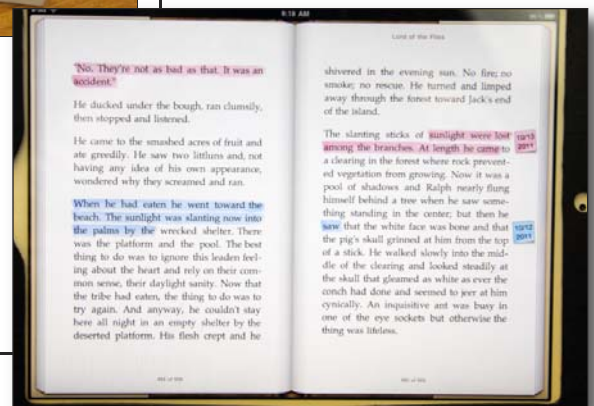
While some students still prefer to take notes with pencil and paper, most are now using their iPads, Mr. Froese said. Students can type the notes in as he lectures on their iPads, but they also have the ability to make an audio recording of the lecture on the iPad and take pictures of diagrams, notes or pictures he is using to illustrate what he is teaching with its built-in camera.

"What that has done has allowed students more freedom to discuss in class," he said. "Instead of focusing on writing their notes, they can answer questions. They also can record the comments from other students. The app we use can then combine any pictures they took, the audio recording and their typed notes all in one place."

Students can send assignments directly to the teacher through a built-in e-mail program, and Mr. Froese can return the corrected papers back in the same way. Most of the books read in Mr. Froese's classes are also available for download -- some classic books that are out of copyright protection are free, while others must be purchased.



**Above: Adriana Landeros, left, and Mikayla Goering, right, show the textbooks and notebooks used in their English class that are now stored on their iPads. Adriana's iPad shows how her library is displayed on the device. Right: Closeup of two pages from *The Lord of the Flies* as it looks on Mikayla's iPad showing her highlighted notes.**



That is one of the biggest advantages of the iPad, Mr. Froese believes. Students can download and access nearly all their books, notebooks and handouts to the iPad, including their daily planner. Heavy backpacks filled with books are quickly becoming a thing of the past. Another advantage of reading books on

the iPad is that students may “highlight” and “write notes” on the text – which is not allowed with the rental books provided by the school as they have to be “kept clean” for the next student who receives it. Mr. Froese believes that ability allows students to be a more active reader. Even though any student who is more comfortable reading a physical book than an electronic one or writing assignments with pencil and paper rather than on the iPad may do so, most are using the iPads for 90 percent or more of their work, Mr. Froese said.

“The kids like the ease of use of the iPads, even though there is some frustration with the touch screen keyboards for those who are good keyboarders. They find it is faster to write papers on the laptops and then e-mail them to me. The small screen can also be a problem for some applications,” Mr. Froese said. “We don’t use the iPads in yearbook class as it is almost impossible to layout pages on them. But, overall, (students) are becoming more comfortable with the iPads all the time.”

Mrs. McWilliams has incorporated a number of iPad applications into her English classes including iMovie, Garage Band, Collage, Keynote (similar to PowerPoint) and E-Clicker, a program which allows students to answer questions in class and receive immediate feedback that she uses to review for tests. In each case, students used the application to reinforce a language arts concept they were studying. For example, after reading a series of short stories, students used iMovie to make a movie trailer which incorporated literary elements and vocabulary words from the stories. Garage Band was used to create a soundtrack to go with a novel that matched music to the mood of the story as it built to a climax.

Her classes have not gone paperless to quite the extent Mr. Froese’s have, but she still finds that at least 95 percent of her students are taking notes on the iPad compared to about 50 percent who were at the beginning of the year. All students do have the option of printing out worksheets and study guides and writing out answers by hand.

One interesting observation as the end of the first nine weeks nears is that work is coming in quicker and, as of this week, her students are current with their assignments -- not a typical situation in past years. Mrs. McWilliams isn’t sure if that is because of the iPads or because students can take their iPads home – something they could not do if they were using computers on the building’s computer carts or in the computer lab.

“I tell them they have to get their work to me by midnight, and I’ve had some e-mail me work at 11:55 p.m., but it’s in by the deadline,” Mrs. McWilliams said. She also makes herself available at night to answer questions after her children go to bed. Her students know that they can Skype her on their iPads between 9 and 10 p.m. if they have questions and she will help them.

“It’s harder for them to come up with excuses for why they don’t have work done, and, if their iPad is with them, there are no excuses about accidentally leaving work or books at home,” she said. “Everything is on their iPad.”

Both Mr. Froese and Mrs. McWilliams have appreciated the longer battery life of the iPads compared to the laptops and the instant-on capability of the tablets. Students have been responsible about keeping their tablets charged and Mrs. McWilliams said there has been fewer problems with connecting to the network than there had been with the laptops.

Mrs. Garst is in her second semester of the one-to-one laptop program in the junior high. Unlike the high school students, junior high students are not allowed to take their laptops home at night, but

are responsible for making sure their computer is plugged in and charged as needed so it is ready for classroom use.

Junior high students are encouraged to use their laptops while still keeping up their handwriting skills in Mrs. Garst’s classes.

“There is research that moving the pencil over paper (in writing) stimulates the brain and, for some kids, it is still faster to write by hand than to keyboard,” Mrs. Garst said. In recognition of that, she asks students to use both the laptop and writing by hand in their daily free writing assignments, roughly three days using one method and two days using the alternate.

Mrs. Garst considers herself an “old-school teacher” but has found the laptops to be a very positive complement to her curriculum, making many things easier and providing opportunities for more students to share with classmates.

As an example, she mentioned a recent study of the play “*The Monsters are Due on Maple Street*” which had been produced as one of Rod Serling’s *The Twilight Zone* series. Her students were not familiar with the series, so they watched the show on YouTube which provided a better understanding of how the special effects were used and what the series was like. They then read the play and wrote about it on their blogs when they were done. “The quieter kids say more (in their blogs) than they would in class. All participated and mixed it around much more than we would have if it would have just been class discussion,” Mrs. Garst said.

Even diagramming sentences is done on the laptops using an application which allows students to drag individual words from a sentence onto a template and receive instant feedback to know if they have the word identified as the correct part of speech and relationship with other words in the sentence. Using a paper and pencil, it would have typically been two days at a minimum before students would have received corrected grammar papers back. Spelling and sentence usage skills are also covered in much the same way.

Collaborative writing assignments are also facilitated by the laptops as students can easily share work and peer edit their rough drafts before final drafts are handed in. Students who have Internet access at home can access their work outside of school.

Other applications used by the junior high students include audio books, helpful for those who need a little extra support for reading, and presentation software.

“I think incorporating technology has been a very good move for both the students and for the teachers,” Mrs. Garst said. “The grammar papers are a great example -- they have immediate feedback, and I have the time that would be spent grading 53 grammar papers each night. It’s made the 43 minutes each day that I have with a class more efficient for teaching.”

All three teachers said the transition to the laptops and the iPads has been smooth for the students. The junior high students have had access to laptops since fifth grade and, as Mr. Froese pointed out, many of the high school students have smartphones and are very familiar with the type of applications used on the iPads.

There are still questions to be answered about how technology will be used – for instance, is it cost effective to teach novels that have to be repurchased each year, or will only books now in the public domain and available for free be taught – but all three language arts teachers believe laptops and iPads ultimately are an enhancement to the basic language arts curriculum. And, they are united in their belief that the important thing is not the technology bells and whistles, but how it supports the strong curriculum already in place and how students learn.