

# Teachers Take on Technology

*Technology on the Ravenscroft campus goes far beyond PCs and projectors. Teachers in all three divisions have found innovative ways to bring new life into everyday course work. Featured here are just a few of the unique methods our faculty members are using to keep their students engaged and informed.*



*Sherri Ausbon helps a student prepare for a Skype call.*



**Profile:** Bill Rothe

**Teaches:** Middle School Social Studies

**Project:** Engage seventh-grade advisees in discussing the seven traits of Ravenscroft's Character Emblem

**Tool:** Wikis

**Definition:** Software that allows users to freely create and edit

Web pages using any Web browser. Wikis support hyperlinks and have simple techniques for creating new pages and links between internal pages.

**Result:** Students used a personal wiki, called a "Self Reflection Portfolio," to provide a definition and example of each of the seven character traits.

**Take on Technology:** "Kids connect faster and with more fluency with technology than they do with pen and paper. There's more engagement with a computer than there is with a textbook, and as teachers, we have to adjust to it. They don't necessarily learn the same way we do. You have to find the right balance and that comes through planning."

"Ravenscroft has been very open to the use of technology. They are willing to try new things and experiment with Web 2.0 platforms. It's definitely on the radar here and the administration here is always looking forward and finding ways to help us bring that technology into the classroom."



**Profile:** Sherri Ausbon

**Teaches:** Kindergarten

**Project:** Connect students at Ravenscroft with students from another school

**Tool:** Skype

**Definition:** An application that can be used to make free voice calls over the Internet to anyone

else using Skype. You can also instant message or make video calls.

**Result:** Ausbon's students completed three separate "Tell and Show" Skype video sessions with students from Anderson Elementary (Wilmington) and Providence Day School (Charlotte).

**Take on Technology:** "Kids now are used to video games and fast action so we need to make things hands-on, more interesting, and engaging. Using technology allows me to develop and find new ways to do everyday activities. It does involve a lot of brainstorming, trial and error, but I really enjoy discovering how to put ideas to work in the classroom."

"Ultimately, the goal is to get kids excited about learning. I love it when my students are packing up at the end of the day and they say, 'We didn't do any work today, Mrs. Ausbon!'"



**Profile:** Janine Wood

**Teaches:** Upper School Mathematics

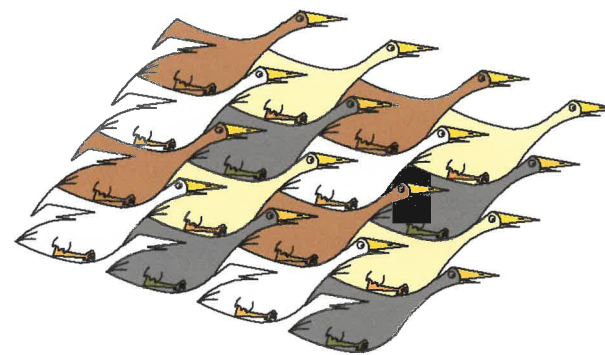
**Project:** Using knowledge of transformations, Honors Geometry students create Kaleidoscopes

**Tool:** Geometer's Sketchpad

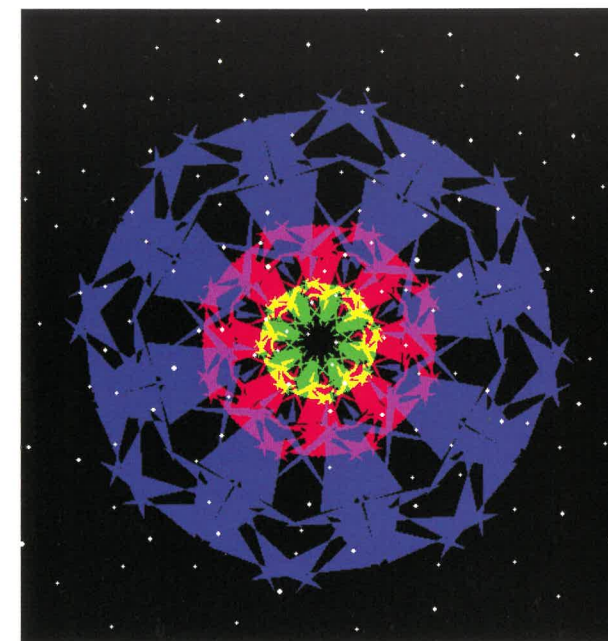
**Definition:** Geometer's Sketchpad is an interactive computer program that allows students to perform geometric constructions. It is the electronic equivalent of the compass and straight-edge, but is a much more versatile teaching tool.

**Result:** Students create unique kaleidoscope designs using geometric shapes, as well as the principles of rotation, reflection, and dilation. Students then animated their creations. This was a major project, through which the students gained considerable knowledge of classic geometry.

**Take on Technology:** "Using today's technology, whether in a computer program or in a graphing calculator, simply helps student learn geometry both more thoroughly and with greater understanding. We have found that modern tools are far more effective than traditional methods. Students eagerly involve themselves with hands-on activities, and in the process, they learn by doing. Using technology allows them to discover the concepts, streamlines the arithmetic involved, and causes students to ask every teacher's favorite question "What if?"



*Kaleidoscope by Austin Edwards '12*



*Kaleidoscope by Chris Wingenbach '12*



**Profile:** Asa Burnham

**Teaches:** Middle School Language Arts

**Project:** At the 2009 North Carolina Association for Independent Schools (NCAIS) Technology Conference, Burnham presented a session titled "Technology in the Classroom."

Burnham frequently likes to infuse technology into her reading, writing, and grammar lessons. Her NCAIS session for teachers included both good and bad examples of PowerPoint presentations, as well as audio, video, and photo resources.

**Take on Technology:** "Just because you are using technology in the classroom doesn't mean you are using it well. Today's students think in pictures, music, and sound bites. They learn differently than we did."

"We also focus on differentiated instruction at Ravenscroft, so any Web site used has to in some way speak to every student – it must reach every type of learning style. Web sites should be interactive, stimulate thinking, be relevant and be easy to navigate."

# One Wiki, Two Blogs, and a Glog to Go

There are six teachers on the Ravenscroft campus who would give you a broad smile if you asked them about blogs, wikis, and social networking. They'd smile because they've done their research and they know plenty about the whole Web 2.0 phenomenon.

The six faculty members volunteered to be a part of the Powerful Learning Practice (PLP) group for the 2007-08 school year. After many hours of education and research, they can expound on the virtues and vices of this new

Professional Development Wiki. The wiki helps faculty and staff members learn about Web 2.0 tools and provides examples of how they can be used in the classroom.

By definition, a wiki is a collaborative Web page that anyone who is a member can edit. You don't need any special software, just an Internet connection and a wiki membership. When the 2007-08 school year began, there were no wikis in use at Ravenscroft. Now there are 43 wikis across campus and more on the way.

PLP team members were: Academic Computing Coordinator Kathleen Christopher; fourth-grade instructors Joni Keane and Julie Folsom; Middle School Language Arts Instructor Francois Nel; and Middle School Science Instructors Tim Phillips and Janet Vande Berg.

The team participated in two face-to-face meetings at Fredericksburg Academy in Fredericksburg, Va.; four online staff development sessions; and countless hours of independent and group work to develop the wiki and test 21st century tools on Ravenscroft's campus.

**What is social bookmarking?**

"Social bookmarking is a method for Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of web pages on the internet with the help of metadata." (Wikipedia) Instead of storing bookmarks or favorites on your local computer, social bookmarking tools enable you to store them on the web, organize them in a variety of ways, add "tags" or keywords to them, annotate them, and access them from any computer. In addition, you can share the bookmarks with others and you can see what others have bookmarked. (You also have the ability to mark some or all of the bookmarks "private" so that only you can access them.)

**What Can Social Bookmarking Do For Me?**

Not only can you save your favorite websites and send them to your friends, but you can also look at what other people have found interesting enough to tag. Most social bookmarking sites allow you to browse through the items based on most popular, recently added, or belonging to a certain category like shopping, technology, politics, blogging, news, sports, etc.

**What can social bookmarking do for my students and me?**

You can even search through what people have bookmarked by typing in what you are looking for in the search tool. In fact, social bookmarking sites are being used as intelligent search engines. Websites on a

communication explosion – and they share their knowledge with other faculty members through a dynamic



"I think we all thought the material would be presented and we would absorb it," said Folsom. We didn't realize we would be doing our own project, and at first, I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of it all."

Vande Berg said that the group quickly caught on "and realized what needed to be done to educate ourselves. We did a lot of reading and research to figure out how we could use these tools to fit into our own curriculum."

Each team member selected a different Web 2.0 topic to research, and then crafted an informational page with examples and resources for the Professional Development Wiki.

Now that the infrastructure is in place, Christopher will use the wiki to introduce these Web 2.0 tools to faculty and staff and teach them applications for their specific disciplines and grade levels.

Topics included in the Professional Development Wiki are: blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, Web searches, images galleries, and podcasting.

The Social Bookmarking section, for example, includes a description, suggested uses, video tutorials, and five sample sites.

"It took awhile for me to get my head around it all," said Nel. "I am totally fascinated with what other schools are doing around the world."

Folsom concurred, adding, "There is just so much out there that we didn't even know existed until we started working with this group."

Seeing the students get excited about learning is perhaps the biggest payoff for all of the long hours and hard work.

Fourth-grade students began a wiki in the fall to research lighthouses and Native Americans of North Carolina. The wiki was such a success that they eventually expanded their wiki include book talks, 100 acts of kindness, and research on key moments in North Carolina history.

"Our fourth-graders just couldn't wait to go home, get on the wiki and do collaborative work," said Folsom. "They are just excited to do projects and that is very gratifying."

Other examples of Web 2.0 technology at play include Nel's "glogs" or graphical blogs in which students read a novel and then produced a summary with Voice Thread software. Phillips has also found that his Middle School students love using online image galleries in science classes.

Folsom stressed that this is just the beginning of the effort to educate both Ravenscroft faculty and students on Web 2.0 technology.

Already, fourth-grade students hosted an end-of-year showcase for the fifth-grade teachers to pass on their knowledge about wikis.

"It's an exciting time to be in education," said Folsom. "If someone needs help, this team is here to support them. It's a grass-roots effort, and that's the way it will grow."

