Students use computers to show off school work

Some North Ward pupils create electronic portfolios

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Grade 5 and 6 students at North Ward School are honing their writing and computer skills through a new program that teaches them how to create electronic portfolios of their work.

Instead of depending on reams of paper to tell the story of what they've done during the year, students highlight their accomplishments through a computer slide show which can be shared with parents at the end of each term.

"Students are creating a highlight of their year," said Grade 6 teacher George Neeb, who first heard about the program at a conference last year.
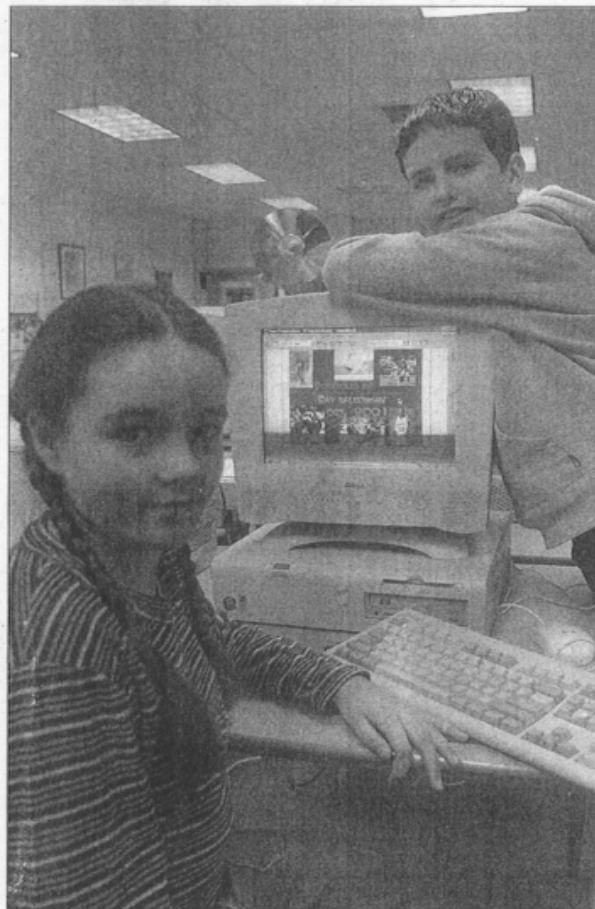
"It was being done in York Region and I thought it would work well here."

He and Grade 5 teacher Sandi Fulford decided to pilot the program for the Grand Erie District School Board. The projects are designed to find ways of improving student learning.

Students are certainly improving their computer skills as they post information about their units of study, their best work and highlights of the term on their portfolio. They're also learning to evaluate their work and the course itself, in the process.

As part of their description of what they've learned in a particular unit, students are asked to tell what they liked and didn't like. They're also encouraged to include digital photos whenever possible, to give a very visual reminder of what they did, whether it was making an art project, visiting a museum or participating in sports or special activities.

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>
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"It's a neat way to get students on the computer and it really helps them to set goals for themselves," Neeb said.

The portfolios also serve as an ideal starting point for student-led parent interviews.

"Students can actually show what they've been doing."

Many students include information about extracurricular activities, such as school clubs or sports teams, as part of the biography page on their portfolio. Fulford said this gives every student, even those who are struggling academically, a chance to show their success in some area.

"As a teacher, that's one thing I really like about this program."

Grade 6 student Ray Balberman said he really enjoys creating his portfolio.

FUN FOR STUDENTS

"It's really fun. It's not just sitting doing paperwork. This is more interactive."

And the electronic record of what he'd done in the first term made it a lot easier for the 11-year-old to set goals for this term.

"It was easier to remember what I did."

Grade 5 student Madeline Rodrigue said her computer skills have really improved since she started working on her portfolio. She's now comfortable using the digital camera, searching the Internet for graphics, and using a CD burner to copy her disc.

"I've learned how to do a lot of things," the 10-year-old said. "Now I'm almost as good as my sister and she's in college."

After using the portfolios for almost two terms, Neeb is sure the concept is a keeper. He hopes to expand the program to both of the school's Grade 5 and 6 classes and all three Grade 7 classes next year. Principals at several other schools have also expressed interest in the program.

Neeb said the electronic portfolios reinforce many of the expectations of the new curriculum, including clear, concise writing, self-assessment and computer skills. They also encourage initiative and co-operation.

"The kids worked together and helped each other. That's important."

At the end of the term, students do a final summary where they assess what they've done well and what they need to improve.

Grade 6 student Ray Balberman and Grade 5 student Madeline Rodrigue at North Ward School are learning about electronic portfolios at the Paris school. *Expositor Photo by Colin Everett*