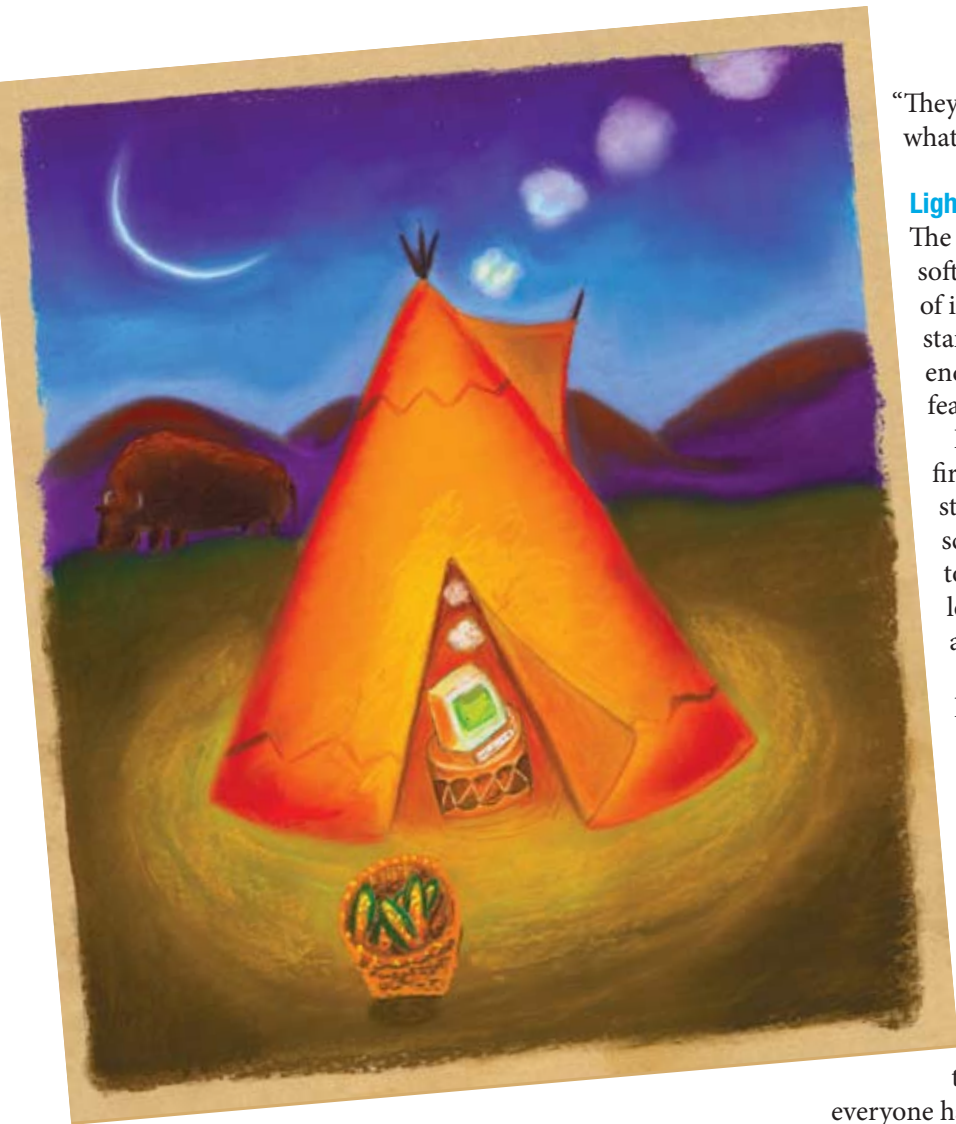


By Joe Bardin

Tech Camp Unleashes Cre



“They just need guidance on getting started. That’s what Tech Camp is all about.”

Lights, Camera, Action!

The multimedia section taught iMovie, multimedia software available with the Macintosh OS. One of iMovie’s many virtues is how simple it is to get started. Teachers can begin their movie-making endeavors almost right way, adding more complex features and effects as they go.

Rosy Escandon, a camp instructor, tells of one first grade teacher who made a movie with her students about fire safety. Kids helped write the script and participated as actors. Getting them to pay attention or give their best was no problem because they were excited about being in a movie.

Such an exercise teaches much more than just how to use iMovie. The process of creating an in-class movie exercises a range of fundamental skills: writing, public speaking, focus, teamwork, and creative collaboration. Not to mention the invaluable exercise of the re-take.

Suzanne Hensel teaches third grade in the Tanque Verde District in Tucson. A visit to her classroom revealed a shoot in progress for a movie about geometry definitions. In the scene, a girl throws a fishing line into a pretend pond to fish for a *line segment*. After several takes, she gets it just right. By then,

everyone has the definition of a line segment memorized. Teachers report their kids love reading on camera and seeing themselves afterwards. It gets students who would otherwise be silent talking.

Rose Adair teaches English to high school students at the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind in Tucson. For most of her deaf students, English is their second language because sign language is their first. This means that writing itself resides outside of their original experience with language. At Tech Camp, Adair got excited about how technology can help bridge that language gap. It “gives kids a reason to want to know what the words mean,” she says. Adair plans to videotape high school students reading books in sign language—as a reading exercise for them, and a tool to help teach reading to younger students. (See Additional Project Ideas on page 20.)

Each August teachers from around the state gather for the Arizona K–12 Center’s Tech Camp (<http://www.azk12.org>), a week-long immersion in technology for the classroom. The Arizona K–12 Center’s mission is to improve teaching and learning in Arizona’s schools through high-quality professional development and teacher leadership.

In 2007, teachers were invited to choose from among three topics to focus on: multimedia, podcasting, and Web site development. The formula Tech Camp follows is a simple one: take motivated teachers, give them basic direction to get started plus time to gain hands-on experience and access to facilitators to answer questions.

“Teachers want to use technology more,” says Kathy Wiebke, executive director of the Arizona K–12 Center,

Activity and Collaboration

Podcasting Has Students Talking

At Tech Camp, teachers also learned to write, read, and produce their own podcasts for use in their classrooms. Podcasts can be an especially powerful tool for English Language Learners who often don't hear themselves fully until they do a recording and then play it back. The process forces readers to slow down and enunciate properly. There is plenty of room for creativity and fun as well. Audio effects range from making voices sound high and squeaky like the Chipmunks to the mechanically distorted tones used to disguise voices reading ransom notes in the movies.

Cynthia Benally, who teaches fifth grade in the Phoenix Elementary School District, planned to have students who read below grade level create scripts in English and Spanish on how to do long division. This technology is allowing her to "kill two birds with one stone," as she puts it, because the students are finding long division to be a challenge as well.

Another Tech Camp grad, Cori Araza, teaches Spanish at Paradise Valley High School. She is having her Advanced Placement Spanish class work on podcast book reports.

For example, two students have chosen to report on *The Alchemist*, or *El Alchemista*. They are focusing on the book's desert setting, working off of a one-page script. Previously, three students had done a podcast based on the popular game show "Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader?" They asked each other questions about Spanish grammar, challenging themselves and the class to answer correctly.

Web Page as Stage

All the world may be a stage, but the Internet is one students know and relate to. At Tech Camp, Kathryn Scott demonstrated how to build a basic Web page. She noted that teachers can be intimidated when kids know more than they do about technology. "The classroom needs to catch up with [the students'] daily lives," says Scott, "where technology is already in action."

While students' familiarity with the Internet can be daunting, it can also serve as an important motivator. Because Web sites are public forums, students tend to put more effort into work that will appear there.

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Patricia Mohr of Paradise Valley School District planned to use her site in her eighth grade Spanish class. Pictures she took at the zoo of various kinds of animals will be posted for the students to translate into Spanish. She says the purpose is "to entice students into creating their own list of animals in Spanish, instead of just giving them a memorization list."

Collaboration Comes Naturally

Tech Camp also got teachers thinking about how technology can exercise and enhance collaboration. As a result, at Holiday Park Elementary in Phoenix, Cathy Dille, who teaches first grade, has teamed up with James Gowdy and his fourth grade to produce podcasts jointly. The older ELL students help the younger kids take photos and write scripts.



PHOTOS BY MIKE TAFT

This reinforces their own decoding skills while introducing the first graders to podcasting technology.

This kind of collaboration is inherent to both podcasting and multimedia. As Gina Millsaps, who teaches at the Lowell School in Phoenix, observes, "students really want to work together. Instead of picking friends, they pick the people for their skills."



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Additional Project Ideas

Movies

- Community atlas, in which fourth graders pick a store, park, or other local landmark to report on
- Book trailers instead of book reports
- Read alouds: books read on camera by older students can then be viewed by younger students and ELL students
- Commercials for imaginary products

Podcasts

- Report on community workers such as police officers, firefighters, parks workers, and sanitation workers
- Public service announcements such as anti-smoking, -drug, or -alcohol campaigns
- Weekly school newscast
- Original five-minute plays

Karen Hla, who teaches sixth graders at Tanque Verde, created teams in the form of production companies. Each production company consisted of three people who came up with an original name and logo for their firm. They then proceeded to make movies—developing story boards, conducting interviews, and performing skits.

As a production company, they were able to develop not only movies but their collective experience as well. This came in handy when they ran into tech glitches such as poor audio due to weak camera microphones. The solution? Use GarageBand and their laptops' built-in mics to do voiceovers and dub them in. The rough dubbing gave their book reports a classic kung fu-movie feel everyone could appreciate.

According to Wiebke, teachers make the deepest inroads when they collaborate as well. "When teachers come to Tech Camp as a team," she says, "that's when you get momentum. Teachers go home and apply what they've learned together."

No Need to Know It All

One of the great revelations for the technologically uninitiated at Tech Camp is that no one knows everything about a given application. Not only is this not an obstacle to learning, it's an opportunity.

For Kathy Murphy, who teaches sixth grade at Tanque Verde, this was a critical realization: "I saw that the trainers worked by trial and error too, which showed me not to be intimidated by what I didn't know. Tech Camp released my inhibitions to ask for help and gave me the confidence to have kids experiment as well."

Amanda Hughens, a podcasting trainer at Tech Camp, encouraged teachers to give their students such freedom: "You worry about the content, let kids worry about the technology. You don't tell students how to draw, you just give them paper and markers. The same is true with kids and computers."

In her eighth grade class at Shea Middle School in Phoenix, consisting of ELL and special education students,

Jill Roger puts this approach to the test. The assignment is to create a movie about “your environment.” Using footage they shot at school and at home, she now allows her students to simply jump into iMovie and begin forming their movie.

Around the room, screens show images of pets, family, school buses, and so on as effects are applied and stories take shape. When someone gets stuck, a hand goes up asking for help. Otherwise the students are free to experiment. Interestingly, it’s impossible to distinguish the students with attention deficit issues. At the computer, they are in their element.

In addition to supporting language and storytelling skills, Roger points out how the assignment “helps with self esteem. Technology gives a tremendous sense of accomplishment.” This is clearly evident on one student’s computer screen where the credits read: “My

Great School Movie” Starring Me.

For some teachers, their students are the least of their worries.

They just need to overcome their own intimidation.

John Bomhoff, an art teacher at Mercury Mile Elementary in Scottsdale, was one of these. He participated in a beginner group at Tech Camp. “It

was almost like a 12-step program,” he says, “because we had such low self esteem in technology.”

Last Christmas, Bomhoff’s son had given him a digital camera that he’d never taken out of the box. But because he was grouped with all beginners, “no one felt like they were an idiot,” he says. This broke the cycle of intimidation in which John and other teachers like him have been caught up.

“Tech Camp teaches what the future is,” says Millsaps. “We went there and heard about all these things like podcasts, it got us excited about technology. It’s also a relaxing environment to think about how to apply tech to my class. It’s so much easier than trying to learn everything myself.”

Technology gives a tremendous sense of accomplishment. This is clearly evident on one student’s computer screen where the credits read: “My Great School Movie” Starring Me.



Joe Bardin is a freelance writer based in Scottsdale, Arizona. His articles have appeared in national and international publications. He has also co-written several books on a range of topics

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