



Education Matters

W C P S S E M P L O Y E E N E W S L E T T E R

Blogging with Kyle the Crocodile and Friends

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Blogs, wikis, and podcasts...how many people have heard of these 21st century tools but do not really know what they are or how to use them? And did you know that they can be used in the classroom to allow students to collaborate and communicate in powerful ways?

Introducing these tools in schools can be challenging. At Sycamore Creek Year-Round Elementary, I wanted a way to introduce blogs before showing teachers the nuts-and-bolts of how they are used. I decided to create a schoolwide blogging project using our mascot, Kyle the Crocodile and his friends: Katie, Carlyle, and Kirby.

The blog (www.kylecrocodile.com) consists mainly of a travel journal "written" by the crocodiles. We take advantage of the year-round schedule to send small, green stuffed animals with students, staff, and friends as they travel the world during track-out times. The crocodiles' caretakers are tasked with taking pictures of their stuffed friend and writing about their trip. These items are posted to the blog to share with students back at Sycamore Creek.

Since the project's kick-off in October 2008, the crocodiles have traveled to Europe and many places within the United States. Kirby Crocodile spent time in Iraq

with Captain Christopher Peterman of the Army Reserves National Guard. Capt.

Peterman posted to the blog some of his experiences as a soldier in Iraq, including flying his Apache helicopter and touring one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. Students asked Capt. Peterman questions, and he responded from Iraq.

Katie Crocodile was able to witness history first-hand as she attended the presidential inauguration in Washing-

ton, DC. Sycamore Creek collaborated with Worcester Academy (Worcester, MA) for this trip. Katie and a group of Worcester Academy high school students shared their experiences with Sycamore Creek and the world via blog posts, photos, and video. On inauguration day, we were able to chat via video-conference with Katie and the Worcester Academy students live from the National Mall. That video was posted to the blog for all of our students to see.

Currently, Kirby is traveling through Asia with a Sycamore Creek parent, a pilot for FedEx. We have read about and seen pictures from Hong Kong, Seoul, and Bangkok.



Kirby helps Mr. Clobridge cook Thanksgiving dinner.

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Middle Grades Madness (cont'd from page 6)

- Issues surrounding RA negatively affect daily academic performance. If students are being victimized, they are most likely not thinking about their upcoming science test, homework, their future, etc. When it comes to RA — know it, name it, and face it.
- Understand that physical fights are usually perpetuated and begin with incidents that adults consider "petty" (rumors, gossip, etc.). Empower students to stop those kinds of behaviors. Reward the positive.
- Know there are always two sides to every story. With RA there can be 12 different stories. Adolescents are like the Mafia, nobody knows anything. You don't have to figure out the truth; just settle the storm.

- Practice what you preach.
- If you have hall duty, bus duty, or lunch duty, pay attention to the students and their behavior. Most instances of RA happen right before your eyes. Don't enforce it by ignoring it.

Ultimately, I believe Newton's Third Law of Science can conceptualize this issue — for every action — there is an equal and opposite reaction. Adolescents will react to overt actions taken against them. Take some time to raise awareness to provoke change. And kudos to all of the middle school educators that are in for the long haul — because a long haul it is.

For more information and additional resources, please visit my website at www.teacherweb.com/nclpscljtaylor/.

Annual LEP Testing is in Full Swing

All 14,000 students identified as Limited English Proficient in our school system will get tested with the new state-mandated test, the ACCESS. The ESL Office has hired a team of contractors who will assist by administering the entire kindergarten test and the speaking domain of the test for grades 1-12. We have until March 20 to complete this testing. Teachers should know that ESL classes may be canceled since ESL teachers are focusing on testing at this time. If you have any questions, contact Alesha McCauley, ESL Senior Administrator, at 431-2244.

Blogging with Kyle the Crocodile (cont'd from front page)

One of the main goals of this project is to allow students to interact with the crocodiles by posting comments to the blog. This is where the power of blogs is truly seen. The crocodiles' travel companions are encouraged to ask questions in their posts for students to answer. We encourage students or entire classes to respond and ask their own questions. Through the commenting process, students are learning how to safely and appropriately write in an online environment.

For example, when Kirby first arrived in Iraq, students in one fourth-grade class asked him and Capt. Peterman several questions: what did Capt. Peterman's bedroom look like? Why are there so many pockets on his uniform? What does he like to do for fun when not flying his helicopter? Capt. Peterman answered all of these

questions, and students were excited to read his responses all the way from Iraq.

Through the blog, students have been able to see places they might not ever be able to visit, and they learn about other people and cultures. This learning process is particularly real for students since they have a personal connection to Kyle and the other crocodiles — they have seen and held the crocodiles at school.

Through Kyle's blog, the entire school — including teachers — now has first-hand experience with blogging without ever being given formal instruction about this web 2.0 tool. Since the debut of

Kyle's blog, I have been approached by several of our teachers looking for ways they can integrate blogs into their own classes. We have discussed how blogs can be used as an online journal for students to post summaries of what they learned in class that day and to create an online dialogue with each other.

Blogging and other 21st century tools can open the door for students to collaborate with people in the next classroom or all the way on the other side of the world. As students continue their schooling and careers in an ever-shrinking world, they will be expected to successfully work with others — both virtually and in person. What better way to allow students to begin learning this process than by using a familiar, stuffed school mascot?



Crocodile Kirby visits Capt. Peterman in Iraq.



Crocodile Kyle visits Belgium.