From Fear to Facebook: One School’s Journey
By Matt Levinson

From Fear to Facebook: One School’s Journey provides insight into implementing new technology in education—in Nueva’s case, a 1-to-1 laptop program.

In Chapter 1, Matt Levinson provides an introduction to Nueva’s laptop program and then dives right into the challenges and surprises that came about in years one and two. He discusses the reactions of teachers, parents, and students as laptops became a part of school and home life. Levinson and the other educators at Nueva were able to work past the fear of implementing new technology and instead focus on the opportunities it offered.
chapter 1

lessons learned
Starting a 1-to-1 Laptop Program

Best-laid plans aren’t necessarily successful plans! Our ambitious 1-to-1 rollout didn’t go as smoothly as we’d hoped. Even with lessons learned, we found more surprises and challenges in the second year.

In the 1983 film War Games, young David Lightman (played by Matthew Broderick) accidentally links into a top secret, national security–level computer simulation game designed to play out different war scenarios involving the United States and Russia. It all happens innocently enough. Bored in the afternoon after school, David has a friend over, Jennifer (played by Ally Sheedy), and the two of them playfully explore the potentialities of the game. They begin pressing buttons and giggle as different configurations pop up on the screen. Little do they know that they have mistakenly launched the countdown to World War III! On the other side of the computer screen, the national security team scrambles to figure out, in the words of one of them, “What the hell is going on?”
I began the school year at our opening faculty meeting in 2007 by showing a scene from this film. It fit perfectly with the launch of our 1-to-1 laptop program. I cautioned the faculty that we could very well end up looking like the national security team in the film, foolishly trying to keep up with the kids. Little did I know at that moment how clearly this film would resonate for all of us as we began to live out the 1-to-1 laptop program.

One of the primary reasons the school moved to a 1-to-1 laptop program was practical: to alleviate the logjam that had developed over the use of laptop carts. One teacher remembers the days of the laptop carts:

> It was a nightmare. There were two carts for the whole building. You had to sign up to use them. The wires were a mess. If you got them after 10:30 in the morning, the computers weren’t charged, and there weren’t enough outlets in the building to plug the machines in. And, more and more teachers were using the laptops, especially in Humanities. We couldn’t stand it anymore. We had outgrown the existing technology, and we had to change for teaching and learning to keep moving forward. Each year, we were adding more laptops to the school inventory, and it finally made sense for all students to have their own laptops.

The situation was untenable for students as well. This same teacher explains: “The more students used the laptops in individual classes, the more frustrated they became when they learned that they had saved their work on different machines. It was an endless process to find their work.”

In keeping with Nueva’s philosophy and attitude toward risk-taking, the school took the bold step of implementing its laptop program in three grade levels, 6–8, at once, instead of beginning more cautiously with just one grade level and then rolling up or down. Interviews with graduating eighth graders at the end of the first year of the project indicated that this full-scale approach
actually created some of the problems that manifested themselves throughout the first year. One eighth grade student wondered whether the fourth grade would be a better year to begin a laptop program: “It’s before kids get into chatting and gaming, and they still listen to their parents and teachers.” The idea of piloting the program with a few teachers and students prior to full delivery had not entered into our discussions.

Many of the teachers felt ill-prepared to deal with the problems that arose during the first year. However, as mentioned, before the rollout, few had expressed concern about the new program. In fact, I vividly recall one teacher stating, in a matter-of-fact manner, “We are already a 1-to-1 laptop school.” In my conversations with those at other schools that use a vast laptop cart system, this was a similar refrain.

A tremendous amount of planning and thinking went into the decision to move to a 1-to-1 laptop program. For years, Nueva families had expressed frustration with the challenges of trying to traverse platforms, moving from a Mac to a PC, for example. Parents reported multiple instances in which their children had been unable to hand in assignments that they had completed at home because they could not print them at school. Problems arose for teachers in this regard as well when they found that students could not continue work on a project started in class unless they had the necessary software on their home machines. In addition, issues of economic equity arose, and the thinking was that the transition to a 1-to-1 laptop program would remove that issue, in that all students would have the same software package on their school-issued computers. For students with learning issues, such as dyslexia, the laptop program was a sure way to help them achieve greater academic success. One parent said flatly, “My child is dyslexic, and the 1-to-1 program will help him learn.” Ultimately, though, the school wanted to create a smoother home–school connection with computers and remove the barriers to curricular innovation with technology.
Year One

The first year of the laptop program lived up to the school’s motto of “Learn by Doing.” The first day we distributed the computers, the students bubbled with excitement. We broke into small groups with our tech support staff and faculty to help students figure out passwords and mail accounts. In each room, keyboards clicked away, and the kids took off … in directions we had not quite anticipated. They quickly discovered the iChat application and began videoconferencing and instant messaging. They started downloading games and building their iTunes libraries and even hacking the administrator password. It literally took only seconds for them to show all of us adults that when it comes to technology, we are light years behind this generation. As I walked from room to room, I was amazed at the electric feel among the students, but I was also struck by the deer-in-headlights look of the faculty. One faculty member asked, “Should we be worried about this? They are kind of going crazy with the laptops.” Another faculty member stated, “War Games has begun!”

When we distributed the laptops to the students, our IT director made the point that the laptops were for the students to explore for programming and applications. She emphasized that if a student came across interesting software applications, the school would be open to deploying those applications. Our mistake was that we did not make it clear enough to the students that the laptops were school-owned machines, and we failed to punctuate that the purpose of the laptop program was to enhance teaching and learning in the academic environment. Therefore, the students were under the impression that the laptops were theirs to manipulate and configure in any way they saw fit. As a result, the students veered into areas we had not foreseen or understood.

In Samuel Freedman’s New York Times article, “New Class(room) War: Teacher vs. Technology,” Professor Michael Bugeja, director of the journalism school at Iowa State University, is quoted: “The
baby boomers seem to see technology as information and communication. Their offspring and the emerging generation seem to see the same devices as entertainment and socializing” (November 7, 2007). At Nueva, teachers wanted to explore applications with students and develop online courses, but the students’ focus was on the social possibilities that the laptops brought. There was a profound disconnect between teachers and students, and we realized that we needed to find ways to bridge the gap.

One teacher jumped right into the fray and tackled many of the issues that accompanied the laptops. Her view is that teachers need to multitask in the classroom to “meet the students where they are.” She moved her entire science class online: students use electronic lab notebooks and submit assignments online, and she designs dynamic electronic presentations that make use of the best of YouTube, Google Images, and music. Because she has two teenage children of her own, she has already experienced the challenge of parenting in the age of technology, and she knows where these middle school students are headed. But it still takes a certain fearlessness to approach teaching this way. She is not afraid to fail; she routinely seeks input from the students on how to use applications and how to maximize learning with technology. Not every teacher is as comfortable with the computers. When this teacher shared her techniques and strategies in a presentation at a staff meeting, many of her colleagues stared in awe at all that she does. However, one faculty member stated, “It’s great that you are doing all of that, but there is no way I can do that. I’ll stick to paper and books.”

Even teachers who admit to being technology novices recognize that curriculum needs to meet the students in this area. In a unit on expository writing, one such teacher decided to use a mock trial simulation to facilitate the use of technology and dialogue around the issue of cyberstalking. The topic was timely, given the tragic suicide of Megan Meier, the 13-year-old girl who fell prey to an appalling hoax on MySpace.
Megan’s story acted as a backdrop to the trial. One of the written assessments asked students to compare her story to that of the victim in the cyberstalking mock trial. This activity captivated the students, and they soared with a deep, meaningful learning experience and authentic uses of technology. Each legal team created a blog to share legal strategy, and students posted late into the night. Jury members took careful notes on their laptops during trial proceedings. Using the video camera on the laptop, students recorded the opening and closing statements and assessed the “lawyers’” performances. Instead of serving as a distraction, in this situation the laptops enhanced teaching and learning. Where earlier in the semester this teacher had battled students over appropriate use in the classroom and staying on task when writing, she now had success in harnessing their collective energy around an authentic learning experience.

Another teacher attempted to engage in the laptop debate with students and used the opportunity to teach expository writing. He had the students watch excerpts of the PBS Frontline episode “Growing Up Online” (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/), and then asked them to take stands on privacy and safety issues. The class erupted so passionately that he could not appropriately direct their energy. He quickly abandoned the project and let me know that he “wished me luck” in handling the student outcry. He simply did not want to get caught in the crossfire of negotiating privacy and safety with free use and fair use issues for students.

At Kansas State University, in an Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course, 200 students began a brainstorming exercise to think about how students learn. With the use of Google Documents, these students quickly gathered input and created a short video, A Vision of Students Today (www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o). The video underscores the outdated nature of teaching and learning today and offers a wonderful glimpse into the minds of the current generation of students. The camera flashes across the lecture hall and finds students holding
up placards with different tidbits of information about their technology usage over the course of a year, from the number of pages of e-mails read (500), to the number of Facebook profiles read (1,281), to the number of web pages read (2,300). The point: these students learn differently from those of the past, and pedagogy needs to keep pace.

One response to this situation is simply to draw battle lines, as does Professor Ali Nazemi of Roanoke College, as quoted in Freedman’s “New Class(room) War: Teacher vs. Technology” in the New York Times:

If you start tolerating this stuff [students’ inappropriate use of technology], it becomes the norm. The more you give, the more they take. These devices become an indispensable sort of thing for the students. And nothing should be indispensable. Multitasking is good, but I want them to do more tasking in class. (November 7, 2007)

I admire Professor Nazemi’s resolve, but as Freedman goes on to say, “Too bad the good guy is going to lose.”

At Nueva, we discovered firsthand that the good guy might lose. In the early part of the first year, we were losing the laptop battle and losing badly. In the first few weeks, students routinely sent instant messages to their peers while in class. In the middle of one class, a student instant-messaged his mother to find out what was for dinner that night. Video chatting with iChat was rampant after school, and during one chat session, a student even shared a view of his mother in her pajamas. Many parents grew increasingly alarmed and did not know how to engage their children in conversation about appropriate computer use at home. For their part, teachers felt overwhelmed by the task of managing the distractions in their classrooms, and one faculty member announced, “I won’t use the laptops in my classroom. The kids need to be able to focus.”

It became more and more apparent that we had an epidemic on our hands. The community had broken into two camps: on one
side stood faculty and parents who felt that students needed the freedom to explore and learn with little or no restriction; on the other side, parents dug their heels in over the need for more restrictions on laptop use, both at school and at home. At informal “parent coffees,” these issues boiled to the surface and erupted into heated disagreements over the appropriate direction the school should take. One parent suggested holding a town meeting to allow students and parents the opportunity to hash it out in a free-for-all atmosphere. Some parents felt blindsided by the laptops. They had created carefully considered home guidelines for the use of instant messaging, and their children now came home with school-issued machines that granted permission to video chat with their peers. The school, in their minds, had made a decision for the home, and they had been given no choice in the matter. Still other parents saw this whole experience as a wonderful opportunity to engage the students and to educate them on appropriate use.

The school had to make a decision. To the dismay of many, we blocked iChat on the school laptops. Little did I know that the outcry would be so severe and extreme. I received volumes of correspondence on both sides of the issue. Student council speeches sounded the clarion call for retraction. Students put together petitions to protest. One student wrote,

> We really love it [iChat] and use it for important uses. We think that one reason is the parents. We believe that the parents can block it for their own children if they want, but it is not fair for them to block it for the whole middle school. If they do not know how, they can ask tech help for help on blocking it for their individual child.

Other students were less circumspect, however:

> My mom says that the majority of angry old people are okay with video chat at school, however after 3:30 it should go off. Of course this makes sense that instead of doing as they say, you ban iChat overall. Pretty smart. Fair enough, it was too complex to turn it off at a certain
time. A lot easier. I am actually glad that you decided on a blanket ban. Otherwise it would be like teasing us. Giving it to us for a little bit then taking it away. Boy, that would be horrible!

One teacher commented, “At least they have a cause now for their student council speeches. This is the most interesting election in years.”

Many parents also sharpened their quills and shared their opinions on the chat issue. One parent wrote:

iChat was wonderful. It truly broke the clique boundaries that tend to occur at school. Also as our daughter is very busy, and goes to a commuter school, she has almost no social life. We, as parents, were relieved that the clique boundary seemed broken on iChat and that she was engaging socially with her classmates. I also second the opinion expressed by other parents, that iChat is like TV or video games or Internet browsing. It is the responsibility of the parent to teach the children how best to use these tools. Each parent can establish household rules as they wish. We are in favor of bringing iChat back! Censorship is not necessary, nor wanted.

The situation had turned into a first amendment issue of freedom of speech. The parent just quoted takes responsibility for her daughter and is willing to attempt to set boundaries at home, and she was pleased that the application offered her daughter a new social outlet. Of this there was never any doubt, but from the school’s perspective, the academic purpose of the laptops had disappeared into the vortex of social networking, especially when it was occurring during the school day.

Another parent saw the iChat storm of protest as a “tempest in a teapot.” She stated:

We will monitor her use, set limits, and help her learn to manage her time efficiently. I think once the novelty wears
off and children realize how much work they have to do, they will naturally reduce their use of the tool. Parents and school staff can help children learn good time management skills more effectively by “learning by doing” as opposed to the school making the decision for the children.

Viewed as a top-down decision, our approach brought the relationship between home and school to the surface and called into question the boundary issues associated with the two realms.

Other parents were grateful that the school took the approach it did. One of them commented:

Thank you for blocking iChat. You acted with due diligence. We felt betrayed by the school when our child came home with the application and started instant messaging, when we had not yet entered that realm in our household. When we told her that we didn’t want her instant messaging, she responded with, “But mom, the school gave us this laptop with iChat!” Now that you have blocked its use, we feel better able to enter this area at our own pace, instead of being forced into it by the school.

Respect for the ability of parents to make these decisions in their own homes factored into our decision to block the use of iChat. And, particularly with middle school students, the option of allowing some to use iChat after school, on a case-by-case, family-by-family decision, did not present itself as a viable alternative. We did not want to aggravate an already frustrated community and pit those who had access against those who did not.

Our next task centered on parent education. We offered to hold a book discussion on Generation MySpace, written by Candice Kelsey, an educator who has spent years dealing and negotiating with the online dramas of social networking among her students. This book is an excellent resource and offers practical advice to parents and teachers. Kelsey frames how to have the conversation about appropriate computer use and even gives sample dialogues to have with
children. During the book discussion, I had an aha! moment that helped me better understand why the iChat situation had caused such uproar. As parents shared their stories about trying to understand the home-computing environment with their children, it became clear that the parents were starting to clue in to the online activity of their children. This thought is terrifying to middle school students. Finally, the adults were starting to get their heads out of the sand. For the students, the days of unmonitored surfing, chatting, and blogging were coming to an end.

One parent shared, “My daughter, who is in high school, just got her Facebook account, but she assured me that it is secure and can only be used for school.” The room fell silent. She could sense that she had missed something.

**What is Facebook, and who has access to Facebook profiles?**

Facebook is a free social networking site—in 2009 it took the lead as the most used social networking site in the world, well ahead of MySpace and Twitter (http://blog.compete.com/2009/02/09/facebook-myspace-twitter-social-network/). According to the Facebook user agreement, users are required to be age 13 and older. Users can create settings on their Facebook profiles to limit public access to their profiles, or they can have their Facebook profiles open to the public. Many users choose to create settings so that only their friends have access to photos and personal information. Users new to Facebook sometimes set themselves up to unintended public exposure by not creating stringent enough privacy settings or providing too much personal information.

What should parents know about Facebook? A good starting point is the website Facebook for Parents (www.facebookforparents.org).
“What?” she asked. We then filled her in on how Facebook works and who might have access to her daughter’s page. She replied, “My God, I had no idea. I need to have a conversation with her about this.” She then did have the conversation with her, and she now routinely checks her daughter’s Facebook profile. I can only imagine how disappointed her daughter is.

To help parents gain firm footing at home, we decided to offer content barrier software to families. We purchased a license for ContentBarrier, a content-filtering program, for each child in the middle school. By default, the program is quite restrictive, which prevented us from deploying it automatically to all computers. The decision to permit or block content is a personal one each family must make for itself. In addition, we invited Officer Steve DeWarns, who has dedicated himself to online child exploitation cases and to educating the public about online safety, to speak to our students. He has appeared on The Today Show and Dr. Phil, in addition to giving presentations to hundreds of schools in California. Officer DeWarns discussed the disclosure of personal information online, in chat rooms, gaming, and during instant messaging and offered caveats that accompany all of these forms of communication. One parent shared the response at home to his talk:

This seemed to really resonate with the kids. We had been trying to convey some of the points these girls learned today for awhile, but couldn’t seem to get buy-in. The example of the girl trying to pull the photo off the bulletin board was really powerful and a great visual aid to illustrate how “public and forever” all their photos/e-mails are once they post this stuff on the Internet. It’s a hard, abstract concept for the kids to grasp, but I think the officer finally got the point across to these girls. Lord knows we have been trying!

The Ad Council has developed several wonderful short ads to facilitate such conversations and to help students further see the difference in challenges encountered by online personas as opposed
to those that occur with face-to-face contact. One powerful ad shows a female middle school student walking through various parts of her community with adults and fellow teens commenting on her postings. Three adult males comment on the young woman’s tattoos and underwear and ask, “Sarah, when are you going to post something new?” The young girl’s facial expression sours as she realizes that she has revealed too much of herself online.

Another ad underscores the power that unkind words can have online by showing four teenage girls seated around a kitchen table, then zooming in on one girl uttering outrageously hurtful words—“tramp, zitface, clown, ugly”—to one of her friends. The ad finishes with the question, “If you wouldn’t say it in person, why say it online?” Taking time with students to talk through such challenges opens an important dialogue and signals that the adults are listening. When an online transgression takes place, students know that they can reach out to an adult in their life to help them figure out how to confront or deal with cyberissues.

When other problems arise, such as gaming or e-mailing in class, we deal with the situation on a case-by-case basis. The teacher confronts the student, addresses the problem, and then writes a brief note home, requesting the parents have a conversation with their child. Parents are then asked to report back to the teacher on the content of the discussion. This approach has generated a healthy dialogue between school and home. For more serious matters, such as hacking the administrator password, we reimage the student’s computer so that it is returned to the initial configurations. iTunes libraries and other downloads are wiped clean, but document files are preserved. These consequences are effective, and the conversations that arise from these situations elevate the importance of integrity for responsible use.

However, the issue of buy-in weighs heavily, especially when it comes to instituting an acceptable use policy (AUP). At Nueva, we did not adequately create a sense of ownership of the AUP, and the students revolted—they refused to sign Nueva’s acceptable
use policy. When, at the end of the first week of the program, the school sent a letter home detailing the parameters of the AUP and requesting adherence to it through a signature, only 7 of 120 were signed. The school did not get overwhelming support from the families on this issue: in fact, many parents were proud that their children had refused to accept the AUP on the basis of principle. This was surprising since Nueva parents, in order to receive access to Nueva’s website, had willingly signed a document that is the equivalent of the federal tax code, with almost every detail of online life enumerated.

We did not require students to sign the AUP from the start, nor did we establish buy-in with students. Therefore, at the end of the year, we only had 63 of 120 AUPs on file. When I shared this information with educators at other schools, they all looked at me with incredulity and even admiration. One educator remarked: “Your students actually read about and care about the AUP? That’s actually a good problem to have.” We took the long view on the AUP issue and chose to work to educate parents, teachers, and students on proper use.

It is never easy to figure out a way to go over rules for proper computer use with middle school students. To arrive at a workable plan to live cooperatively with technology in a school community, a fine line must be straddled between paternal guidance and student voices. Making a real-world connection with students and parents helps provide context for the “why” of an acceptable use policy. By year three, we had figured out how to enter this conversation with students, and, in so doing, we referred to several real-world situations.

For example, the U.S. military found itself trapped in the crosshairs as it tried to leverage technology for advancement and progress, while figuring out how to shield and safeguard the precious vault of information that undergirds its organization.

The military is toying with an extreme technology makeover, harnessing the tools of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr
Students want to have control over their computers at school. They want to download and personalize their music libraries, chat with their peers using iChat, clog school bandwidth with YouTube videos, and bypass any effort to regulate network security, all in the name of technology independence. Schools have an obligation to overhaul its image to bring in recruits and influence public opinion. However, the military is expected to unfurl a new policy to limit the uses of social networking, owing to increased worries about cybersecurity. This may thwart whatever progress has been made and sink popular blogs, such as Embrace the Suck, which chronicles life at the front in Afghanistan. The debate, James Dao of the *New York Times* writes, “reflects a broader clash of cultures; between the anarchic, unfiltered, bottom-up nature of the web and the hierarchical, tightly controlled top-down tradition of the military” (“Pentagon Keeps Wary Watch as Troops Blog,” September 8, 2009).

Funnily enough, this is just what our students said about school authorities trying to implement an AUP for school computers.

Another organization, the National Football League, banned the use of Twitter during training camp, for fear that players would leak team secrets and playbooks. The notorious hothead and Bengals wide receiver Chad Ochocinco (formerly Johnson) responded to this, of course, on his Twitter page: “Damn NFL and these rules, I am going by my own set of rules” (@OGOchoCinco).

Even lawyers are being hushed, as bar associations put the clamps on those who use blogs to spread news about courtroom happenings. John Schwartz of the *New York Times* reported the fining of a Florida lawyer, Sean Conway, who called a judge an “Evil, Unfair Witch” in a blog. With more and more twenty-somethings entering the legal profession, the problem of inappropriate postings will only worsen, according to Stephen Gillers of New York University Law School. In the same *Times* article, Gillers says, “Twenty-somethings have a much-reduced sense of personal privacy” (“A Legal Battle: Online Attitude vs. Rules of the Bar,” September 12, 2009).
to provide safe learning environments, but they also are charged with fostering innovation and creativity.

The question is, “How wide should the window of use be opened to enhance teaching and learning?” There is simply no way to stop the flow of information, as Noah Shachtman, editor of Wired’s national security blog, Danger Room, commented in Dao’s New York Times article about the military (September 8, 2009). Schools are in the same pickle. Schools must help students to make sense of information, to synthesize, analyze, and judge the credibility of the material they encounter.

But schools also need to draw boundaries for students around issues like chatting, texting, downloading, and gaming, much to the chagrin of freewheeling students, many of whom are accustomed to more lax rules at home surrounding technology.

Is there a way to find a win–win solution? One way is to invite students into the conversation about setting boundaries for proper use in school. This is a tricky process and one that can fast spin into open revolt, as we learned in the first year of the laptop program at Nueva.

Schools can devise laptop boot-up days to introduce students to both the perils and possibilities of technology. These boot-ups can include workshops on care, ethics, and appropriate use guidelines, but they should also give time and attention to authentic media creation projects and experiences so that students, with the guidance of teachers, can experiment with the tools, make mistakes and missteps, and learn. Also, schools can invite guest speakers in the field of technology to share success stories of innovation and risk-taking. Technology educators can also be brought in to run aspects of the boot-up camp to bring outside voices into the community dialogue.

An additional, critical component of the rollout of computer use in schools is to engage the parent community. Parents are spokes on the wheel of the school community, and for the educational ride to go smoothly, schools need to educate parents about appropriate
use at home, particularly when it comes to such tools as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and Flickr. Students will receive mixed messages if, after a night of unfettered computer use at home, they come to school to find a more restrictive policy in place, and this is where conflict arises. Organizations such as Common Sense Media, a national nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, have created a family media use agreement that schools and families can use together to arrive at agreements for appropriate use. Bringing families to school to talk with administrators and teachers about these issues helps bridge the gap that can exist between children and adults around technology.

In terms of the actual policies that schools implement, schools need to provide wiggle room in them so that the policies can be modified and adapted according to circumstances that arise during the school day. Having an AUP in a question and answer (Q and A) format leaves room for new questions to be added as issues unfold. Not every situation can be addressed in an AUP, and it is critical that the document conveys a spirit of encouraging students to do the right thing. The last thing schools should do is box themselves into a corner with a document that interferes with the ability of teachers to help students act appropriately with technology. We figured this out in year three when we moved to a Q and A format for our acceptable use policy. By the second week of school, when we handed out the laptops to students after the boot-up day and with the new Q and A format, we had 100% acceptance of our AUP and no grumbling.

AUPs can be a challenge for teachers. Some teachers become so wedded to enforcing the “letter of the law” that they lose the ability to act in the moment and educate students. One teacher, running a study hall, grew worried that students were playing games and not doing homework on their laptops. He sent me an e-mail during the study hall and asked me to contact the tech office to use Apple Remote Desktop to survey student activity in the study hall. The result: students were actually doing their homework and not playing games, as he had suspected. This teacher felt unable to deal with
the students in the study hall because the AUP did not specifically mention the use of computers during study hall. Schools cannot reach the point where teachers need to walk around with the AUP in their pocket, pull it out, and then point to code, paragraph, and line to call students on their behavior. Instead, schools need to foster a spirit of discussion and reflection and impose appropriate consequences when there are clear transgressions.

During year one, a wonderful learning opportunity to educate fifth grade students about acceptable use, a year in advance of their entry into the 1-to-1 laptop program, arose around the use of Gmail at school. Several students opened Gmail accounts, and many did so without the permission of their parents. While we do not have a 1-to-1 laptop program at the fifth grade level, the students take a tech class, and humanities and math teachers use a laptop cart for projects. Also, students have computer access in the library at recess and lunch. In a matter of days, these students began using the chat function in Gmail during classes, and word of this traveled quickly among the grade. I began to receive e-mails from students who were concerned about the rampant use. One student wrote:

I have been noticing a lot of people Gmail chatting during classes. I keep telling them to stop but they will not. When I try to get them to stop they start calling me a baby for not chatting during class. They get mad whenever I tell them that we should be trying to learn in class not chat they just ignore me.

I shared his comments with the fifth grade teaching team, and they addressed the use of Gmail at school with the students.

Concurrently with this student’s e-mail to me, parents raised the issue of Gmail use at school at a morning coffee gathering, and I explained to them that we have several safeguards in place to monitor computer use. One of these safeguards is Apple Remote Desktop, which allows the school to access computer screens on campus. After the coffee, one parent went home and asked his daughter if she had a Gmail account. The fifth grader confessed
that she did have the account, and the father shared with her the content of my discussion with parents concerning the issue. He also disclosed to her that the school uses Apple Remote Desktop to monitor student use. This student then sent an instant message to all of her peers, alerting them that the parents and the school had discovered the “surreptitious” use of Gmail and that there would soon be “big trouble.”

The next day in class, discussion erupted over privacy issues and concern that the school had too much power. However, as conversation continued, under the guidance of a skillful Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) teacher, students began to arrive at the conclusion that the use of Gmail at school was not okay. They formed an agreement to cease using their accounts during school, and by the end of that day, two students came to my office to let me know that they had been using Gmail at school and were now going to stop. In addition, the student who had sent me the e-mail the night before came to see me. He was worried that his friends were going to get into “big trouble” for using Gmail. I reassured him that nobody was in trouble and that I appreciated his courage in coming forward to raise the issue with me. I thanked him for his leadership and let him know that he had set in motion a community conversation around appropriate use of e-mail at school. He responded, “It’s good that we are having this discussion now before we get those laptops!” In a 24-hour period, we had made huge inroads with these 10-year-olds who were months away from receiving school laptops.

At the end of year one, we implemented several steps designed to help prepare students, parents, and teachers for the 1-to-1 laptop program. These included the following:

- A boot-up camp at the opening of school for our sixth graders to orient them to the laptops
- A partnership with Common Sense Media, an organization geared toward helping kids and families make informed choices about media
• Training sessions on how to conduct effective, efficient online research
• Faculty training and teacher-led technology workshops throughout the school year
• Parent education workshops to help navigate usage of the laptops between home and school
• Requiring a signed AUP before laptop distribution
• A programming elective offered to seventh and eighth grade students (to redirect the energy of the hackers who bypassed administrator security)
• Continued flexibility and openness in our approach to handling issues that arise

Year Two

Of course, the best-laid plans always bring surprises. At the start of year two, we created a carefully mapped-out week of boot-up camp for the students. This included faculty-led workshops on ethical dilemmas, a review of the acceptable use policy (AUP), with a quiz to discuss “gray” areas, an introduction to the menu of applications on the laptops, and detailed demonstrations of appropriate laptop care strategies. In addition, Common Sense Media ran two workshops for parents on how to develop home guidelines for computer usage with their children. Officer Steve DeWarns also spoke with students and parents about cyberbullying and online safety. The boot-up camp week appeared to roll out the laptops without incident. At the technology committee meeting toward the end of the week, after the completion of these various components of the boot-up program, we congratulated ourselves for “getting it right” with students. In fact, one member of the committee stated, “This could not have gone better.”

At the conclusion of the all-school assembly on the Friday of the boot-up camp week, at 1:59 and 42 seconds p.m. (the time is
forever etched into my memory), the wheels came off, and another communitywide crisis enveloped us. The faculty member running the assembly handed the microphone to an eighth grade student who wished to speak. He walked over to me and asked, “Did you plan this?” I responded with incredulity, “Ah, no.” The head of school, who was standing right next to me, asked, “What do you think she is going to do?”

Before I could reply, the student asked, in a fire-and-brimstone voice, “How many students here agree with the terms of the acceptable use policy?” One very brave student raised his hand. Then, she turned the question: “How many students here disagree with the AUP?” A loud roar erupted and every other student joined her in a chant of “Down with the AUP! Down with the AUP!” The head of school looked at me in bewilderment and uttered, “Oh, dear.” Students then filed out of the assembly, high-fiving each other and brimming with excitement at the public protest.

That Sunday afternoon, I received a phone call from the student who had spoken at the assembly, demanding that I participate in a conference call with the entire middle school community. I declined and assured her that we would have a community meeting the next day to discuss the acceptable use policy. With the head of school and another teacher, we developed a plan for the meeting. Students would fill out a note card and identify three parts of the AUP with which they disagreed. We would then have lunch meetings through the week with small groups of students to discuss the issues, which centered on being able to use the laptops on school buses, to and from school, at lunch, recess, and in after-school (After Care) classes to do homework.

The meeting started smoothly. I acknowledged the eighth grade student’s protest from the previous Friday and framed her words in the historical context of the power of protest, from the civil rights movement and the student-led campus protests of the 1960s. I even quoted the words of Frederick Douglass, the legendary 19th-century civil rights activist: “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”
explained the approach we were going to use to work through the disagreements, had the students fill out the note cards, and then announced that students would go to meet in advisory groups to process the laptop issues. All appeared calm, at last.

As I stepped away from the microphone, however, the eighth grade student leader stood up with a prepared speech and announced to the entire group, “In direct disobedience of Matt [the middle school head] and Diane [the executive director of Nueva], I must be heard!” She proceeded to recite her demands, which centered on the overarching theme of building trust in a community and the practical concerns of being able to do homework on the bus. She also took issue with the fact that students had not been involved in creating the school’s acceptable use policy. She was not wrong; this is where we had erred.

We constructed the AUP as a faculty, but we omitted a certain key constituency, the students. At the end of year one, in a meeting to debrief and review year one of the laptop program, we worked our way through the many issues we had experienced with students. Some teachers went so far as to move to eliminate the program entirely and yearned to return to simpler days of the laptop carts. The focus of the discussion with teachers centered on their feeling that the laptops had dismantled and derailed a strong school culture that emphasized play, trust, and cooperation. There was universal agreement that students needed to be brought back into the fold of the school’s culture and that one key way to do this was to eliminate the use of the laptops at recess to encourage students to play outside and socialize with friends.

Another important area of contention dealt with monitoring in the classroom and the need to create and communicate the expectation that the laptops were to be used primarily for school-related learning. In the first year of the program, students had been allowed to veer into territories beyond school work, such as gaming and social networking, in their computer usage. However, as one faculty member stated quite clearly, the key problem was that students and
adults had different views of the role of technology to enhance learning:

For students, play and work are the same thing with technology. They are completely interwoven for them. For us, we make a division between work on the computer and our personal and social lives. We need to come to terms with that to make this program run smoothly.

Other parts of the discussion with teachers addressed the practical matters of getting rid of the technical hurdles that inhibited smooth running of the laptops during class time, such as printer issues and the ability of students to access the school server from home. Also, teachers wanted to make sure that students were required to and versed in putting their homework in a “drop box” on the server for each of their subjects, to facilitate development of an online portfolio. We combed through these many issues and felt confident that we had hit on the key points to include in the revised acceptable use policy. But we soon realized that we were looking at the AUP from the outside in and not from the inside out—from the student’s point of view.

In my opening words to the students at the community meeting, I tried to spell out the need for the school to balance safety with freedoms, but clearly my words did not make much of an impact. Several teachers lauded this student for her courage in speaking up, and those teachers who had witnessed this student’s growth over several years at the school marveled at her poise, confidence, and command in speaking in front of the entire community. One of these teachers said, “She would never have done this four years ago. We are so proud of her.”

The student leader channeled her energies into a run for student council president. Her campaign speech, though still tempered, captured a wonderful sentiment for school communities to foster in its students:
When I stood up at assembly two weeks ago, I did so firstly for myself. I was fed up. When I spoke at MS [Nueva Middle School] Meeting, I did so not only for myself but for others. I will speak, in the future, for you. The Student Council’s purpose is to represent the students to the teachers—to act as a go-between, a force of communication. May it do so this year—represent the students, represent their needs and wants, their problems. May it act as a voice of reason, to mediate communications between the faculty and students. May it create opportunities, and may it create a stronger community in the Nueva Middle School. May it have power, but not control it. May it be a voice for those who cannot shout above the crowd. I cannot promise you that I will succeed. I cannot promise change, and I cannot promise stability. I cannot even promise a fourth dance and popcorn. The only thing I can promise is that I will try, and that I will try with all my strength, to listen to you, to speak for you, to speak with you. I will speak your views, even should they not be mine, and I will do my best to create a lasting culture at Nueva—one of community and of honesty.

At parent coffees, held right in the midst of the AUP turmoil, parents celebrated the student’s boldness and appreciated that the school was listening to the demands. One parent commented:

We think it’s great that you [the school] are allowing the students to voice their concerns, but don’t change any of the rules. We support you completely, but we just don’t want to have to do this at home. It’s better if you guys stay strict.

Another parent, in alignment with her child’s stance in opposition to the AUP, wrote:

He has informed us that he has strong objections to portions of the acceptable use policy for school laptops, and
that because of this he is unwilling to sign the form. We have decided to support him in taking this position on the condition that he engages in a respectful and constructive dialogue with you and others involved in administering the laptop program regarding the possibility of modifying parts of the AUP. He is working with some other students to draft a revised AUP to discuss with you. We hope that this situation will be seen as a positive development, since an implicit part of Nueva’s mission is to educate future leaders capable of thinking for themselves, and it is probably a measure of the school’s success that its students are taking action on something that they feel strongly about.

I shared our challenges with a head from another school to seek advice on how to handle the maelstrom. She chuckled and said:

You’ve got some little protesters over there at Nueva. This honestly would not happen at our school. Our students are not wired that way.

She did agree with the process we were using and thought a resolution was imminent. Her advice:

Give the students something, but not everything. You need to keep school running smoothly and provide a safe learning environment. Some issues you cannot bend on, like the bus, which is a matter of safety.

Teachers began to look for alternatives to meet the students halfway and realized that the students’ concerns focused on practical matters such as completing homework. One faculty member proposed a solution:

It seems to me that without conceding anything in the AUP, we could give students what they really want, which is more opportunities to use their computers at school besides in class. I’d be willing to supervise laptop use one recess a week.
The lunch meetings were well attended by students, and one student proudly announced as he walked into one of the meetings, “It’s time for me to help my community!” Students shared concerns about homework completion and computer use on buses, after school, and at recess. They listened to each other and felt honored to be part of the process of finding a solution for the school.

The eighth grade student leader even shifted in her thinking:

I’m glad we’re all working together and realize that we’re all working for the same goals. I realize that we can’t change everything, and that some things have already been irrevocably set for this year, but hope that maybe things can be different next year. I know some things are in there because of student misbehavior last year, and I hope that we can help the student body to understand the importance of their decisions about laptop care instead of merely dishing out constraints.

As a concession to students and in an attempt to listen to their concerns and implement change based on these concerns, we allowed laptop use during recess three days a week, with the proviso that students had to work on homework while in the laptop recess room. Ironically, once we put this in place, very few students showed up to use their laptops at recess. Instead, they played outdoors as we had hoped they would do.

Tim Brown, the CEO of IDEO, a design and innovation consultancy firm based in Palo Alto, California, in an October 9, 2009, interview with National Public Radio about IDEO’s involvement in health care reform, explains the challenges that change can pose for a community:

[W]hen something’s designed on the outside and then pushed into the organization, there’s often a lot of resistance. But when you involve the people themselves, then they already own the new solution, and it’s so much easier then to get the change to happen.
We learned this valuable lesson from the students at Nueva.

For schools to be successful with rolling out a 1-to-1 laptop program, students need to be brought into the development and deployment of the program, from soup to nuts. The rules or guidelines need to be constructed with their input and also allow room for change over time. Tim Brown, in a September 23, 2009, interview with BNET, echoes this sentiment:

> It has to be an experimental culture. There has to be an enthusiasm for new ideas. You have to have a culture that’s willing to explore new ideas, test them and then get rid of them if they’re not good ideas. If ideas get shut down, if they’re only allowed to happen in some little corner, or if only certain people are allowed to have ideas, then you’re failing to tap into the innovation potential of an organization. So this notion of experimentation is thoroughly important.

At Nueva, we attempt to foster this culture of experimentation.

The school has a formal partnership with Stanford’s design school and is in the process of developing a comprehensive design thinking curriculum for K–12 schools. In 2007, Nueva opened the doors of its Innovation Lab (iLab) and each day brings students into the lab for class projects. These projects range from figuring out how to lower an egg from the second floor of a building using a deck of cards and stapler, to constructing an optimally efficient solar house with the aid of a laser cutter, Adobe Illustrator, math, science, and design thinking. In his June 2008 *Harvard Business Review* article, Tim Brown defines design thinking “as a discipline that uses the designer’s sensibility and methods to match people’s needs with what is technologically feasible.” Even though we did not know it at the time, Brown’s definition captures perfectly what Nueva worked through in unfolding its 1-to-1 laptop program.

The rationale for a 1-to-1 laptop program needs to be clearly spelled out, and students, teachers, and parents need to be given adequate
time to digest it. In addition, the home–school connection needs to be strong so that parents and school can work together to reinforce a consistent message to students. In a conversation I had with our IT director, who spearheaded the first year of the program, she underscored this point for schools:

In year zero, there needs to be massive parent education. They need to know how to manage the home computing environment. All of the stuff they saw in their homes as a result of the computers coming home from school was already going on. They just did not know it. Also, teachers need heavy-duty training, curricular leadership, and rethinking about how to change their teaching to incorporate technology. There was a feeling among teachers that because the school had laptop carts and teachers used them in the classroom, the 1-to-1 program would be a natural extension. This turned out not to be the case.

There were moments when we asked ourselves why we had ever embarked on this program. However, we seized each new situation and moment as a learning opportunity, not only for ourselves but also for the community at large. Moving to a 1-to-1 program is not just about enhancing teaching and learning in an academic setting. It is about being open to the online world of students and being ready to deal with the social landscape that forms such an integral part of their lives.
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