

## “Back to the Future”

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It was 1983 in small town Alberta, and I remember Mr. Revega, the Principal, entering my grade 2 classroom. He stood in front of the class, cleared his throat, and swooped his “comb-over” back in place with his right hand before making the announcement.

“I have big news!” Mr. Revega continued, taking another swipe at his “comb-over” to ensure that it was still in place. “Today the future has arrived!”

I remember sitting in my desk wondering what he meant. How could the future have arrived? I was still in grade 2. I wasn’t any older. I could not see any flying cars outside like my dad said would be in the future. Was Mr. Revega crazy?



“Does anybody know what a computer is?” asked the Principal. All of us kids put our arms up in the air as though the Lord himself was passing a large magnet over the classroom and these sprouts of grade 2 arms couldn’t resist the pull. Then the arms began waving, and grade 2 children were moving about in their tiny desks like they were struggling to keep their bottoms attached to the wooden seats. I, too, was eager for the Principal to notice that I knew about computers. I had watched *STAR WARS*, *Flight of the Navigator*, *Star Trek*, *Mork and Mindy*, *The Jetsons* and all sorts of shows that displayed computers. I knew what they were. They were cool-sounding machines with colourful lights, gnarly buttons and devices. Computers made doors open and close by themselves, controlled space ships, beamed people places, controlled robots, and gave my mom change at the grocery store.

“Today our school has just installed the first computer in the school district. It cost the district \$11,300!” stated the Principal as he paused to drag his hanky out of his pocket to catch his runny nose.

“OOOHH!” replied our class. Raised arms began to slowly drop back to the children’s sides as we looked at each other with wide eyes of awe trying to understand just how much \$11,300 was. It sounded like a lot.

“Mr. Revega,” interrupted Tanya. She was one of those kids that always had something to say whenever big news was being delivered. “Mr. Revega, my grandma says that if someone has to pay a lot of money for something, then they had better use it for a long time. That’s what she said, and I believe her because she said that my grandpa hasn’t bought a new car since after the war because he spent so much.” Tanya sat back content with her input about the financial decision of the school district, hoping that her warning would be taken into account as the Principal made plans for incorporating this computer into the regular everyday functions of the school.

“Thank you, Tanya,” replied Mr. Revega as he stuffed his used hanky back into his pocket. He continued, “If you can all stand and in single file follow me to the science lab where we have set up the student computer, I will show you what the future looks like.”

We all stood quickly not wanting to miss this opportunity to see what the future looked like. I was thinking about the computers on TV. Was it large? Mean-looking, like in that space odyssey movie? The anticipation rose as we began our futuristic march toward technology. We passed outside the doors and turned left. I noted that my locker door wasn't shut and stepped out of line to quickly close the door. Suddenly I was face to face with Miss Turko. She was waddling towards me pushing the gigantic movie cart. She was straining to keep the film projector on the cart because of the ridiculous wobbly wheels and then swerved to miss me.

“Out of line!” Miss. Turko barked. “Back in line.” She never missed a beat as she maneuvered her way past me and down the hall with that film projector. I sheepishly got back in line and entered the awaiting science lab with the rest of the grade 2s.

“Here she is, students. This is an Apple,” introduced Mr. Revega. “This science lab will eventually become a classroom filled with computers. This is how your children will be educated.”

Our grade 2 class stared at this thing that looked like a small TV with a typewriter attached and said nothing. It looked nothing like an apple. We started to reach out and touch the thing, but were stopped abruptly. “No!” interjected Mr. Revega. “I'll show you what it does.”

After a few minutes of standing patiently watching the Principal push buttons, slip things in and out of the side of the computer, check a manual, and adjust the screen, we then saw what a computer could do. “Kevin,” Mr. Revega challenged, “come here.” Another swipe of his hand over his now failing comb-over and the Principal looked my way.

Gingerly I stepped forward. “What am I supposed to do?” I thought to myself. Mr. Revega picked me up and stood me on a chair facing the computer. There was a black screen and a blinking green line at the top left of the screen. “That is the cursor,” said the Principal pointing to the green blinking line.

“My grandma says it is not good to curse, Mr. Revega,” a startled Tanya spoke up.

“It is not that type of curse,” the Principal responded. “This shows where to type a letter. Kevin, type your name into the computer.” I looked down at the array of letters, numbers, and symbols on the pad in front of me. I found the first letter K. It showed up on screen just as the Principal had said. E-V-I-N finished the name. I was so excited. The rest of the class closed in around me like animals at a trough each wanting their turn entering their names into the computer. They clapped with joy. The future was here, at the push of a button.

The excitement, the mystery, the power, the opportunity, and the ability that was presented to that grade 2 class was EMPOWERING. Not because the computer was unveiled to the world of education, but because of possibilities at a student's reach. That day with Mr. Revega has stayed

with me, reminding me of the value of going back to the future when technology is seen as the answer to and/or the cause of many educator's dilemmas.

When my Principal introduced the computer to our class, he was not introducing just an object or tool to make us better students. He was introducing the hope of a better tomorrow, a future filled with possibilities. I was excited. But because there was no continuum of technological application in my education, Mr. Revega's passionate introduction to the mighty computer was diminished.

Now, as a teacher, I have come a long way in understanding the value of passionate teaching. The computer, photocopier, scanner, Internet, flash drive, cell phones (those wretched classroom demons!), iPods and so on, are all tools. Many teachers depend solely on these for educating their students. Others use them sparingly. Society has accepted these as normal everyday accessories. The ability to create colorful eye-catching power points, DVDs, art, and music has been enhanced with the computer and its programs. Research is easier with the Internet; digital cameras have revolutionized photography classes. A Socials 11 student in my 1st year teaching at Okanagan Adventist Academy designed a web page for his Social research project to showcase his essay, maps, cultural illustrations, and many other links. These things weren't thought possible in the '70s and '80s. Education has changed. Yes, I have seen students waste time during class looking at videos (I'm pointing at you, YouTube!), e-mailing friends and playing games instead of doing their class work. This extra distraction for classroom management has a teacher increasingly frustrated with technology. But here it is, folks. Step up to your computer, find your cursor in Office Windows, and type A-T-T-I-T-U-D-E.

I have learned the hard way that a teacher sets the mood of learning in a classroom with his/her attitude about the subject. Mr. Revega, with his excitement and passion for the new technology, intrigued and excited me. We are called as teachers to pass that kind of energy on to our students. As a teacher, I see technology being as useful as one allows it to be. Depending on technology to educate is dangerous. If a computer could teach the multiple aspects of academia, what would we need teachers for? It bothers me to see pastors and teachers setting up for a presentation and upset when their technology does not work. They make a big scene and stumble through their presentation. Not a good sign. Technology is valuable in educating our students for the future only as we allow room for the student's potential to shine through. In other words, a good teacher uses technology to enhance and not as a focus. It comes down to the teacher-student relationship and the energy that creates the desire to move forward with learning. To assume that technology is education's answer to all sorts of problems is to assume that all students are alike – and they aren't.

My grade 2 class left that lab enlightened and excited about our future. Knowledge was available at the push of a button and how cool was the future looking? I sat back in my wooden desk and picked up my yellow pencil and continued working on my assignment. Years later, I am sitting in a typing class as the teacher, trying to pump up the students for computer class. To get encouragement to motivate this class, I went back to the future. But I had no comb-over!

### **Resources:**

Picture of Apple Computer - [www.techcrunch.com](http://www.techcrunch.com)