The Promise and Peril of New Technologies in the Classroom
By John Myers (Program Co-Chair)

Face Up to Facebook – The Potential and Perils of Facebook, YouTube and Other Internet Tools

Thirty Kappans and guests attended the second session in this year's research series on January 29-one day after a wintry blast that would have offered challenges for the best technologies!

At Port Credit Secondary School, Vice-principal Terry Whitmell (formerly I.T.
Co-ordinator for the Peel District School Board) outlined some of the basic issues in a brief presentation. Then we went to the computer lab and played with Facebook. Those who did not already have accounts were taken through the steps to set them up and use them to connect. The positive climate Terry set helped us through the learning curve.

Some points were shared.
- Schools and the online worlds of students differ in some important ways. For example, school life and work tends to be linear and clear. "Virtual life" is non-linear and operates on many levels, only some of which are conscious levels for students.

- Schools can help the "digital natives" among the next generation be more conscious of important issues such as privacy, disclosure, and anonymity, the dangers of ID theft, and other issues of control.

- Schools and the wider and deeper experiences of teachers can work with students to look at the possibilities. After all, we have the experience, and, (we hope) the wisdom to help students deal with the promise and the perils contained in the power of online work. For example, do we (teachers and students) teach ourselves and each other about wise use of email—"simple netiquette"? We have all recognized the latest time word, the "onosecond!": the time it takes to realize that you should NOT have pressed the "send" command key on your last message.

L. to R: President Walt Winchell, Presenter Terry Whitmell, and Membership Chair, Moveta Nanton

Gaming & Education/Technology as a Learning Tool
The final session took place March 5 at York University.
Dr. Jennifer Jenson from York had us look at the world of gaming in "Get up and play: Exploring the Ludic in Digital Environments" Coincidentally, the current issue of *Scientific American Mind*

(February-March) had a feature on the importance of play and learning. Through examples from music to Shakespeare to mathematics and back, Jennifer cautioned us that the world of gaming is much more complicated than the media's portrayals of "good" vs "bad". There are a variety of gaming formats, some of which are "shoot em up" but many of which are more conducive to the kinds of learning we want to promote: the ludic or playful attitude - we need to take this world seriously if we are to harness its power for important learning. The power comes from immediate feedback on the many levels that can be explored in such games and the high level of interactivity in the stories: a level Jennifer called "immersive": like what we do when we are into a great book.

Dr. Bev Freedman, an educator with a long and distinguished career, offered her take on familiar ground from the series. In addition to presenting some useful directions and websites she noted the work of the provincial ministry's and Ontario schools. We saw some examples and Bev reminded us of the ministry webcasts being produced for schools to use. While connecting the promise and perils to females and males, she had an optimistic perspective of future developments.

Presenter Dr. Jennifer Jenson

Presenter Dr. Bev Freedman with Program Co-Chair Susanna Tang

Series Retrospective
I talked to many of the attendees in this series. There were many who were able to come to all three sessions surrounding the uses of technology. What can I say other than "keep coming to PDK events?"

-   All of the presenters in their own ways noted that this online world is here to stay and needs to be taken seriously.

-   However these technologies shape schools, there will always be a role for teachers to promote wise use.

-   To take best advantage we need not only to collaborate with students but with each other: to find, discern, unpack, critique, and collect the best of what is online. For example, I hope to work with my network of teachers to compile a database of useful YouTube sites that develop teaching strategies for best use in classrooms in my subject area (History). This is a tiny project but should demonstrate the power of collaboration. None of us can do it all, but all of us together can do what we need to do to promote learning. We cannot predict the future but we can prepare for it.

Did you miss one or more of these sessions? Thanks to the technologies, we have been exploring York University's ABEL (Advanced Broadband Enabled Learning). Watch the U of T Chapter website for the url for these streaming videos.