

Virtual Reality an additional learning tool

A QCSD technology initiative is helping students “visit” far away locations.

By Gary Weckselblatt

On Tuesday, Ryan Wieand’s fourth-grade class researched various forms of alternative energy in textbooks. On Wednesday, the students had an enhanced educational experience.

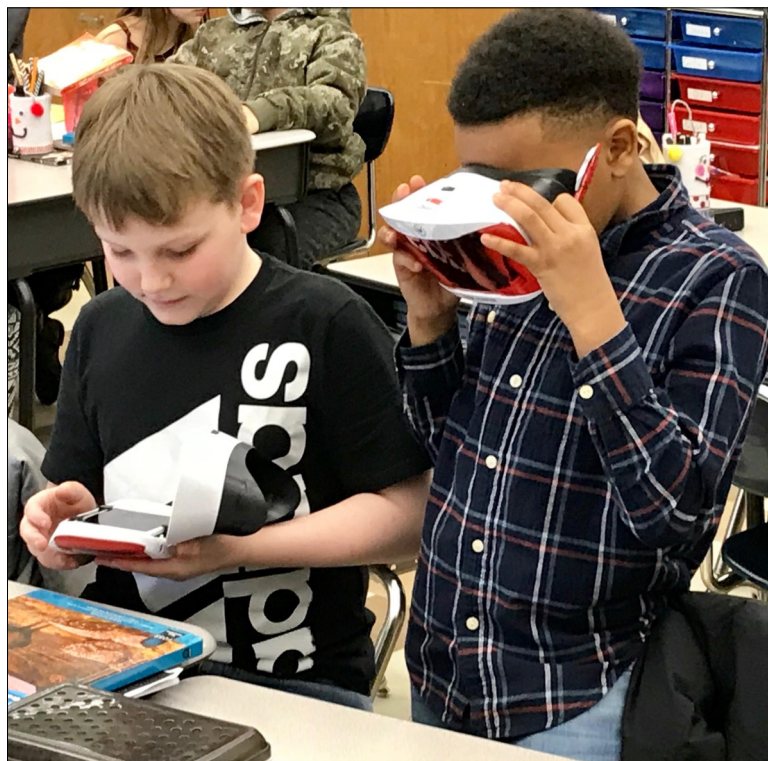
Using Google Expeditions Virtual Reality headsets, Mr. Wieand led his Quakertown Elementary School students to far away locations where they viewed various forms of energy. One stop took them to an ice cream factory in Scotland that takes advantage of various alternative forms of energy to help improve the environment.

“Students were stunned by the images, because they never had an opportunity to connect to what they were learning in this way before,” Mr. Wieand said.

The use of Google Expeditions is a technology initiative in the Quakertown Community School District, said Joe Kuzo, QCSD’s director of technology. QE and the Sixth Grade Center have each received 30 units. Another 10 are at Pfaff Elementary School for special education students as an incentive for achieving goals.

“We’re in the pilot phase right now,” Mr. Kuzo said. “Based on feedback, hopefully, we’ll be able to expand it, especially at the elementary level.”

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Ryan Wieand’s fourth-grade students at Quakertown Elementary School used Google Expeditions to learn about alternative energy sources this week.

Google VR

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He noted that colleges and universities use similar technology to give virtual tours online to prospective students.

Mr. Wieand ran the lesson through an i-Pad, which shows him if students are following along or have taken a wrong turn. He said they were “blown away” by the experience.

“I can immerse students in environments or destinations that they may never see on their own or may be too dangerous to visit in real life,” he said. “VR also provides a background knowledge for students that is often missing. People would be shocked to hear how many students have never had the chance to visit common places like the beach before. Now they can visit and experience those places from the comfort of their classroom! It’s one thing to read about something in a textbook, but for the students to be up close to the content and be close enough to touch it, simply can’t be beat.”

From an educator’s perspective, Mr. Wieand said “Virtual Reality technology adds a layer of excitement, interaction and engagement to my lessons, which is harder to do with traditional strategies.

“Today’s students need a higher level of interaction than years ago and VR definitely brings that to my classroom. This type of technology hooks them immediately, raising their interest level and helping maintain their focus on the topic being taught.”

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