

Angela Gatt:

Tech-savvy teacher makes Grade 4 fun for all learners

By Lauren Donnelly, BCTF staff



BARTERING, bargain-hunting, and occasionally getting ripped off—learning about the fur trade became real this

year for students at Bert Ambrose Elementary in Fort St. John. The Grade 4 students traded pint-sized containers of gunpowder—poppy seeds in this case—and felted facsimiles of Hudson's Bay blankets. The wares were all carefully assembled by teacher Angela Gatt.

The simulation fur trade is just one example of Angela's knack for creating engaging lessons for her students.

"My own philosophy would be that kids learn best when they are doing and experiencing things in as real a way as possible," she says. "I try to think about everybody in every lesson, and make sure that I am providing different entry points for everyone."

Angela keeps her classroom bright and well-organized. Details like sky-blue curtain toppers and soft fabrics make for a cozy atmosphere, and Angela has other ways of making students feel at home.

Bert Ambrose has a breakfast program, but sometimes students arrive too late to access it. Angela stocks a snack drawer that she tops up when she can. Having items like apple

sauce, crackers, and granola bars easily accessible mean that students' learning isn't impeded by rumbling tummies.

Attention to detail is a strength of Angela's. She's a scrapbooker in her free time, and she's actively involved in her school's science fair as well as the regional science fair.

Experience has shown her that technology can make learning more accessible. For lower-level readers Angela uses an app called Clicker that reads articles to students, highlighting each word along the way. "That way they can be independent," she says. "They can still be part of the room."

She says that independence can work wonders. She remembers a student who was struggling to demonstrate what he knew, so she had him use an iPad app to create a project. "What he showed me through that use of technology was so much more than I had ever seen him do with anything else," she says.

That's when she knew she wanted more of that technology in her classroom.

"The output that they were giving me with that technology was so exciting," says Angela. "They were proud that they were able to show 'this is what I know.'"



Annie M. Photography

Her use of technology extends outside of the classroom too. Angela is a fan of FreshGrade for its ease of use and accessibility. She uses it to share academic progress, highlight important dates, and to send weekly letters to parents.

Parents and students aren't the only ones benefiting from her use of technology. In 2012 Angela started a website as a place to connect with other teachers online and to share her ideas. It's grown into something much bigger. She blogs, and posts lesson ideas and resources. "I feel like I've been able to help support a lot of teachers in BC with the curriculum change," she says. "That's been really meaningful to me to hear their feedback."

Angela is excited about the idea of individualized learning and its implications for students as well as teachers. There's room for all kinds of learners, and there's room for different kinds of teachers too.

"I think teachers can be really hard on themselves, but it's important for people to know that the love for your job matters so much," says Angela. "We all have our different styles and I think it's so amazing even just to walk in my building and see how teachers' love for their job comes out in different ways." •