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**HEADLINE:** **Education**, on demand: At Don Estridge school, webcams and podcasts are tools for teaching

**BYLINE:** Rhonda J. Miller, South Florida Sun-Sentinel

**BODY:**

Dec. 5--BOCA RATON -- In a middle school with a voracious appetite for innovation, half a dozen teachers are pushing back the walls of the classroom.

They're using cameras so that students at home or on vacation can get their lessons.

**Podcasting** and live streaming video from classes at Don Estridge High Tech Middle School are parallel experiments to discover how cameras can add to learning.

"Are you breezin' today?" program coordinator Jamie Thyng asks math teacher Billy Garren.

Breezin' is the school's term for live video streaming from the classroom using the Palm Beach County School District's Macromedia Breeze software. Generally, it's for staff conferences, but this middle school is driven by its name and is ever alert for new ways to use technology in **education**.

Garren is breezin' today, proud of it, and thinks more teachers should use it.

His laptop is open on a desk at the front of the seventh-grade class. The computer's pinhole camera lens focuses on him doing calculations on the white SMARTboard, which are recorded by the computer.

One student, sick at home today, is logged in via the school district's Edline system for parents and students. The boy sends brief instant messages and offers his answer to the math problem.

Three of Garren's students -- who were in Connecticut, Maryland and Nevada for an extra vacation day around Thanksgiving -- logged in.

Another of his students, eighth-grader Samantha Shumaker, was out sick with a cold a few weeks ago and logged on for the first time.

"It was really cool," she said. "I didn't have to make up my work."

Even though Samantha was home sick, she felt rested enough to join her class via computer.

"I was just sitting on the couch with my laptop. It seemed fine," Samantha said.

The question of whether students might be expected to keep up with class work through video lessons, even when they're home sick, hasn't been examined because the streaming and **podcasting** are new projects, Principal Debra Johnson said.

It was the students' idea to log into the live classroom lesson when they're out sick, Johnson said.

Another camera in Garren's classroom is videotaping the lesson so students can download the podcast and watch it when convenient. Garren is one of six math, science and social studies teachers involved in the project.

"**Podcasting** is like a teacher in your pocket," Johnson says. Using small, inexpensive cameras, it costs about \$40 per classroom.

Some students watch the podcast and then discuss the lesson chat-room style, like an online study group.

"Every teacher in the district can do this," said Garren, an enthusiastic, third-year teacher.

Perhaps, but not so fast, says Johnson, bursting with similar enthusiasm tempered with the restraint of a researcher responsible for determining value and efficiency.

"We're in the discovery phase," Johnson said of the project that started in October. "We're going to see what works best."

As issues evolve, staff members will examine them.

Will families, for instance, tend to take an extra day or two of vacation if a student can log in for live classroom lessons?

If parents log in to the live stream with their Edline password, will they discuss the lesson with their children, and will that be helpful to students? That question brings up the equity issue, as to how that affects students whose families cannot afford a home computer.

For now, the plan is for teachers involved in the **podcasting** and streaming to train other teachers in the school so more classrooms can be in video mode for second semester, Thyng says.

The principal is delighted when developments at Don Estridge Middle can be a model for other schools. After all, the school is named for a man known as the father of the personal computer.

Don Estridge, who died in a plane crash in 1985, was an engineer whose team developed the IBM PC 25 years ago at its Boca Raton headquarters.

"We're experimenting with cameras and finding out what the kids are accessing the most. We want to record the best lessons, key concepts and reviews," Johnson said. While the lessons continue, the space

they occupy could change with video and other innovations.

Says Johnson: "A lot of what we're doing shakes up the schoolhouse."

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