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## iPad use out of sync with L.A. charter school's philosophy

*Ocean Charter, a school based on the Waldorf educational approach that strictly limits technology provided iPads for student use.*

November 14, 2013 | By Howard Blume

The eighth-graders in Stephanie McGurk's class at Ocean Charter School began a recent day as if nature. Next, they played scales on recorders as they sat in a classroom furnished with wood furniture and plants.

Then McGurk did something incongruous in a school that avoids plastic toys, let alone technology.

By chance, Ocean Charter, a Westside school based on the Waldorf educational philosophy, became an effort to provide an iPad to every student and teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

As a charter school, Ocean is run independent of L.A. Unified. Still, under state law, charters are subject to the same conditions and L.A. Unified decided that charters operating on district property are eligible for iPads. Ocean Charter uses classrooms on the campus of Westchester High, which was among the first 47 schools to receive iPads.

And for Ocean, this created unique tensions. The school was caught between a philosophy that eschews technology and a district determined to provide it.

Ocean asks parents to keep students away from technology and media on school nights. It also asks parents to limit screen time until sixth grade.

A strict, private Waldorf school might not have even accepted the devices. For more than 100 years, Waldorf schools emphasize child development over skill development.

Instead of plastic dolls with detailed faces, for example, young children in a Waldorf environment use toys made of materials such as wood, silk, wool and cotton -- that are unformed enough to stimulate the imagination. Students are encouraged to express their emotions; students often stay with the same teacher three years or more.

Some parents who subscribe to Waldorf methods don't let their children use technology at all; others are more lenient.

As a public school, Ocean cannot follow all Waldorf beliefs and practices. It has eliminated religious instruction and accepted annual standardized testing -- as well as the idea that the school will be accountable for its performance.

Still, a technological emphasis seems to cut against the grain.

Nearly every classroom has a garden as well as shelves of books, musical instruments and a weather station. Last week, fourth graders were exploring mushrooms using their five senses.

Director Kristy Mack-Fett is aware that new state standardized tests will be given on computers and that students must have some knowledge of technology. For those reasons, she's grateful for the devices.

At the same time, parents and teachers have shared their serious concerns freely, although their  
"Most parents are plugged in," said parent Lisa Cahill. "It's not like they're off the grid." But until  
would only use iPads for testing, they were "a little freaked out."

"I don't want to be responsible for a \$700 iPad," said parent Tamara Haas, who questioned the  
Mack-Fett was discomfited by a promotional video showing a classroom of students plugged into  
"This technology shouldn't replace a school community with people interacting in live situations.  
Nor was she impressed with students writing on the touch screens with their fingers; Ocean instead  
over three years.

"The physical act of writing is important, both print and cursive," Mack-Fett said.

Ocean, which offers kindergarten through eighth grade, has needs beyond iPads. It lacks a permit  
are split between a rented church for the lower grades and space at Westchester for grades four through  
the school's only running water is in the student bathrooms.

In her class last week, McGurk explained to students how to turn on the devices and how to carry them in  
cases, glass screen facing in. But it's not as if most students are new to computers.

At home, Andre Hinton said he has a MacBook Air, two MacBook Pros, an iPod, an iPhone 5 and an iPad.  
West Adler recognized that the device handed out was a newer model because it has a different color.  
"We have Garage Band," he added excitedly, scanning the apps. "I want to try it."

"Can we use the iPad today?"

"No," McGurk told him.

At Ocean, students have learned word processing in sixth grade and online research in seventh grade.  
appropriate, for yearlong projects in eighth grade. Recently, one student built a computer, and another  
challenges around becoming a female FBI agent.

That format will continue, although students will learn how to use a keyboard earlier and take on more  
necessary skills.

In contrast, L.A. schools Supt. John Deasy has bigger plans for the iPads in the nation's second-  
-- which cost \$768 each -- will deliver the curriculum for the district's 560,000 students, starting  
offering a richer, more engaging experience tailored to each student, while also allowing for greater  
students to have the benefit of devices that their more affluent peers take for granted.

The effort to distribute the iPads to schools has encountered delays and other problems, including  
high schools deleted security filters so they could surf the Web freely. The episode led to the devices  
students elsewhere now must keep them at school. On Tuesday, the Board of Education voted to  
contract and examine the academic benefits.

At Ocean, the teachers don't intend to supplant creative, if low-tech, teaching strategies. In McC bone and muscle systems but she also brought the topic to life with tales about the Day of the Dead Halloween. Her students made sugar skulls and used watercolors to paint pictures of them, which were covered with vibrantly colored chalk drawings of a skeleton band performing in a graveyard. As a classroom, and she engaged students with a game of bone bingo, which also served as review for

Sixth-grade teacher Kit Olbris knows how to use computers -- she's getting an online degree and is hooked on iPads.

"I suppose you could go out in the garden and take a picture of a flower with an iPad and then compare it to teaching at Waldorf schools since the mid-1980s. "But then you're not in the garden experiencing

Olbris added: "Observing the sunset. Going out and looking at the night sky. Finding the pole star. You can't get this in a Google search."

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