

PARADIGM SHIFT FOR VIC HIGH COMPUTER TEACHER

By King Lee, VHS 1958

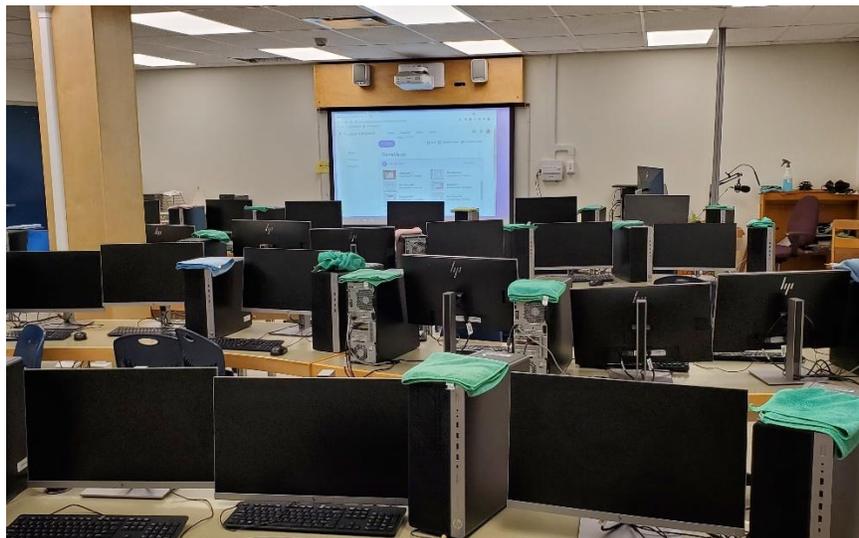
Fourteen years into his almost-25 years of teaching computer programming at Victoria High School, Greg Poy shifted his learning goal for students.

Mr. Poy recalls that the paradigm shift happened in 2010 during a field trip to EA Sports in Burnaby. EA (Electronic Arts) Sports was founded in 1982 by former Apple employee Trip Hawkins and is a pioneer in the home computer game industry. By 2020, EA Sports became the second-largest video game company in the Americas and Europe behind Activism Blizzard.

Mr. Poy said the visit to the B.C. facility, which now employs 1,300 and is the world's largest video game test operation, was not only visibly inspiring, but also added a key to his teaching toolbox.

He remembers asking the tour guide how one gets a job there. She said the prerequisite was not as much about educational requirements as it was about how well the applicant worked with others.

When Mr. Poy began teaching at Vic High in 1996, his goal was to give his computer-programming classes facts and knowledge about the fast-changing field. After the visit, he changed the emphasis towards teaching students to apply knowledge and work as a team.



The class size hasn't changed much as it has been limited by the number of computers wired into the room. He started with 25 students, one more than work stations in his Vic High classroom (banking on the average of one absentee student per day). It is about the same despite the fact Vic High now has students from Grade 9 to 12 instead of the Grade 10 to 12 when Mr. Poy started there.

His courses teach the effective use of the internet, programming skills, how to find, move and store information across networks.

The Grade 11 and 12 classes are now learning Python, a new computer language which he described as "wonderful" for coding.

The challenge, he said, was to teach them how to work with each other. He required them to work in team projects, although he did have one notable exception. The student wanted to build a remote-control car which operated faster from a computer chip installed in his cell phone. He solved a steering problem by building a part made on his home 3-D printer.



Greg Poy works the controls at an arcade game built in 2019 by Grade 11 student Elliot.

Mr. Poy credits his teaching career to his mother, Carole Poy. In 1989 or 1990 she was a teacher at Braefoot Elementary School and convinced him to bring his skills to the school's computer club. He remembers there was about a dozen students and they delved into Apple HyperCards and turtle graphics.

He enrolled at the University of Victoria in 1989 in a general program but switched to education before his graduation in 1993.

He said he wanted to teach at the elementary-school level and began as a TOC (Teacher on Call), subbing at Braefoot, Lake Hill, Frank Hobbs, Tillicum, and View Royal elementary schools.

In 1996, then-Principal Denis Harrigan, who learned about Mr. Poy's computer skills, offered a one-year, temporary contract at Vic High.

"I thoroughly enjoyed high school," Mr. Poy admitted after his year at Vic High. He applied to fill the permanent position and has been the only computer-programming teacher there since. He said other District 61 high schools, such as Oak Bay and Mt. Douglas, have had two computer-programming teachers, but Vic High has not been given that luxury.

"Things just really took off," he said, "after the permanent position was confirmed."

He credits Mr. Harrigan with his enthusiastic pro-technology support; as well as the many administrators throughout the years who have always been supportive of funding computer technology. In fact both the current principal Aaron Parker and vice principal Chris Koutougos have taught computer technology in the past before they became administrators and share an enthusiasm for the subject.

Mr. Poy said there was one internet hookup located in the school library when he started and he was not only the teacher, but the technical support. A new computer lab was built at Vic High during Mr. Poy's initial period at the school.

He recalls that his early students loved making websites and animated hamsters.

Some years ago, he bumped into one of those students on a BC Ferries trip and found out that the student worked at Cisco Systems, a major networking firm.

Asked for a humorous recollection for this story, Mr. Poy said he told students heading on a field trip to Camosun College that the bus would leave the Interurban Campus at 2:45 sharp and that anyone who didn't get back on board in time would be left behind.

He remembers the reception he received when he returned to his classroom after having to get a ride back from a colleague.

"I'm so fortunate to work at Vic High," he said. "Everyone is so supportive."

He is looking forward to returning to the 'new' Vic High from his temporary Topaz Campus classroom and has no plans to teach anywhere but Vic High until his retirement.