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BRIAN HARDER FOR TIME

TECH SCHOOL
 The Galileo staff pushes teachers to use new technology and pupils to ask more questions

Inquiring Minds

Brenda Gladstone Patricia Clifford Sharon Friesen
 [Galileo Educational Network]

THE GALILEO EDUCATIONAL NETWORK is kicking the sides off the box that has corralled children in school systems designed for the assembly lines of a bygone industrial age. “We are out to change the world,” says Brenda Gladstone, the standard-bearer and business mind of Galileo.

Gladstone’s partners in world changing are the award-winning pair of Sharon Friesen and Patricia Clifford. They are on education’s front lines, leading a team of tech-savvy mentors dedicated to the professional development of classroom teachers on a long-term basis. The Galileo-trained teachers fuse technology with learning, to guide

students in creating knowledge rather than regurgitating received information.

Galileo had its start as a 1995 pilot project in a new rural school featuring state-of-the-art technology. Anticipating staff members’ apprehension about learning to use the technology on top of maintaining their regular workload, Gladstone solicited funds from the local business community and recruited Clifford and Friesen to offer sustained professional development. The team teachers were known for turning classroom rules inside out to engage even students who couldn’t conform to traditional schooling. “Kids operate differently in the world because of technology, and we need to figure

out different ways to teach them,” Clifford says. Three years later, an intrigued Education Minister offered provincial money to expand their pilot. Then the University of Calgary provided a new home that allowed Galileo to jump school-district boundaries. By structuring the network as a fee-for-service, not-for-profit organization, Gladstone could collar private funding as well as government grants.

The heart of Galileo is inquiry-based learning. Teachers fuel students’ curiosity by pursuing their questions in the context of curriculum. “You learn how to listen to questions kids bring collectively to you, to say, ‘How do I open this up in a way that everybody in the class can find something to be interested in?’” Clifford says. “The rule is that everybody has to sweat the same so there’s a dignity, and everybody’s work contributes to a larger understanding of the subject.”

The result is that students are “uncovering juicy bits of information, not that the teacher is telling them,” says Thea Green, Grade 5/6 teacher at Riverbend School in Calgary. “They’re thrilled when they discover things themselves.” —By **Melanie Collison**