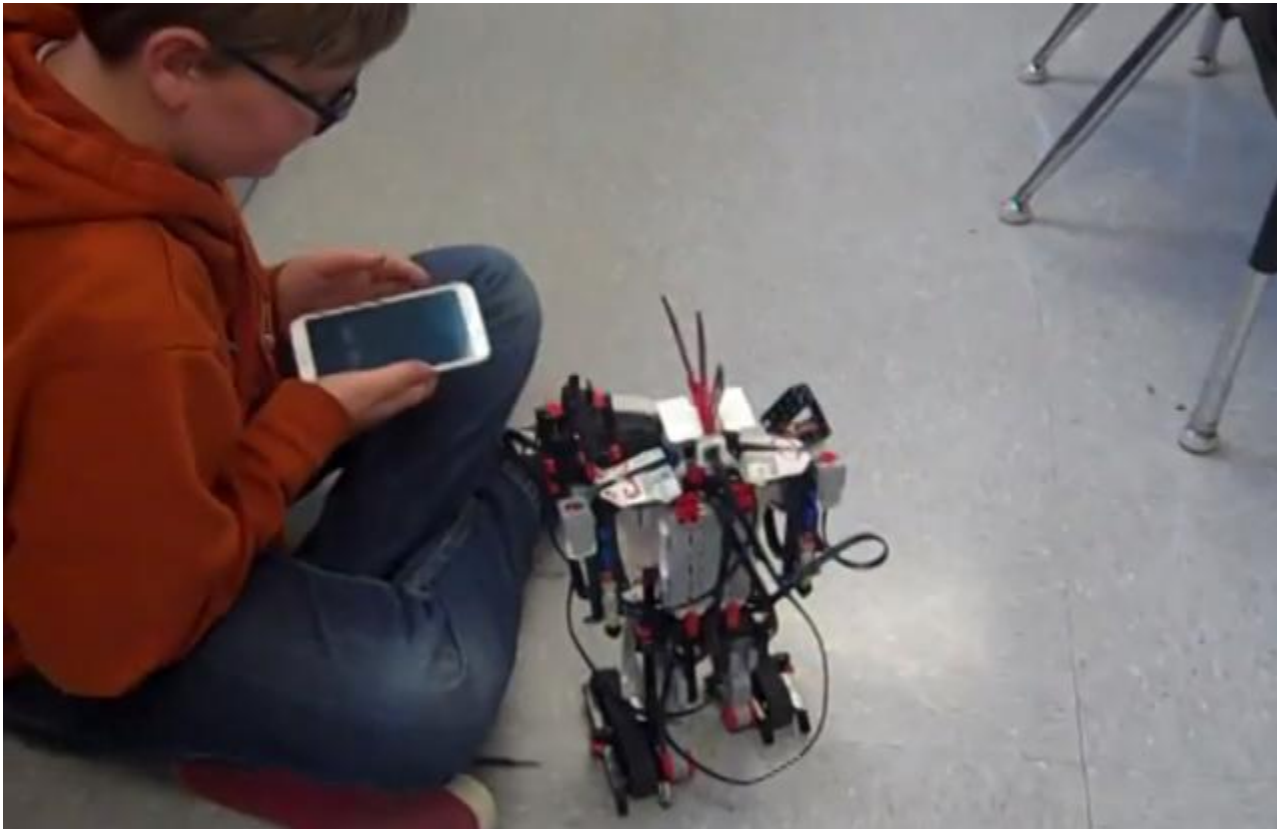


Innovative Canada opens eyes in Edwardsville District and beyond

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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The word innovation and Rob Canada seem to go hand in hand.

Canada, an instructor at Columbus Elementary School, has been recognized as one of the most dynamic teachers in Edwardsville School District 7.



“I have been here since 1998,” he said. “We are lucky because we have tons of technological leaders all over the district and sometimes one of us gets handed the ball and runs with it. I have learned a lot of things from Shannon Weber, a teacher at Worden and Alex Fox, the assistant principal at the high school. There are key people all over the place in the district and never a shortage of great ideas.”

Canada said Edwardsville Superintendent Dr. Ed Hightower has encouraged the teachers to be innovative and has been especially supportive of his work. Hightower said Canada has been a huge inspiration to other teachers in the district for trying new things. Canada has done a lot with video work, power points and many types of learning that involves computers and technology. He has assisted several of the teachers in the district in learning new ways of reaching students.

“Dr. Hightower has talked that we have to be able to get out of the way of the students and I like that philosophy,” Canada said. “Things that would normally take a few hours they might learn in 20 minutes because they absorb things that much more quickly.”

One project that has been fun for the kids at Columbus has been programming Lego robots, Canada said.

“We are in the beginning stages of learning how to program the robot to carry our lunch to the cafeteria,” he said. “We are not just trying to build a remote-controlled toy. This is great at working with them on research and it keeps them a lot more engaged.”

One of the first exciting tasks that Canada did with students was launch a weather balloon. The kids took an old Barbie Jeep and put solar panels on it so it could run on sun. “The videos of the kids hooking up the solar panels and driving the cars were powerful,” Canada said.

The key in Canada’s eyes at being a good science teacher is making things interesting and with computers, he said anything is possible.

“We have to give kids every opportunity to do real life now,” he said. “Some of the most important jobs today are jobs that didn’t exist four or five years ago.”

Fifth-grade teachers in the Edwardsville system are asked to make math instruction more dynamic.

Canada uses recordings and because of that, those can be stopped whenever necessary.

“Sometimes kids might need to see something two or three times or 30 times,” he said of using video recordings in learning. “When we record teaching videos we often have the kids narrate it and they take ownership of it. I think about 80 percent of the time they will narrate the videos and often show the parent and then the community of learners, parents and teachers starts helping out.”

In the late ‘90s, Canada said there was a push to make solid websites and Edwardsville School District became a leader in that regard. The same is happening today as technology evolves, Canada said. “If someone has a really great idea, they will walk to the office and make copies for everyone to see,” he added. “It is really easy to inspire that way.”

Canada has a four-year business degree and master’s degree in education. He started his career working at Boatman’s Bank in St. Louis, but eventually he felt he wanted to help people and become a teacher.

“In elementary teaching, you teach everything from spelling, English, reading, social studies, math, science and health,” he said. “I think there becomes a point in every person’s life where they want to help people. I want to help kids and I think I am in a perfect place in my job with the Edwardsville School District at Columbus.”

The Edwardsville teacher doesn't plan on resting on his laurels any time soon.

"I am always thinking about the next thing," he said. "Wayne Gretzky, the hockey player, got to where he was because he didn't go to where the puck was but where it was going to be. He anticipated the puck would be and where opportunities would be. I try to work on different platforms and always be one step ahead, thinking of the next thing."

