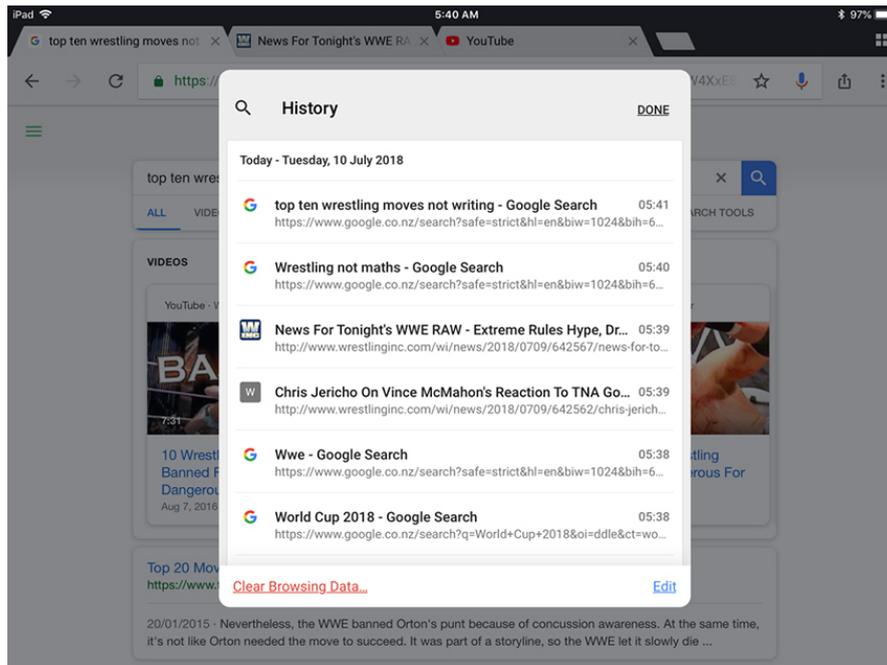


Engagement - visibility = mischief

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Curiosity is a natural part of learning and is especially evident in our young learners. This natural drive to know about the surrounding world is a brilliant aptitude that supports us as educators when developing teaching and learning programmes.

A curious child can be engaged for hours on end in their own world of knowledge curation. However, in an educational setting, there has to be some caution to ensure the learner's engagement is the learning outcome we desire. Often, quiet engagement can just mean the learner is not in "the right place at the right time" and is actually up to mischief.

When I was growing up, we were often up to mischief in the class. We would be completely engaged, silent (apart from the odd quiet giggle) at the back of the room, under a desk, or tucked in a corner. This often involved looking through the Encyclopaedia Britannica or National Geographic to broaden our horizons, or making miniguns with our biro pens' internal compartments, or creating paper spitballs to fire out of felt pen pipes behind our reading books.

However, these opportunities were few and far between, as I remember all of my teachers had an uncanny knack for identifying when my engagement in an activity was actually mischief in the making or not. It was like the teachers all had eyes in the back of their head and could read my and my friend's thoughts before we even had formulated them.

The classrooms in which I was a student were always arranged so the visibility of the space, learners, and equipment was achieved by the teacher. I also think, looking back, that I was seated according to my potential for mischief: usually by a sensible student.

Learning in classrooms is now supported by not only the traditional tools and strategies but we are also privileged to have technology supporting and, in some cases, turbocharging the learning environment.

The opportunities for learners to be engaged is much greater due to the much freer access to knowledge and the ways technology capture our learners' attention. Gone are the encyclopaedias and National Geographics — replaced with Google, Bing, [Kiddle](#), etc. Gone, in many cases, are the computer labs in schools — replaced with personal mobile devices like the Chromebooks, laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

To protect ourselves as educators and ensure the wellbeing of one another in the long term, we need greater visibility and understanding of what our learners are doing in the time they spend with us. Being able to avoid situations that put us offside with parents, for example, bullying, issues around the amount of screen time, viewing of inappropriate material, can be achieved easily.

There are a number of strategies and systems to support visibility and allow us a greater understanding of what our learners are doing in our classrooms, involving time-proven and digitally-enhanced methods. These include:

- Roving and roaming — you still cannot beat the teacher moving out from a desk or teaching space to wander around the class and interacting directly with students.
- The look — another great tool in the teacher's repertoire — can quickly give a teacher insight into the thoughts of the student and be followed up with a visit if required.
- Questioning and feedback — asking questions or requiring intermittent feedback to ensure the student knows that at any moment you may require them to give feedback on their progress on a task.
- Creating a basic language in the class — for example, “are you in the right place at the right time for your learning?”
- Setting your classroom up with the learners — so that there is a good understanding of the behaviours and expectations are of each space. This empowers your students to monitor and support students to use devices ethically and safely in the spaces. Check out the example from [Rimu's Learning Space](#) at Yaldhurst Model School.
- A really engaging teaching program — with lots of opportunities for creativity to support learners engaging in the curriculum. For example:
 - Testing whether your programme is engaging could involve asking your students by conferencing or getting them to [complete a simple survey](#).

- Stopping and observing your class for a set amount of time — how many are truly engaged in stimulating, progress-enhancing learning? Ask yourself: How do you know? Rinse and repeat daily/weekly.
- Using a tripod or something to lean a phone or tablet onto and focus the device onto an individual or group of learners and use time-lapse photography to capture their engagement.
- Ensuring there are tools and systems in place to ensure visibility of learner's time on technology — using tools such as:
 - N4L filters
 - using a student internet management solution
 - or Hapara Teacher Dashboard which increases visibility for teachers of students on the Google or Office 365 platform
 - or Apple Classroom for iPad visibility
- Programmes of teaching to support the use of technology in classrooms — such as:
 - [Netsafe's resources for educators](#)
 - Cybersmart Curriculums such [Manaiakalani Cybersmart](#)
 - [Be Internet Awesome Programme](#)
- Using a tool like [Videonot.es](#) when using videos in your teaching program — to analyse the video and make the learning from the video visible.

Our learners can be engaged in their learning very easily through great creative tools both analogue and digital. They also have numerous ways to show their understanding of learning and many great platforms to share their learning within and outside of the four walls of the classroom.

When reflecting on engagement in your own schools and classes, are students set up to be:

- merely engaged in an activity to keep them out of mischief?
- cognitively engaged in learning that promotes shifts in understanding?
- visible both in the physical and digital world?

At the end of a session, are you able to see evidence of what learning has occurred?

Comments:

Please share your own strategies you use in your school! Add them to the comments below and share for the benefit of others.



Mark Maddren

[Mark Maddren](#) is a Facilitator at CORE Education. He assists schools in the use of e-learning, and promotes connectedness and collaborative learning within a school and its wider community. Working with Learning Community Clusters, Mark supports the coordination and development of programmes, partnerships, and relationships within clusters. This involves working with early childhood centres and school leadership.