



David Considine's

TEN TECHNOLOGY TIPS FOR PRINCIPALS

It's Not the Hardware or the Software: It's the Underwear!

We have been adding tools to schools for over 100 years. In the computer era many of these tools have claimed they would revolutionize or transform the teaching/learning process. They don't. Innovative tools are often undermined by the culture and climate of schools as institutions. To save time and money, any administrators wishing to use technology to increase test scores or improve teaching and learning need to take the following into account before adding new equipment. So be a techno-skeptic!

1 TECHNOLOGY INVENTORY. Stop spending! You cannot move forward with technology if you do not know where you are. An inventory seeks to identify what equipment is in your school, who is using it, where, when and how they use it and the condition it is in. The results help you identify high, low and moderate media/technology users as well as non-users. The information can be used to evaluate both the frequency and the effectiveness of technology use along with exemplary teaching with media and teachers who might need assistance.

2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT. The Technology Inventory should provide evidence to be used in planning new acquisitions of media/technology. The needs assessment is not a wish list or shopping list. It seeks to identify weaknesses, gaps or needs in hardware and software. It can be used to establish spending priorities and to develop fair and equitable distribution of resources so the technology budget does not favor one department, individual, program area or group of students. It should also involve a strategy that helps align the new equipment or software with existing resources and plan a maintenance component for the budget. Much of this can and should be done by a Technology Committee where teachers share decision-making.

3 DIFFERENTIATED STAFF DEVELOPMENT. One Size Does Not Fit All. Just as equipment needs to be updated, so do teachers. Too many schools and districts assume teachers will figure it out for themselves. Most of them don't. They're too busy and have too many other priorities. Many of them have come to resent change (technological or otherwise) as something that **happens to them, not thru them**. Resentment is an enemy to effective staff development. Forget the mandates: motivate!

- Involve teachers in decision—making about what type of training they need, as well as questions about when, where, why and how the training will take place.
- Management models such as Concerns Based Adoption or the Diffusion of Innovation Theory suggest that meaningful change starts with ME; that is, with the people we want to embrace change. When they ask “What’s it got to do with Me?” we need to respect and address their personal and professional context to get them on board.
- Plan staff development for teachers at different career stages (early, middle and late)
- Plan staff development for teachers in the same subject or program areas.
- Don't just show them how to turn on the equipment. Show them how all of the new resources and technology relate to what they are already doing. (Subject area, standards, developmental needs of students, etc.)
- Always provide additional opportunities to refresh and develop the new skills. Most single shot training exercises are not enough. They need time to practice, apply, modify, and own.

4 IT'S THE PROCESS NOT THE PROGRAM: OR A SMART BOARD IS ONLY AS SMART AS THE TEACHER USING IT. Research since the era of silent film has confirmed and continues to confirm that teachers are the vital instructional intermediaries who help students MEaningfully engage with technological products and programs. The decisions teachers make, help to align tools, tasks and learners. Turning a program on without turning the students on to the program is an exercise in electronic baby sitting.

- Your teachers should always preview media before using it.
- Preview provides preparation time that helps teachers provide students with clues and cues about what to watch and listen for.
- Less is more. Research suggests showing segments of film, TV and other programs in short segments preceded by guidance and clear expectations; then follow by questions, activities and appropriate instructional strategies based on the screenings.
- Using teachers as reviewers is a potentially valuable asset which involves teachers recording three or four sentences about the strengths and weaknesses of any program they have used, along with student responses to the program. This form of record keeping takes little time and can be of enormous benefit to other teachers in the school and to new teachers as they are hired. It's your own greatest hits list right at your fingertips with the added benefit that it did not come from the company or the distributor but is generated by your own staff who feel empowered and respected by the process.

To look at effective use of media and multi-genre media teaching, open the *Richer Readings* pdf at www.media-literacy.net.

5 MEDIA & STUDENTS: BRAIN DRAINS OR BRAIN GAINS?

Does modern media hurt or help kids? We've been having this debate since the days of silent film. Listen to your teachers and your parents and you'll find media advocates, adversaries and accomplices. Parents who let kids watch anything at anytime are accomplices just like teachers who use media to baby sit, or reward students. If we want to spend time and money on technology we need to make sure the use is effective & efficient. That means we have to be aware of the literature of the field and we must be able to explore and explain what it says about the impact of media and technology on students.

- A relatively easy way for administrators to keep up to date with this data is to use the internet to locate and bookmark the home pages for the Kaiser Family Foundation [www.kff.org] and the Pew Internet and American Life Project [www.pewinternet.org].

A Princeton-Brookings report, *The Future of Children* (2008) noted the positives and negatives of media use. Media content designed to promote pro-social behavior, for example, was found to increase social capacities such as altruism, cooperation and tolerance of others.

On the other hand, risky behaviors such as aggression, alcohol and drug use were strongly linked to media consumption.

- Research also confirms that both teachers and parents can engage in co-viewing behavior that helps children to question, challenge, reject or endorse media messages. This balanced approach rather than constant criticism of the media has been shown to be valid and consistent with media literacy "best practices." (To see more about positive and negative media impacts and effective instructional strategies teaching with media open the "Brain Drains or Brain Gains" pdf on the homepage of www.media-literacy.net.)

6 PRIVILEGING PRINT PRIVILEGES ONE TYPE OF LEARNER.

Students who are successful with traditional skills such as reading and writing are not always as creative or skillful when it comes to comprehending or creating media texts. This point has been acknowledged by The National School Boards Association and is consistent with learning theories related to multiple intelligences, learning styles and brain-based learning. Providing these students with opportunities to utilize current technologies as part of their school work, will not only engage them it may well reduce absenteeism and increase retention rates.

7 MEDIA LITERACY IS NOT ANTI-LITERACY.

One myth-conception held by some educators and parents is the belief that new literacies are somehow opposed to old, or traditional literacy; that working with screens and images for example, means not working with books. Take a look at those screens. Sure, there are plenty of pictures but there's also a lot of printed text and whatever kids do or do not feel about reading and writing in school, outside of school they spend a lot of time using technology to read and write. Progressive educators now realize that we need to give students the intellectual skills to think critically about those texts. Media literacy is defined as the ability not just to access media texts or to create media texts but to effectively analyze, and evaluate those texts. It also means giving them design and production skills to make effective media messages. If you sat thru a mind numbing PowerPoint presentation with too many bells and whistles- you know being able to make a program is not the same as being able to design one that engages and informs rather than distracts, As a couple of authors put it, "Where's the Power and what's the Point?" (Mason & Hlynka, 1998)

8 TEACHING WITH OR THRU MEDIA IS NOT MEDIA LITERACY. Another myth-conception held by some educators is the belief that they are already doing media literacy so they do not need to update their skills or practices. In reality many of these individuals are using media and technology as delivery systems to teach their standard course of study. Media Literacy requires teaching ABOUT media. It utilizes key principles of media literacy defined by educators in the U.S., Canada, Australia and the U.K. It also recognizes and applies media literacy “best practices” identified by experts and published in a document from The Office of National Drug Control Policy at the White House.

9 VALUE THEIR VOICES AND VISIONS. One of those best practices says schools should include production experience. Traditional literacy required the ability to write, not just read. Media literacy requires the ability to effectively create media messages, not just comprehend someone else’s messages..When the work is displayed, distributed, screened and exhibited, students are responsive to the presence of this wider “authentic audience.” It also frequently brings greater parent involvement and participation.

10 GUIDELINES NOT ROADBLOCKS FOR RICH RESOURCES. One of the most frustrating problems I hear from teachers is the excessive use of filters that block out legitimate websites. In the interest of protecting children or avoiding lawsuits some over-zealous administrators create policies which are overly restrictive, burden teachers, disrespect them as professional decision makers –and run the risk of making school increasingly irrelevant to young people; a point recognized by the National School Boards Association report, *Creating & Connection* (2007).

- *YouTube* contains many outstanding segments that can energize students in ways that are relevant to standards and the curriculum. Limiting student access may be an acceptable practice in some communities but teachers should be given the opportunity to utilize

relevant segments in instructionally valid ways in their classrooms.

- Effective written policies and guidelines for selecting and using materials in the classroom should be established (with teacher input).
- Where approval is needed for using a clip or resource it should not come from a single administrator but from colleagues in the program area to promote teamwork, mutual respect and collegiality.
- Violation of the policies and practice should have clear consequences but they should be confined to the instructor without blanket restrictions being imposed on other teachers who have followed the guidelines.

FINAL THOUGHT

When teachers experience change (technological or otherwise) as something that happens **to them not thru them**, many resist & resent. They may comply in public, but when they close that classroom door, silent subversion follows. Modern management techniques tell us there is a better way that benefits individuals and the system. Which do you think would work better in your school; you being the leader or the boss?*

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