

TIPS FOR TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM



by Derek Merilees

Imagine a classroom where every student has a notebook computer. Where teachers can seamlessly and easily tap into content, post homework and class materials, test students online; effectively bridging the gap to anywhere-anytime learning and firmly establishing the 21st century classroom.

We're not there yet. But clearly technology is contributing to the transformation of education—the students out there today are “digital natives” who weave technology effortlessly through their lives, and who are creating the demand for the integration of technology into the classroom. A pilot project in Montreal, Quebec led by Lester B. Pearson School Board, for example, provided HP Mini-Notebook PCs to four-year-old students last fall with the objective of enhancing learning opportunities. These students aren't simply learning how to use the technology; they're learning how to creatively approach projects and problem solve.

There are many resources and much information available to help teachers incorporate technology into their classroom environments. Below are some tips and hints to help navigate the world of the digital student.

Know yourself

Just like in every other profession, there are teachers who are interested in technology and are therefore tech-savvy, and others who are less comfortable and natural with the advent of technology in the education system. It can be overwhelming to be faced with students who live and breathe technology and have integrated it into the fabric of their day-to-day lives. Take a minute to honestly assess your level of technological knowledge, and use that as a starting point.

Know the trends

Whether it's the latest social media site like Twitter, or the newest trend in computing like mini-notebooks, put some time aside each week to catch up on technology trends. Being able to join technology discussions with students, or better yet, provide some net-new information for them on the newest trend, allows for better connections with your students. A good place to start is the International Society for Technology in Education at www.iste.org.

Know your audience

No one knows their students better than teachers. Leverage that relationship by talking to your students about how they use technology in their personal life. Are they on Facebook and MySpace? What online sites do they like to go to? Use technology to strengthen your connec-

tion with them, and integrate that knowledge into your everyday classroom activities where possible—in the computer lab or in social studies. The use of technology doesn't end at the school door, however. Having a candid conversation with your students about how they can safely and responsibly navigate the Internet, for example, is an important lesson they can use in all of their online interactions.

Leverage available resources

There are many routes available to help teachers incorporate technology into the classroom. Boards of Education have professional development programs available that enable teachers to develop the ideas, capabilities and skills to help integrate technology into the curriculum. For instance, the Simcoe County District School Board rolled out the HP PD program to its teacher base—the program is a framework that allows teachers to become more comfortable and effective in the use and application of technology in the classroom through mentor-based collaborative working environments and job-embedded learning.

As well, many corporate entities have programs and grants to help expand technology options for teachers. For instance, Brookfield High School in Ottawa, Ontario utilized technology from an HP Technology for Teaching grant. The school received HP tablet notebooks, digital projectors, digital cameras, a printer photocopier/scanner and a mobile cart for the school. With these tools at the ready, technology integration quickly evolved. Multimedia Internet access is now a regular part of all classrooms, with many uses from carefully planned presentations or scavenger hunts to spontaneous discussions of daily news.

Be realistic

Incorporating technology into the classroom is a process, and cannot be done all at once. Each teacher will approach it differently and at his or her own pace. The digital student is here to stay and has changed the face of our classrooms for the 21st century.

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