

Questions Tech-Savvy Principals Should Ask Themselves

Technology is a word much used these days, to say the least. But technology always has been with us, at least since we began to walk on two feet and carry tools in our hands. So when we use that word today, we really mean the revolutionary new technologies of the digital age—incredible tools that let us employ vast electronic “minds” to open up new ways of seeing, thinking, and learning that we are only *just beginning* to realize.

Today’s tech-savvy principals use technology, encourage their faculties to use technology, and give their students opportunities to use technology. But they also dream about how they might use some of these amazing new tools.

I daresay we all use e-mail and cell phones—probably too much and too often! And no doubt we all go online for any manner of things. But how much time do we spend really exploring how new technologies can help increase our ability—and our students’ ability—to see and understand the world?

Recently, I’ve been thinking about what it really means to be “tech savvy.” Here, then, is a very incomplete list of some of the questions I think truly tech-savvy principals might ask themselves:

- Do I confuse using new technology with an ability to really take advantage of its mind-expanding nature?
- Has the technology we have adopted actually made us more productive, or has it merely added new tasks with no discernable payoff in automation, information, analysis, or effectiveness?
- Do I have a good sense of some of the many ways that others are using technology in education? Have I visited the most advanced technology-using schools?
- Do I worry that my urban students are falling behind in the more advanced uses of technology? Do I try every day to close the gap in technology use?
- Have I become more productive by using technology? Do I now have more useful data? Do I use technology to run higher levels of analysis on this data? Does this data really




yield greater and more useful insights into the quality of teaching and learning at my school?

- Do I know if my teachers and students are going beyond the bells-and-whistles aspects of technology? Do I see that a slick PowerPoint presentation does not necessarily mean well-researched and well-organized work?
- Do I see students using computers to explore the world outside of the school walls, visualizing complex phenomena, getting immediate and useful feedback on their developing skills and knowledge, or analyzing information?
- Is our school using communications technology to share effective ideas? Are we “flattening” our organization by creating new channels to share lessons and solve problems, or are we using things like e-mail as a newfangled teacher’s mailbox for electronic mimeos?
- Am I frustrated by the lack of computers and connectivity in our classrooms?
- Do I believe enough in the power of technology to dedicate as much professional development as possible to it?

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Helen Coley, principal of Lake Arbor Elementary School in Mitchellville, Maryland, invests both her school’s resources and herself in technology. She recently reminded me of what John Dewey taught us all: that we learn best by doing. Coley believes that if she “does” technology, her teachers will. And if they do technology, their students will.

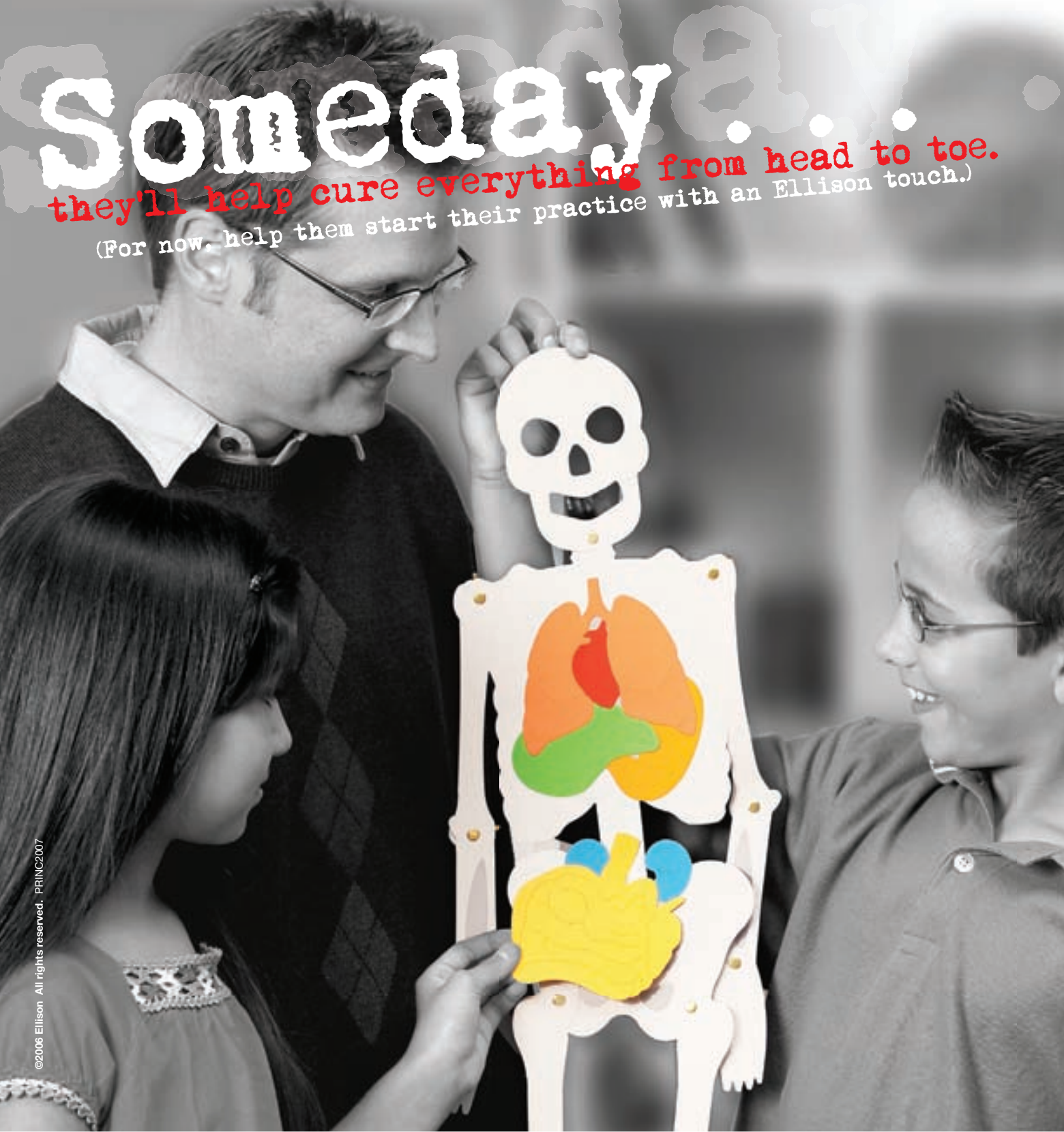
Awhile back I was talking with Pete Thompson, principal of John Carroll Elementary School in Landover, Maryland, about technology. His is a Title I school, where 75 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch. These are children who can ill afford to be as tech-savvy as some of their more fortunate peers. That is why teachers at John Carroll are charged with providing as much technological exposure for children as possible.

Under Thompson’s leadership, technology is being used to incorporate student achievement data into the school’s improvement efforts. He reminded me of something truly important when he said that it was critical to figure out how we can use technology to provide more effective learning for our students. We need, he reminded me, a vision of how our minds can be expanded, not bedeviled, by technology. 

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