You Don’t Have to Know Much About Technology to Apply It

At times the electronic highway seems to have no speed limit, leaving some teachers fearful that students may know more than they do about the newest technology. The truth is that while teachers don’t have to master technology, they must be able to apply it creatively.

In the Mankato, Minnesota, public schools, students are taught computer keyboard skills from kindergarten through eighth grade. Other technology, such as PowerPoint, Web pages, and iMovies, are taught in content areas, where their application is linked to the learning process.

Dakota Meadows Middle School was built as the technology flagship school for the Mankato School District in 1993. Since then, I have taught my eighth-grade English students to use various forms of technology, including the Internet. However, as the years passed, I realized that I needed help if I was to continue upgrading my technology skills to help my students. Luckily, I was able to call on the services of the district’s technology specialist and my building’s media specialist. The three of us worked together in 1996 to teach my students HTML computer programming.

Since then, my challenge has been to integrate new applications in the classroom. For example, I didn’t need HTML anymore when inexpensive Web page design programs became available. I learned PowerPoint to help students with their electronic demonstrations and QuickTime to help them integrate movies in their work. My big learning projects lately have been creating iMovies and iDVDs.

Web Projects

Since 1996, I have taught my eighth-grade students—more than 1,500 of them in all—how to build Web pages and make them “reader friendly” by using appropriate backgrounds, fonts, sizes, and colors. We learned it should take no more than three clicks on links to reach any information. Students now create Web pages on the school’s Web site to post their writing projects. Their mystery stories, for example, can be viewed on our “Mini-Mysteries Main Page” at www.isd77.k12.mn.us/schools/dakota/mystery/contents.html.

In 1997, instead of reading about World War II from a textbook, students interviewed community members about the impact the war had on their lives and used what they learned to create Web pages. Six years later, with improved technology, we redid those pages to include audio and video clips, and digital photos. The new Web pages are accessible at www.isd77.k12.mn.us/schools/dakota/worldwarII/worldwarIIinterviews.htm.

When I started our World War II project, I didn’t know it would turn into a successful undertaking, and I certainly didn’t know that creating Web pages would become an ongoing learning activity, expanding to other conflicts, including the Vietnam War (www.isd77.k12.mn.us/schools/dakota/vietnam/vietnamwar.htm).

Digital Yearbooks

My students’ use of iMovies in the World War II and Vietnam Web page projects led me to think about making a DVD school yearbook. At a day-long DVD workshop, when my media specialist and I explained that we wanted our eighth graders to do—make a DVD yearbook and produce 150 copies for their fellow classmates—no one had never heard of that being done before.

At first, it was hard for the students to break away from the standard yearbook format of print and still photographs, and to think about using video to capture memories of eighth grade, but they became increasingly creative. For example, students rolled dollies with video cameras to record what an eighth-grade hallway looked like before school started. One yearbook segment was a take-off on the children’s book, Alexander’s Horrible, Terrible, Very Bad Day, where everything that could go bad for an eighth grader did.

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Embrace the Possibilities

What my students have accomplished at Dakota Meadows Middle School can be done elsewhere without too much expense. For example, we use iMac computers with iMovies and iDVD capabilities, and only two computers have DVD burners. We also use a video camera and a digital camera, which download to a computer, and an iTunes card to download audio. More important than equipment, however, is a team effort of teachers, administrators, staff, and students committed to making a learning difference with technology.

While I continue to attend technology workshops, I feel I will never have the innate understanding and ease with computers that my students have. Raised on technology, they will always be the experts. I don’t fear this, however; I embrace it.

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Youth Program Quality Assessment

The Youth PQA is not just an assessment. It’s a valuable tool that begins to help you meet the challenges you face every day as you try to provide a quality program for youth. The Youth PQA will help you identify areas in your program where you can excel and others that could stand improvement. And, it will help you to better demonstrate to others the effectiveness of your program.

Once you have administered the Youth PQA, you’ll be in a better position to:

- Validate the quality of your program
- More effectively align with state program standards and accreditation procedures
- Increase your program’s effectiveness
- Help your staff learn more about dynamic youth development methods
- Create interesting, challenging activities to help you connect with youth
- Demonstrate to funding sources that your program is doing important work with strong, documented results

For more information on obtaining Youth PQA materials, training, and other support services, please visit us online at youth.highscope.org, or call the HighScope Youth Development Group at 734/485-2000.