EduTech InSites

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By Jeff Cooper

In my position as Education Technology Specialist for the School of Education at Pacific University, I sometimes find myself in the position of apologist. Aside from apologizing for computer crashes, oftentimes I find myself placed in a defensive stance, answering barbed questions and jibes such as:

- Why do we need to use computers? I hate them.
- My classroom only has one computer, so I can’t really do much anyways.
- Computers aren’t good for little kids, and I’m only teaching second grade.
- The hardware and software don’t work half the time, so why bother?
- I’ll never understand how to use this program (which seems pretty useless and overpriced anyways) and I don’t have the time, energy or inclination to do so.

Technology often becomes today’s scapegoat. The following papers and resources give short shrift to the aforementioned concerns. Instead, I will address the pragmatics of technology and curriculum integration. In short, this paper will help jumpstart K-12 and university educators and present methods, software, websites and philosophies intended to make their lives easier in the long run, help flatten the learning curves, and give sustained support for taking the necessary steps.

If you need convincing that technology belongs in the classroom at virtually all levels, please do not read this paper. Instead, take a look at Technology in Early Education (June 2001) by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory which cites research supporting the following:

- Computers intrinsically motivate young children
- Computers enhance children’s self-concept and improve their attitudes about learning.
- Increase children’s levels of spoken communication
- Children share leadership roles on the computer and initiate interactions more frequently.

The list goes on, as NREL does an excellent job showing it is important that software and
approaches to computer be open ended rather than drill and practice (or drill and kill) in order for students to reap the greatest benefits, and emphasizing using computers for real purposes, and that there are benefits (improved communication and others) for young children using computers. I raise this point because some scholars have recently argued that it is unhealthy for young children (under 8) to use computers, saying they should be playing outside instead. No one is arguing here that children should sit in front of monitors for eight hours a day. Indeed NREL argues that time spent by children in front of any monitor (computer, TV, etc.) should not exceed a couple of hours a day.

The arguments against using computers for children mask the real issue imho (in my humble opinion), namely that educators do not have the time, knowledge, or inclination to incorporate technology into their curriculum. They also feel insecure stepping outside of their element, namely their professional environment and area of expertise, and avoid technology because they don’t want to appear ignorant to their peers and especially to their students. These insecurities need to be overcome and can be addressed by having a system of sustained staff development through peer mentoring, online meetings and listservs. This is possible, but overcoming status quo inertia and getting educators to have fun with something they have loathed for some time is not easy. Indeed, it is quite a task to have educators shift their routine at all, and to get them outside of their comfort zone, making the shift from equilibrium to disequilibrium and back again.

Educators don’t have the time to begin to scratch the surface of what is available in the area of technology integration with curriculum. The key to overcoming this hurdle is ongoing support and collaboration. To this end I offer the following:

- **Programs for Educators** This is a list of roughly 100 software titles that will make an educator’s life easier. Many are freeware or shareware (knowing that budget is always a consideration).
- **Easy Email** This is a set of tutorials and links designed to help the educator learn how to use their email system, set up projects with other educators, find relevant listservs as well as creating their own.
- **WebCT vs. Blackboard** To help educators make an informed decision regarding which platform is most appropriate for their school.
- **Classtools Powerpoint** This powerpoint presentation contains 25 links to online resources for educators. Most of the resources are free, although a few will charge a subscription fee. You can also download this powerpoint presentation here.
- **Educational Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVE)** This paper gives an overview of online polysynchronous (both real time and permanent) environments that allow educators to collaborate and share in ongoing and growing educational communities. If you ever wanted to team teach with peers outside of your classroom, this is an excellent way to go.

I could go on with stories of how I used a 386 in my class (that had no windows, harddrive or mouse, but did have a shell connection to the internet) to inspire my 9th grade students (who wrote at 3rd grade level) to write stories about their community, and become published in papers
around the world. Or how this experience validated them and motivated them to write more, and engage in other projects with other students beyond the boundary of the immediate classroom walls. But that would be just me, talking about what I accomplished, and what I really want to get going here is you, and how to make your classes more enjoyable for everyone. That is why I urge you to take a look at the above resources, and do me a favor, get back in touch with me and add your two cents as to what works. Please add your voice to the global networking that is indeed the motivating wave of the future.

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4 THOUGHTS ON “EDUTECH INSITES”

Mellissa Delvin
on January 30, 2014 at 6:17 PM said:

Thank you for the sensible critique. Me and my neighbor were just preparing to do a little research about this. We got a grab a book from our area library but I think I learned more clear from this post. I’m very glad to see such fantastic information being shared freely out there.

nigeria social network
on February 4, 2014 at 10:18 AM said:

Thanks a lot for providing men and women with these kinds of a remarkable opportunity to read important reviews from here. It is always so superb plus packed having a lot of fun for me personally and my office peers to visit your website minimum 3 times each week to find out the new things you have. And indeed, I’m also really satisfied with your astonishing tips served by you. Some Two details in this posting are totally the simplest we’ve ever had.
Be excellent to every other is one of my favorite quotes. I practically wrote a write-up about that last week! Party on, dude.

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