

## Overcoming the Fear of Technology

Let a school leader who has been there dispel your misconceptions and fears about technology so that you and your students can move forward with confidence.

*Eric Sheninger*

**E**ducation is currently at a crossroads: traditional methods and tools are changing because of advances in technology and learning theory. Some schools across the country are taking the lead in merging sound pedagogy with effective technology integration. Those schools and their leaders, whether they realize it or not, are not only enhancing the teaching and learning processes but also giving students the essential skills they will need for success once they graduate. Those skill sets include critical thinking and problem solving, media literacy, collaboration, creativity, technological proficiency, and global awareness. The shift to technology has led to increased engagement and a sense of relevance and meaning among learners, all of which are foundations for improving achievement.

### Common Misconceptions

Although growing numbers of schools and educational leaders are transforming the teaching and learning culture with technology, many are not. Opinions vary on the merits of education technology. Among those who have not yet embraced it, technology is

viewed either as a frill or as a tool of dubious value. The reasons encompass several misconceptions but revolve around a general theme of fear.

**Time.** The time excuse seems to rear its ugly head more than any other reason not to move forward with technology integration. The fear of not having enough time to meet national and state standards—not to mention mandates—influences many educators against working technology into lessons, suppresses their will to do so, and inhibits their desire to learn how to. Current reform efforts that place an obscene emphasis on standardized tests compound the situation. That is extremely unfortunate because integrating technology effectively does not take as much time as people think. Education leaders are well served by spending a little time investigating how technology can be leveraged to engage learners. Once they do, their fears will subside as it becomes apparent that standards and mandates can still be met while making learning more relevant, meaningful, and engaging for students.

**Cost.** With budget cuts across the country putting a strain on the finan-

cial resources of districts and schools, decisionmakers have become afraid of allocating funds to purchase and maintain current infrastructure. That is unfortunate because there are many creative ways to cut costs, including using free resources with existing infrastructures. Schools can use cost-effective lease-to-purchase programs for computers, investigate a bring your own technology program, or take advantage of a plethora of free web 2.0 tools. Where there is a will, there is a way. Cost can be prohibitive at times, but there are many ways to overcome that challenge and move forward.

**Assessment.** Many teachers and administrators often worry about how students can be appropriately assessed in technology-rich learning environments. This fear stems from a reliance on traditional methods of assessment as the only valid means of measuring learning. Projects that involve the use of technology and unleash creativity, promote critical thought, encourage problem solving, and enhance communication and collaboration can easily be assessed with teacher-developed rubrics. In addition, many software and web-based computer programs

that are aligned to standards contain embedded assessments and offer real-time results and feedback.

**Control.** For technology to be not only integrated effectively but also embraced, it is necessary to establish a culture in which teachers and administrators no longer hesitate to relinquish a certain amount of control to students. The idea of giving up control can generate fear among even the best teachers because schools traditionally are rooted in structures that are designed to maintain control at all costs. But schools and classrooms do not—and will not—spiral out of control if we school leaders give teachers the flexibility to take calculated risks to innovate with technology or permit students to learn by using social media or to bring their own devices. To create an innovative culture of learning, we must learn not to fear failure. Giving up control can lead to certain instances of failure, but it is from failure that people learn and improve.

**Lack of training.** With the integration of technology comes change. With change comes the inevitable need to provide quality professional development. Many educators fear that there will not be appropri-

ate training to support technology implementation. Rest assured, training can be provided, and in most cases, it turns out to be cost-effective. Schools can leverage tech-savvy teachers to facilitate professional development. There are also numerous free instructional webinars available throughout the year that can be found with a simple web search. A powerful means of professional development allows educators to use social media to create their own personal learning networks (PLNs) that are based entirely on their unique needs and passions.

### **A Confession**

All those fear-inducing misconceptions about educational technology in schools were a reality for me a mere three years ago. It wasn't until I took the time to educate myself to better lead my school forward that I realized my fears were based solely on misconceptions. The end result has been the transformation of New Milford High School, a transformation that continues today. Don't let fear that is based on misconceptions prevent *you* from creating a more student-centered, innovative learning culture. **PL**



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