Technology Today

K. Scheidler, October, 2014

Technology plays a central part in our work and social lives today. We can't imagine a life in which we can't chat on-line with friends and family, do quick research at our fingertips, catch up on the latest news on-line. Our students coming in to Kindergarten today may be more advanced with technology than their teachers. Teachers seek that silver bullet that will be the button they can use to develop students' learning. It isn't there.

Teachers still are and always will be the drivers of learning for their students. It's teachers' own thoughts on what of the vast array of technology applications they can access to help students learn that propels learning. When a teacher just becomes overwhelmed with the choices and abdicates from integrating technology, this is a disservice to all students, who are adept with technology, love using it, need to learn to use technology for learning.

Our job is to take young people's affinity with technology to adapt it to focus students on learning via whatever tools are available to us. A young kindergarten teacher tells me she worked on her distance learning course with videos and course discussions via her Smartphone while watching her children's soccer practice. A middle school teacher finds almost too much video streaming information from a relatively inexpensive application that her school purchased.

Another middle school teacher deals with the onerous task – for both students and teachers -- of having students report on summer reading by having students create a Facebook page for a key character in the summer reading. It worked. Another teacher asks students to create a film poster

on a summer reading text, providing examples of film posters and the elements needed, fun for all. A kindergarten teacher uses children highlighting matching word families in different colors on manual devices, where with a mistake a child can delete the color to correct an error. This kinesthetic tool aids retention. An eighth grade teacher researches graphic organizers and finds a wealth of types his students may choose from to help them organize information. A teacher sees a clip of video instruction for teachers and adapts this to a video of use of motor skills for young children. Technology is powerful when it serves needs.

We find YouTube educational clips – once banned by school internet blockers -- for every age level on the topic that has long irked teachers with explaining correct use of informational text appropriately in research writing via paraphrasing and citation, avoiding plagiarism. YouTube provides a plethora of clever and apt instructional clips; presenting well needed skills, penetrating through visuals and sound. The time a teacher takes to research the right instructional video clip is minimal, the results rewarding. A teacher can make a powerpoint presentation on a needed skill in 30 minutes, and use it year after year, modifying to perfect it. The wave of educational applications keeps coming. The issue is seeking and sorting the right tools for the particular students, for the limited school access to computers, and that the teacher can pick up and use with confidence and dexterity. We can do this.

Along with the issue of seeking, sorting, sifting, evaluating and learning the software application that will help a student learn well the Common Core Standards, is the issue of quality of learning balanced with time well spent.

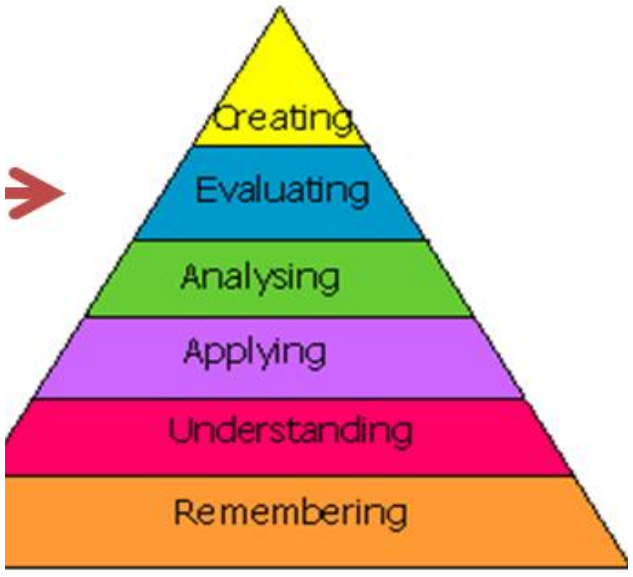
Parking children in front of a computer to use a software application on one's own is the antithesis of using technology for learning. This student staring vacantly at a screen frees up the teacher, who hopes learning will just magically happen. But computer use can be done in better more

valuable ways with carefully developed projects and activities tied to needed specific learning.

A teacher proudly showed a beautiful model of Shakespeare's Globe Theater that her students had constructed in Prezi presentation software. I recalled a similar physical construction made by students decades ago and proudly exhibited in our school library. But I couldn't find the link with Common Core Standards, needed for today's world. If the students who created this Prezi model had already demonstrated proficiency in Standards learning, this was fine. But a project more closely linked with Standards learning is so needed for math, reading and writing skills development at high levels that we must substitute a project that will help develop these understandings, to best serve our students.

Commonality of rigorous content learning is essential. My son took a course in film animation in engineering school, which required extensive time in moving an object slightly for each film shot. I'm sorry he told me about this, one of those things a parent paying for college doesn't want to know. He told us that the animation creation – initially thought of as a fun course -- was a "time suck," a term these high tech kids commonly used aptly for activity that took them away from what they knew was their essential core studies, an apt expression for what we have to be careful with on technology projects, to emphasize and focus on the content learning.

Having students work in teams to determine how the stages of text develop, and then enact these scenes and present these in a video trailer, develops the higher level skills of understanding, analysis, evaluation and creating. Acting out the key scenes appropriate to the text and presenting these in a fairly polished way in video form, ideally then projected on a large Smartboard presenting visuals and sound sharply and prominently, develops the



understanding and retention we're looking for. This type of project is not a simple written piece or discussion one quickly forgets. When well done, this video clip can then be used in successive years to show students an example of the product they'll work toward. Even the most disorganized of us busy teachers can now save and retrieve our files easily, not in that dusty mess of a cold metal file cabinet.

On the down side, time spent in developing a student presentation, with rehearsal and refining for filming has the potential of taking many more hours than the selection of scenes and text discussion. The video is the hook. This is what makes the project engaging for students. Providing a time limit means that students will voluntarily do their homework, work on their own outside of class, via e-mail communication at night, whenever they can catch the time. The best final result requires students do extra work. Students will remember their project because it's kinesthetic. They will take more time to do the project because it's collaborative, thought provoking, a presentation for their peers. Technology is the tool used. Students are on their computers at home at night anyway. Now it can be for an educational purpose.

In a useful limitation, one software application "Animoto" to produce video trailers is free for 30 second use. This forces precision. Students must spend more time cutting to the chase, but they find the time on their own for this project, not losing important class time to interact with a teacher. Students will make this time for themselves; time is there for what we want and must do. Students will also find the technology they need. We mourn the fact that school technology is limited. Schools with wi-fi and a computer for each student are rare. But when it comes to technology, students are resourceful, knowing well the value. Those without a home computer use after-school library computers, in town or school libraries, friends' computers, a smartphone. We can find resources when we wish to.

Teacher time too is limited. Teachers learn of useful applications from colleagues, from seeking and researching a particular web site for their particular course needs. Training on applications is wasted time if the application doesn't match the teachers' needs. The vast array of web sites teachers use vary with the range of teachers and particular needs. No single application is perfect for every teacher. When we find a useful application we often need help only in getting started, and move on from there to find the tools needed to do the job. However, it's not necessary that a teacher knows the sites and application a student uses to learn steps for "argument" writing, or bibliography citations, for example, proliferating on the internet, or as long as the work is correct. We want students to seek sources they need. This is a life skill.

Long banned "Cliff Notes" or "Spark Notes" that provide students with an easy to read plot summary, character delineation, and analysis is a losing battle. Teachers want students to learn these reading elements in their classes, not read them from "cheat sheets." Students quickly find on the internet these plot summary and analysis materials of an array of the classic books schools use. We have to turn the tables. We can use these to our advantage by seeing that these sites explain the literary analysis that students need to know. Students learn from the explanations of text that is otherwise inscrutable.

I observed a teacher who had to hold his class in a computer lab since his classroom was being used. It was a class of over fifteen special education students. While the teacher was teaching the class, I observed that each student was quickly on a web site that explicated the text, carefully reading synopsis, analysis. Students were glued to different web sites. These students with disabilities that interfere with learning knew how to find what they needed. They were reading what they needed to know. Oblivious to the teacher. We accept the fact that struggling students are helped when they can read plot analysis, and that they are learning literary analysis skills from these on-line sources. To assess learning, we ask questions not explicated in these guides.

Teachers and students research from need to know. Colleagues brainstorm and help each other. One Kindergarten teacher stated she was told that Kindergarten teachers were told their children had to produce one digital project by the end of the school year. She bemoaned that her children didn't have the motor skills to create a two-slide powerpoint. Another teacher told her about a "Paint" program that her own Kindergarten children loved. The teachers beamed. Need to know and sharing information proliferates, technology is unleashed.

When the student Peter collaborated with peers to research a topic via huge data bases, posted relevant findings on a web site, matched graphics and sound to convey precise meaning, forged a thirty-word thesis statement, and broke the web site constraints to expand their research postings, and then reported to a committee, Peter suddenly said, "But I don't know Excel." Knowing well with parents present that within minutes there would be a community call that the schools weren't teaching Excel, I smiled to myself. I just looked at him, speechless. When Peter needed to know Excel, he would figure it out. With about two instructional points he would become competent in Excel. He knew how to learn. We all learn what we need to learn, at the time we need it. Our job as teachers is to ignite that interest in students.

When we can match student interest with Common Core Standards learning and the right technology application to develop those understandings, we hit gold.

Technology Tips for Common Core Standards Learning

Why use Technology for Common Core Standards Learning

- Students know tech
- Students love tech
- It's students' world today
- Co-opt technology skills for learning
- Easy to differentiate
- Students help peers with tech and with content
- Teachers can better assess to assist in improvement
- Digital literacy is required for college and career
- Lack of technology expertise leaves students behind;
- Expertise promotes learning growth

Success takes time

Use graphics, visuals, video clips, internet searches, blogs, powerpoint presentations, e-mail groups for discussions

HOW: Emphasis on Common Core Standards Learning in Reading and Writing

Tech is a tool for needed Understandings

Avoid wasting time on unnecessary presentation details: no frills, no twitter, no texting, no Facebook. This is learning media, not social media.

Good applications: PowerPoint, Prezi, Glogster, Google Docs, Inspiration and Kidspiration- to brainstorm topics for writing – fun to use, Blogging, Moodle, Edmodo online learning,Text, Visuals, Animoto, Web Research, Kindles, iPads for primary levels Chatterpics—this is no-cost and allows children to record their voice and add a mouth to any photo or photo a child takes of any drawing. The mouth makes it look like the photo or drawing is talking. "Paint" or "Paint Tux," Padlet" help Kindergarten and above children.

Next Practice learning activities for Standards learning:

Mentor Text reading skills exemplars, Peer Editing to develop student metacognition on writing, Student Centered learning activities (PBL), Differentiation, More Time on learning for struggling students, Baby Steps, Match reading with student ability and interests, Kindles, iPads for multiple texts, inexpensive or free e-books, Visuals for student interest and learning, personalized reading

Teacher as Coach

Common Core Reading and Writing Learning with Technology

1. Video presentations (Google search for YouTube education sites)
2. PowerPoint presentations to teach skills and understandings
3. Machu Peccha Visuals match text
4. Create video or PowerPoint to present learning
5. Webquests with easier sites, more challenging sites. Rubric to guide work
6. Integrate visuals to convey meaning, enlighten heavy text to be reader friendly
7. Teacher web site to post materials for on-line learning
8. Post Mentor Texts. Students highlight words to create tone (R 4), context clues for vocabulary meaning (R 4), words for point of view shapes content and style (R 6) delineate, evaluate argument word choice and detail (R 8). Students write on topic.
9. Primary level early literacy children color word families, such as "cat," "rat," "pat" Adding word highlighting color or removing it is fun and interactive at any age or reading and reading analysis level, using Word documents. Students can compare notes, share ideas, and learn from one another.
10. Students select visuals to match text (R 7) and insert the graphic into the text.
11. In Mentor Text such as "Harvest Moon" poem (below), students highlight similes in yellow, metaphors in turquoise, using Word tools R 4, R MA 8A)
12. Inspiration and Kidspiration software promotes student brainstorming on ideas to write on, students can easily create different graphics such as a cloud or box, put text into boxes, move graphics around, and organize in varied ways. Interactive software is visually appealing, stimulates thinking.

13. For advanced students, teacher posts course on web site, paperless course with readings and assignments posted, papers submitted and evaluated electronically.
14. Inexpensive access to wide range of readings: Kindle (0 or little cost), iPads. Carefully select best texts for students. Let students choose readings.
15. Students create no frills basic powerpoints to report on how individuals, events develop over a text for meaning. May allow two graphics that match text.(R 4)
16. Students peer edit peer's writing on-line. Provide language to use and rubric to follow, such as, Can you make your conclusion better fit your argument? Check your apostrophes for correctness, What's a better title?
17. Students create in small groups video film trailer of a book studied (Time limit)
18. Select on-line text for needs. Sites have same text at different reading levels.
19. Animoto software helps students create presentations including film trailers
20. Blog via e-mail on text discussion of key ideas that lead to central idea or a theme or other standards such as delineate and evaluate argument (R 8).
    Discussion Board on Blackboard allows students to create their own discussion Thread. Posted comments give each student a voice, not drowned out by others. Moodle and Edmodo are good distance-learning programs to teach understandings and skills, and provide Discussion areas for students to ask questions (may be anonymous) Teacher may participate in a positive way to set the tone. Teacher may use monitoring of posts to keep posts positive and appropriate.

First think, What are the learning needs?

Then use technology to develop understanding of these needs.

Sample use of Word highlighting of close reading, text clues:
Use the Word highlight color to highlight close text points. With a Word file, students can delete the color if they make an error. Use color to delineate context clues, details that convey central idea, word choice creates tone, images that convey meaning, clues that lead to inference.

Harvest Moon

Drowsy after a day of carnival fun,
Rocked gently homeward in the car,
I have almost fallen asleep
when the moon rises like a dream
outside my back-seat window.
It is the world's largest Ferris wheel,
bright as a beacon,
welcoming all riders.
It is a giant pumpkin slowly ripening,
Outgrowing its protective ground cover.
It is the face of a smiling friend
who wants to play hide-and-seek
behind the highway's bare trees.
I smile back at my friend
And drift off to sleep.
Maybe I'll play when I awaken.

Highlight similes in yellow, highlight metaphors in turquoise.
How does each piece of figurative language add to meaning?

Reading visuals Harvest Moon Photo: What is one word that encapsulates the main effect portrayed here: What are the details that help convey this effect?