

## Three Suggestions...

September may be over and the 2007-2008 school year well under way, but we have recently broken heat records for early October and it hardly seems like fall. So it doesn't feel too late for the first Podologue episode of the school year.

I would like to offer three basic suggestions for implementing digital technologies in your classroom this year or any year. These suggestions are based on the proposition that productive and effective use of digital technologies are fundamentally necessary to adequately prepare students for their 21<sup>st</sup> Century future.

The three suggestions are:

1. Know your students: how do they currently make use of digital technologies
2. Know your resources: what digital tools are available for use in your classroom and your school
3. Know yourself: take inventory of your own digital skills and experience, and make a plan for adding to your repertoire in the classroom

So let's take them one at a time.

First, try to get a real feel for the technologies your students are using - and not just in school. Find out what they are using and doing with digital technology in their everyday lives. Are they using cell phones? Are they sending text messages to each other? Are they taking photos with their phones? Are some of them into digital photography or videography? Are they making movies, animations, digital scrapbooks? Are your students creating digital content? Are they participating in social networks like MySpace,

Facebook, or others? What kinds of game technologies are they using? Are they involved in multi-user games over the Internet? Is there a gender difference in their use of digital games? If there is, is it changing or is it fairly constant from year to year? How much time are they online per day, per week? Your students will most likely appreciate your interest and you will learn a great deal more about each of them.

You might want to follow up with some research on the age group you teach to see how your students match up with their peers. Check out the Speak Up Survey reports at [www.tomorrow.org/speakup](http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup) and other national samples of student use of digital technologies.

Then consider how the digital technologies your students are already using might be leveraged for learning in your classroom. Be cautious, however, so older students do not feel you are attempting to co-opt what they may perceive as "their space." For example, launching a MySpace or Facebook page for online posting of classroom assignments and student work could easily be met with shocked stony silence if not outright hostility.

On the other hand, if most of your students have cell phones that take photographs, they would probably be happy to collect photos for a classroom collection to illustrate geometric shapes in nature or in architecture, or to document local historical sites.

Suggestion two is to get to know what technologies are available for teacher and student use in your classroom and your school and what kinds of support are available. Find out who provides curricular integration support as well as technical support and how to make contact. Like Lower Merion School District, most districts have that information posted on the website. Lower

Merion staff also have a help desk available through the website or, in the case of emergencies or pressing need, a phone call.

Find out what computers and related equipment are in your classroom and learn what software is installed. Read the policies and guidelines for use for both teachers and students. If you have any questions about either be sure to ask. Find out if any equipment in your room is shared by teachers and students from other classrooms. Printers are typically shared, for example. Also, a cart of laptops is typically shared among several classrooms but will usually be housed in one classroom. Find out who shares the laptops and work out how they will be shared and cared for.

All LMSD classrooms should have video projectors. Make sure you know how to connect to yours and get the most from it. Like many districts, we have some video tutorials and demonstrations available on our website. An LMSD video on using video projectors can be viewed through our Video-on-Demand resource.

Other resources like digital still cameras and video cameras are typically shared within a school. Find out where those are kept and the procedures and conditions for using them in your classroom.

The third and last suggestion is to take inventory of your own digital skills and experience and make a plan for adding to your digital repertoire in the classroom.

Take a moment to consider your own experience using technology for your own professional responsibilities (email, word processing, grading, reports, etc.), and, most importantly, for use in your classroom for and by students. What kinds of things have you and your students done with digital tools in the classroom? What

kinds of software and hardware have students used? How have digital technologies played an important role in student learning? How often? Have you used technology to help make a difference in developing critical student understanding or achievement? Or has technology been more supplemental to what students do all the time?

In Lower Merion, teachers are expected to complete the Levels of Technology Implementations DETAILS survey online in the spring each year. The results of the survey provide you with an individual and private report of your LoTi level, Personal Computer Use level, Current Instructional Practices level, and professional development priority areas. While the aggregated results are used to help design and develop professional development opportunities district-wide, all technology workshops at LMSD are aligned with LoTi levels to help teachers select topics that might fit best with their individual needs. If you took the LoTi/DETAILS survey last spring but didn't take note of your results, you can visit the LoTi Lounge website -- [www.lotilounge.com](http://www.lotilounge.com) -- to review your results at any time.

As you reflect on your own experience with digital technologies, consider how your students use digital tools and the digital resources available to you in your school. Then challenge yourself to add something significant to your classroom repertoire this year -- using available technology that will be likely to engage your students and help them take their learning to a new level of understanding or performance.

Discuss your ideas with colleagues that are familiar with the technology or ask for support from your district resource personnel. Let them assist you in making a plan for expanding your use of technology and the opportunities you provide to your students. By working with colleagues or district support

personnel, your plan should include reasonable goals with excellent prospects for success.

Lower Merion teachers have a number of individuals willing and ready to provide support and encouragement for classroom integration of technology -- from building teaching colleagues like District Tech Committee representatives, Technology Mentors, Elementary Tech Curriculum Facilitators, and secondary teachers providing Technology Integration Support to district Technology Department personnel including our Educational Technology Specialists. Please do not hesitate to call on these individuals at any time. If they cannot assist directly, they can definitely contact someone who can.

So let's review the three suggestions:

1. *Get to know your students as users of digital technologies*
2. *Get to know the digital resources available to you, and*
3. *Take stock of your own digital experience and make a plan to add something new to your repertoire.*

*Good luck and have a great year!*