Get Your Geek On!

Using Technology in the Arts Integration Classroom

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Keyed Notes about Technology

Why I Can't Keep Up - And My Students Can

Feeling old stinks. And I'm not chronologically that old - I'm only going on 30. I even grew up in the "technology" era. I had a Tandy computer when I was 6 playing those Grover games that taught you about math and reading. I grew up with floppy disks and 3 1/2 inch disks and all of my friends thought I was so lucky because we had 2 computers with Windows 3.1. Good times.

But that all seems so provincial now. Kids get hand held video games when they're 3. My kindergarteners can create a movie in a 15 minute center. The world of iPods, iPads and iPhones is the new Tandy 3000. And I'm falling behind.

This is a huge dilemma. Every year, we have new technology training with 5-6 new programs to master. Comic Life, Kidspiration, Audacity, and Pixie. Not to mention all of the apps for teachers and now social media. I'm racing to try and keep up. Meanwhile, by the time I think I've got it mastered and ready to teach the kids, they already know the little tricks and shortcuts of the programs I'm finally comfortable introducing. God I feel old.

The speed of change is exponentially getting faster. And I have come to the conclusion that rather than trying to keep up, I just need to hang on for the ride.

Instead of pretending to be the "leader", I'm realizing that I can be the facilitator and let the kids be the
leaders. By giving them the projects and the outlines with the opportunities to use programs that they already know, I'm providing them with the tools to build the product. They're job is to wield the tools in new and exciting ways. Suddenly, we're not in a classroom anymore - we're operating in the 21st century world that surrounds us.

So while I take my time figuring out Twitter chats and Facebook badges, my students will be racing ahead to create the next "big" idea. And that's okay with me....I don't need to keep up. I just need to keep them up ahead of me.

Kno, Kindle, iPad - Infinite Possibilities!

College campuses around the country are being inundated with the latest high-tech devices to "make an impact" in education. The tablet culture is upon us in full force. In a December article on Campus Technology's website, it turns out that the new Kno is making an appearance in a classroom near you. These tablets are to take over traditional textbooks, allow for video streaming and work within "the cloud" of Web 2.0. And, as you may recall, Amazon's Kindle was THE hot gift to give this year for college, high school and life-long learners alike.

So what's the appeal to the digital tablet? Well, for one, it's cool. Seriously - you can pack all this information and capabilities into one tiny little item that you can throw in a bag and take with you anywhere. And it's not like a laptop - it's light, small, and most have super long battery lives. Second, they're really easy to use and to read. I received the Kindle this Christmas from my wonderful husband and I had some mixed feelings before I turned it on. I love the feel of books in my hand and the look of them lined up on bookshelves around my house once I've read them. But once I turned on the Kindle and started downloading, reading and using the nice highlighting and clippings features, I was hooked. Everything was organized and stored right there and I could access it any time. Which brings me to number three - immediate access to EVERYTHING. Being able to do some much with something so small is an immediate plus. If I have a question about something and need to visually see it done, I can do so by just bringing up a video segment and then going right back to my text. All
of these powerful tools converge into one singular intuitive invention - beautiful.

So what's this have to do with education? Personally, I think it's going to bring another round of revolution to our schools. I was just at a meeting learning about the School Improvement Network's PD360 tool and found out that they have an observation tool for administrators. If the administrator has an iPad, they can download the observation app, write the observation on the iPad and then provide the teacher with links to professional development videos and articles directly within the observation form. The administrator can then email it to the teacher and the teacher can get immediate PD within their feedback. No more waiting around for a week to get your observation form and then having to research the web to learn new techniques. All of that time is now able to be devoted to actual learning and a change in teaching. Think about what this type of change could mean to our students? Faster feedback, more synapse connections, linking and thinking and inking all in one space and time. Amazing.

Obviously, there are the pitfalls to this type of movement. Lack of personal connections could be a problem, as well as making sure that we don't just get caught up in the technology without evaluating what goes IN to the technology. As one commenter on the Campus Technology website put it, we'll never get ahead in education if we don't fix the content of the textbooks that we're downloading to the tablets. But the sheer possibilities for engagement, learning, and questioning with this type of technology gives me hope that we're not as far behind as we've been told.

Facebook connections: the good, bad and ugly

Facebook is a huge way that I connect with the world. I'm not proud of it. It's a screen with black and white pixels. But the reality is that Facebook is an easy way for me to connect with my peers, network with colleagues, and spy quietly in a socially acceptable way. It's also fascinating to watch what gets posted and some of the various Facebook "faces" out there. Take a look:

1.) The Exhibitionist. This is the person who lays it ALL out there. Every minute detail of their life - good or bad - is on display to the world. Ick. I don't need to know about your kid's snot problem or what you're craving for lunch. It's great for a laugh, but otherwise I'll pass.

2.) The Professional. This person never posts anything personal, is always updating their latest networking event, and sometimes puts up inspirational quotes. Give me a break - this is boring! I want more from you than what your latest meeting was about. Give me some juicy details already!

3.) The Activist. This person has a passion and uses Facebook as the platform to broadcast it. Commendable, but can also get a bit annoying to watch those BIG CAPITAL LETTERS ALL THE TIME ON MY LATEST UPDATES PAGE!!!!!!!!!

4.) The quiet stalker. This is the person that rarely posts much about themselves (and when they do it's fairly tame), but scans through their list of "friends" frequently to find out what each person is up to. Nothing wrong with this of course: just that label of stalker that gets a little uncomfortable, doesn't it?
In education, we are forced to walk a very fine line when it comes to social networking. We don't want to be the Exhibitionist, but at the same time, we can't really be the Activist and we don't want to admit to being the Stalker. Instead, we're forced to be the Professional. Which is okay, but that's kind of like a new year's diet: good intentions waylaid by reality.

The thing about Facebook, though, is that our students, our parents, our colleagues and our friends are ALL on it. So while you can try to maintain being "professional", know that others will not. You'll see and hear everything out there. And if you're dumb enough to be "friends" with your students, be prepared to hear things you may not want to know. About you AND them. At the same time, be prepared to NOT know the very details that you want answered from the questions this info has created.

Facebook is a fantastic tool that's premise of connection and collaboration is developed from the very foundation of our educational fabric. But in the end, Facebook is a fabric made out of fiber optic connective tissue and not direct human interaction. To truly take our "network" to the next level, we must reach beyond the screen and make the connections real.

Meet your friends - the good, the bad and yes, even the ugly.

**Link Love Arts Integration Style!**

In honor of Valentine's Day, I wanted to offer a little bit of love out there to our readers: link love that is!

These links are to articles that I have found to be tremendously helpful for arts integration, student engagement, innovation and technology. They truly get to the "heart" of the matter (I know, I know - bad, right? I just couldn't help myself).

First up, many thanks to Elizabeth Peterson for loving this site and allowing me to guest post a series for her on starting an arts integration program. You should definitely check out her post on [Educating the Educators](#). How else will we get beyond the initial barriers to arts integration?
Jessica Balsley provides some fantastic visual art lesson plan ideas at her site The Art of Education. They are beautifully written, have a lot of meat to them and can be used in a variety of settings.

Speaking of lesson plans, here are some great ways to integrate dance into the academic subjects from DancePulse. Get those kinesthetic learners engaged!

One of my favorite bloggers, writers and presenters, Angela Maiers discusses arts integration as the new stage for educating our kids in her post Art 2.0. She provides a lot of great detail and data for supporting arts in education for all of you who are looking for that concrete data to take to an administrator.

As a case study for an arts integration program, you really can't get any more in depth than how Wilson Elementary presented the details at the Speed of Creativity's blog. What a great inspirational story!

If you're looking for a place that has a ton of links to everything arts ed in one spot, be sure to visit Cybraryman.com for a full listing!

And finally, one of the pieces that I go back to read quite often throughout my year so far. Kyle Pace talks about the need to go beyond adequate in educating our students and ourselves. Because we all deserve so much more in education. Truly a piece that I need as a teacher to feed my development.

Happy Valentine's Day to all and please pass the link love on!

- Susan
Technology in the Arts (Integration) Classroom

Why I Heart iMovie for Arts Integration

This is technology week on EducationCloset! We're going to take a look at the variety of ways that technology can play a part in the arts integrated classroom. I'm super excited about this week because a.) I LOVE technology - I grew up with it, I use it, I find that it helps me be the most efficient I can be and b.) my STUDENTS love technology! Anything that engages my students and provides a work environment that allows them to truly learn is a must in my book. As I've said before, it's time to embrace the tools that our students love to use. Not only that, but I just received and reviewed the new info coming out about Race to the Top. A whole thick packet of info is all about STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Personally, I think it should be called STEAM (add the Arts in there), but regardless - technology and arts integration can go hand in hand.

So today, I wanted to share why I heart iMovie. iMovie is a software package found on Macs, but it's equivalent for Windows machines is either Animoto or Movie Edit. Personally, I'm a Mac girl all the way - I used to hate them, but have found in the last 5 years that they are super user friendly. However, if you/your school prefer to use Windows machines, then Animoto or Movie Edit offer comparable movie editing software (just substitute this for iMovie within this post). The point, however, is to USE it!

I find that iMovie helps me to truly engage my students by offering them the ability to manufacture their own learning. By this I mean that when students create and produce a video on a topic, a performance, or as a lesson for another class, they are using both areas of the brain simultaneously and creating deeply embedded connections within their neural pathways. Thus, as the teacher, I simply become the facilitator. I guide them through the process of learning, therein allowing the students to engage in the act the learning. This is huge towards creating 21st century learners. When students arrive in the workforce, they will no longer be given a list of tasks to create. They will need to manufacture their own tasks to solve the problems that we have yet to know.

So....how do I use iMovie to do all of that?? Here's a few quick ways that I've used iMovie to help my students become independent learners/thinkers:

1.) Film my students during a performance/class and then have them watch it back, unedited. This provides students with the necessary reflection time to process what they actually did. Often, students
have a way of just remembering one or two special moments (usually positive) that happened within the performance or the class. Instead, by watching themselves and their classmates, they get a better idea of the overall picture, evaluate their role within the team and have a better idea of an honest assessment of their own work. This is a very passive way to use the technology, but a great tool nonetheless!

2.) **By having the students create and edit a movie about a topic.** This does a multitude of things: engages students in researching topics for accuracy and to communicate information effectively, teaches social skills (don't pick your nose in front of the camera!), encourages collaboration, enhances reflection and critical assessment skills, works on summative and formative learning and assessment, and culminates as a product within a project-based learning lesson. These movies are usually much more in-depth and connective than a paper or report and more engaging for the students (and myself!) to watch.

3.) **Letting students teach a lesson.** We want our students to become independent learners and to develop leadership skills within a safe environment. This provides them opportunities for both of these skills. Students will learn more deeply and with richer cross-connections by teaching others than by simply sitting and allowing us to fill up their minds. iMovies grant them the opportunity to learn a topic well enough that they can then teach it to their peers. I usually allow students to get into peer groups and assign them a topic to research and create a lesson using iMovie. These are on-going throughout the year. Students can come in during recess/study hall to record their lessons and work on editing. Then, rather than teach another class the same lesson I just taught an hour ago, I pop in the DVD of their peers teaching the lesson topic instead. This immediately grabs my class' attention and they learn so much more. It's a win-win for everyone!

I hope these ideas spurred some of your own to use movie-recording software in your teaching! The school year is quickly coming to a close - why not try one of these ideas and see if it's something you'd like to explore further next year? Do you already have ways that you use movie editing in your classroom? Please share with us! And, if you're looking for even more ideas like these, consider taking the online arts integration class this summer - we'll be covering this in more depth week 2!

Happy movie-making!

**Today's Technology in Yesterday's Classroom**

Our school is old. Really old. It was built in 1970 and really hasn't been touched since then. We've also got a teacher or two who has been here since the school opened. So, as you can imagine, 2011 is a bit of a change for both the building and these teachers.

But, I've got to tell you - I am so proud to be here. Because this old building is finally getting a facelift. We're being renovated this spring into a whole new building. No more asbestos. No more HVAC issues. No more open classrooms. New new new.

And my veteran teachers are trying their own hands at a facelift. Today, they used Wordle for the first time with me. And the results were awesome!

We just finished a unit on the Science of Sound and Beethoven and the students created a wordle...
to synthesize their knowledge of Beethoven, and as a way to spark their imaginations for their next project. Next week, they'll be writing interview questions for their teacher based on the wordle they created today. These kids truly understand how sound is created and used, why Beethoven was so spectacular as a composer given his extraordinary circumstances (deafness), and how the two correlate and extrapolate with each other. If you haven't used wordle yet, I so hope that you'll give it a try! Here's our sample from today:

Great software for kids and arts integration

The one constant in our current world is always change. And technology is one of the fastest changing pieces out there! Almost the minute that I think I've figured out how to upload the software, it's time to update the software to the newest version. This can be wonderful: the constant hum of activity and innovation almost makes me feel like I'm part of the motion of change itself. But at the same time, it can be quite difficult when it comes to incorporating technology within the classroom. Just when I have my "Jeopardy" powerpoint ready to use, along comes the newest, better program that students can use that makes my measly powerpoint look "so 2000 and late" as Fergie would say. So today's post should only be taken at today's value.
If you come back to this one in a year, or (gulp) even 6 months, these will probably change. But for TODAY, right now, this minute, here is a list of some of the best software that link arts integration with student accessibility and engagement.

Software

There's lots of great software out there that I would recommend, but here are some that I use almost constantly in my classroom right now:

1.) Kidspiration - Kidspiration is an elementary school software program that allows students the ability to create organizers using pictures or music, use virtual pattern blocks and tiles to form creations in math, and even has built in activities for reading, math, science and social studies that extend student learning and allows them to create their own manipulatives. It truly puts the students in the drivers seat for their own learning and that's HUGE when you're a 3rd grader. I like to use it when we're studying composers to synthesize their information, and as a way to create their own listening maps when we do lessons like "The Planets" from composer Gustav Holt. It's also great for students with special needs because there is a sound tool for student who struggle with reading or communication.

2.) Google Earth - Google is always coming up with new innovative tools and I absolutely love this one. It brings the earth to life and can be used in so many ways. From connecting to map writing, to measurement of streets, to figuring out how waterways contribute to land division, this is a fabulous tool for all grade levels to use as both an engagement piece and as a way to process new information in these areas.

3. miXscope - this program is just plain down cool. Here's the scoop from the programmer info: "miXscope enables microscope and video camera users to take snapshots, create time-lapse movies, stop motion movies, or image sequences of the world around them. Users can also add time stamps, text comments, image overlays, make measurements, add special effects, and/or draw on the live view images." Basically, we use it during science as a way for students to capture what they are seeing, either through the microscope or through the video camera and splice it together to create a time elapse sequence. We can then use art to compare the "real life" creations to artistically created pieces. Sequencing, patterns, drama, music, order, division - it can all play a part when using this software.

4.) Quicktime Broadcaster - for those of you that don't have Garageband or other comparable software, this is a great alternative! Quicktime Broadcaster allows students to create a radio broadcast of a project and then upload it to a variety of sources: youtube, websites, school TV stations, you name it. Students love being able to create their own radio broadcast on a variety of subjects - they can outline the format, decide what music they want to play, and determine if they want it to be audio, video or BOTH. Plus, since they can share it, they take more pride in their work and the details are much for fine-tuned.

5.) FlipShare - Yes, I know that FlipCameras are folding up shop. However, I also know that a bunch of schools (including ours) purchased them. We're not just going to throw them away! FlipShare is an awesome tool for editing and sharing student videos. After students create their videos, they can edit them, produce them and send them as a greeting card, youtube video, or email them. My students love the greeting card feature - they can educate others through an online greeting card. When they
send it to their parents, it's a great way for parents to become involved in what their kids are learning.

So there you have it! My top 5 picks for software that I use in my classroom all the time. There's definitely more out there though. Do you use some software that has that "cool" factor? If so, please share it with us! We all want to know the latest and greatest in our rapidly changing tech world!

And....GREAT news! This whole week's tech series, plus other popular technology posts with valuable links and info will be wrapped up into a FREE eBook that will only be available here on EducationCloset.com! My email subscribers will get first dibs - so why not sign up? It's free and you get great stuff like this! It's located over there to the right....

See You in the Funny Papers

One of the best tools around for pre and post assessment is the program "ComicLife". This may sound a bit strange - after all, we're talking about comic strips here - but actually, for many students, this can offer you great insight into their true understanding of a topic. You can download a FREE trial version here or you can buy the $20 teacher license and get the full power of the program here. Best of all, it can be differentiated quite easily based on level and content. It truly is a unique and fun way to get students thinking!

If you've never used ComicLife before, this is a great way to get started! ComicLife is a software program that has hundreds of comic strip templates, cartoons, text types and bubbles all included. So your students can create whatever "type" of comic they'd like: anything from a typical "strip" to a one-frame message. So essentially, your students can use this as a summary of content, as a way to show prior-knowledge, or as a tool for synthesizing material.

Here are some examples of ways to use ComicLife:

1.) Students can create a comic that depicts someone who is traveling around the globe and comes across a variety of seasons (Spring in Australia while it's Winter in America) - used as a way to assess a Kindergarten unit on weather.
2.) Students can create a political cartoon using the current political climate (great for during an election year, as a study on historical campaigns, and as a way to gauge prior knowledge of historical events).

3.) Students can create a comic to teach a topic to their peers (this is great for having students teach each other techniques like writing skills, The Actor's Toolbox, visual art techniques and more!).

ComicLife can also be used for staff development! Teachers can create their own comics to help lead a book study, as a way to analyze their professional development from the year, or as a way to build the staff culture.

When using this program, I suggest you play around with it for a while. There are manuals and help sections, but the best way to really figure out what ComicLife has to offer is to simply try it! You can use photos that have been taken either from your computer or your digital camera, or there are graphics that you can use within the program itself. Have a great time with it and watch all of the creative ways that your students and your staff will come up with for "show and tell" during your next class!

Technology and Arts Integration Worksheet

Here is the worksheet that goes along with the podcast from Monday! It contains lesson plan idea starters, links to arts sites, and a list of software and apps to get you started. Please send this to anyone who you think could benefit from this sheet. And don't forget to listen or download the free podcast discussing these lessons!
Software for Arts Integration Lessons

Google Sketchup - Architecture design tool that is great to use when teaching maps, bird's eye view, economics, perspective, measurement.

Audacity - Music editing software. Create karaoke for a poem, use for measurement, see sound waves during a sound lesson, discover decibel.

Garageband - Music creation software. Keep a beat while reading for fluency, create patterns, learn about texture and layers.

Prezi - Presentation software. Students can create a zoom map for their presentation, create a sequence, develop organization.

Wordle - create an image with words, use for brainstorming, topic creation, main idea.

Comic Life - create a comic strip as a writing tool, to assess knowledge on a topic, or as a way to synthesize information.

Google Apps to enhance AI Lessons

Digication Portfolio - Use for students to organize and share their learning. Creates deep meaning.

Aviary Design Suite - Students can create a podcast, design album covers and more to enhance their project based learning.

TECH/ART LINKS BY SUBJECT

TECHNOLOGY & ART

MUSIC

Garageband
Audacity
Comic Life
Aviary Design Suite

VISUAL ART

Digication Portfolio
Wordle
Comic Life
Prezi
Google Sketchup

DANCE

Garageband
Audacity
Comic Life
Aviary Design Suite

DRAMA

Wordle
Comic Life
Google Sketchup
Garageband
Drama Games

Or, download the .pdf here: tech and arts
Technology and Professional Development

Communication Connections - Where Does Your Passion Come From?

In a recent study by Florida Atlantic University, it was found that listeners could tangibly "feel" the passion of a musical piece when played by a human, rather than a computer. In essence, this study states that human brain activity sends a signal of emotion when it detects passion from the nuances of the player. What I find so interesting about that is the connection piece of the communication puzzle that we embody every day. How many times do you come into your room or office, say hi to a few colleagues, put the things in your arms down and immediately turn to a computer screen? I gonna bet that most people do that every day. It's a way of life. My to-do list today started off with a few emails that needed to go out, updating my blog, sending out links via my social networks and then getting myself organized through my online planbook. Does this sound familiar? It should. And there's nothing wrong with it. Except.....

Human engagement and interaction is necessary to our very existence. We naturally crave those moments when we can make a personal connection with another human being. Our brain starts firing different synapses, our very body begins producing chemicals and reactions to what is being said or done, and suddenly we are changed (for better or worse) based upon that instant when we made a human connection. The same cannot be said for virtual communication. It's kind of like generic soda. It's okay - maybe even great - but nothing is going to be the same as the original.

We have a lot to learn from this as educators. Schools they are a changin' and technology and cyberschools are hot buttons right now leading the way of change. If you read this blog enough, you'll find that I support these kinds of innovations whole-heartedly. But, we must be careful. Too much of a good thing really can do harm. We want to encourage our students and ourselves to get away from those computer screens, away from the chatting and even from the virtual learning and be a witness to what else is out in the "real" world. Connect with the earth again. Listen to a beautiful symphony and hear the emotion and feel that very passion within your own being. Look with your eyes at the feast of a genius work of art and allow it to spur questions and answers to your personal world. Experience the physical joy of laughter with a good friend. These are things that can't come from our virtual environments. And as educators in a world where technology is everywhere, this is difficult. You'll see - try turning off every technological device you have (including your phone). You'll feel naked, as if you've misplaced your very being. Yet, it can be a freeing moment as well when you realize that your identity is not the screen name that you use, but rather the person that you are.
Which brings me to another idea - that in our classrooms and in our lives, we need to work on our communication skills. We need to understand that our actions and our words have meaning and can evoke emotions from another human being. Too often, we shoot off an email that we would never say in person. Why is that? Because the screen hides our faces? That's not living and working with integrity. We need to be reminded that when we connect with others, we must communicate from a 3-dimensional level: theirs, our own, and ours together. What is it that the person is offering to this situation? What am I bringing? What can we bring to this together? By using this small reminder, we'll save ourselves a lot of headaches.

Often, I hear from teachers that their students' writing is so terrible because they write like they text. Teachers debate whether or not to teach to the "text". Do we allow and encourage this because it enables faster communication, or do we hold to the properties of grammar and expect our students to develop quality sentences? Personally, I think it's a little of both. I think that if the shorthand of "text" writing allows students to get their ideas out faster and thus be able to be more imaginative, then by all means allow them to use it. But, in the end the students should be able to translate that into good quality writing, because writing is an art. It's another way to elicit passion from people. Passion, which is so desperately craved by our brains that it produces a chemical, physical and emotional response within the deep recesses of our beings.

In the end, the means does make a difference when it comes to connections. The ways in which we communicate with others has morphed with good and bad consequences. As educators, we need to understand this change, but also embrace the moments when we can get that intense, passionate response. Because when that happens, the real learning begins and the glow of a computer monitor is simply a background light.

Technology and Art: Which came first?

Technology is a friend to the brain. Art is a friend to the soul. Together, you get Steve Jobs crossed with Maya Angelou. Wow - now THAT'S a mental image for ya.

Technology and everything that comes with it is a great part of our present and I can't wait to see where it takes us in the future. But, in today's educational climate, technology is seen as the "fix". As if you can cure everything that's wrong with our education system if you just think hard enough about it and have the right gizmos. Art is left on the sidelines as a nice way to bring in some kids' creativity. It's like the dog that you pat on the head when you come home and then forget its there for the rest of the night until it needs to go out to the bathroom.
But here's the dirty little secret about technology nobody ever talks about: it wouldn't and doesn't exist without creativity. The art behind the iPad, or a Droid is incredible. The way it functions and the way that the pieces move together in synchronization is fascinating. The new Watson that is being built to "think" like a human brain has to be able to understand nuance - art at its finest. And the reason that we all use and want so much technology is through the art of marketing. Watch an iPad commercial and drool. If it was branded as pure brain, we wouldn't want it so much. It appeals to our artistic side because it "looks" cool.

I know of schools that have cut the arts and bought every student a laptop. They fail as surely as schools with no money. These very same schools will then turn around and ask how they could possibly afford to invest in the arts. How could they not? It's a matter of priorities.

You see - the brain doesn't function alone. It takes the heart to pump the blood that feeds the brain. Art is our heart. We must invest as much priority into exercising it as we do in feeding the mind.

I'm curious as to how many views I'll get on this post. My guess is that it will be one of my top entries. Not because it's profoundly in support of the arts in education, but because it is tagged as technology in education. Please, pass it along. But by all means, do so with the heart in mind.

Using Technology to Creatively Assess Students and Teachers

Do you ever just feel a little left behind when it comes to technology? Darn, I hate it when that happens. That whole "continuing education" thing really gets in the way sometimes, doesn't it?

I say this tongue-in-cheek of course. As educators (and people for that matter), we're always learning
and growing. So sometimes, I think that assessment is a little silly. After all, are we ever really a "master" at something? Don't we always have more to learn? I mean, I've studied, performed, written and taught music for over 25 years at this point and I still wouldn't consider myself a master. Not even close. So perhaps the true meaning of assessment is really in measuring where we are in comparison to others. Or maybe it's just to see if we have the basic skill set down. Either way, I'm not too thrilled about what this means for our students or our teachers.

Actually, after all this reflection this week on assessments, I think their core purpose it to tell us how we are doing in comparison to ourselves. That is, seeing how far we've come as a guide to tell us where we are headed. It's kind of like when you are peddling up a mountain (or a hill, in my case) and stopping about half-way there to look back and give yourself a pat on the back for coming so far. And then turning your face front and figuring out what route you're going to take to get to the summit. You want to learn from the sweat you've already put into the journey to make the next part more satisfying and perhaps, a little easier.

This is where technology comes into play in assessments. As I was saying in Tuesday's post, we need to get out of the 20th century mindset and re-envision what assessment can look like for the future. That HAS to include technology. It just does. Our students are using sophisticated technology every day and to try and test them without it makes absolutely no sense. We need to embrace technology (flaws and all) and use it to help us with that core purpose for measuring individual student growth.

Of course, we also need to keep in mind the limitations of technology - and yes, there are some very big limits currently. Just ask the folks at Pearson who had their servers go down while a whole population of 5th graders in Maryland were taking part of their State Science test online. All of the information was lost and the students needed to start again. Not a shining moment in technology's favor. Technology is still limited by bandwidth, access, knowledge, and server space. Yet, improvements are being made all the time. So let's take a big collective breath and step out past our comfort zone for just a minute.

Ways to Use Technology for Assessment

These are just a few of the ways that I have seen or used technology to help me measure student growth:

1.) **Creating digital portfolios online.** I like these because in essence, this is a blog/webpage that showcases student work from the whole year. It's easy to update and easy to access. It allows the students to experiment with graphic design (which uses measurement principals) and writing source code. Depending on the subject, it can be fairly simple and straightforward as a way to present classroom work, or as a way to get them ready for the world of interviewing and job-seeking. Most companies nowadays expect you to have a web-presence. This is teaching our students how to develop that in a safe and secure way. Never allow students to use their full names or put any personal information on there (including pictures of themselves or others in their classroom) unless it is through a private access. Teaching safety online is a huge topic, but you can address this and still have some awesome portfolios.

2.) **Create assessments using YouTube videos.** Again, make them secure, but after that - let them go wild! I've had students create videos for interviews with dead composers, for creating dramatic scenes
that connect with a story they are reading, and for teaching their peers choreography using geometry. This teaches students the art of editing, recording, being prepared, and self-reflection. Once my students watch their pieces, they all create a list for how to improve it and go back and do it again. This reflection piece is one of the biggest ways our students can learn from their own assessment.

3.) **Recording a song through Garageband or Audacity.** Students can create their own podcasts, karaoke song or poetry set to a beat structure using these two programs. Again, the self-reflection piece here is vital. I like to have students write their own songs using chords learned in class and writing their own lyrics about a topic from a social studies unit. Students then record them, add beats and instruments through the editing process and we upload them to iTunes for them to upload at home. Students create a band name, album art and even pseudonyms to post. It's a project they remember year after year and it is a great way for me to assess if they understand and can manipulate beat, chords, rhythm and make it into a statement based on history. I've seen other teachers use this as a podcasting tool where students teach others by creating their own podcasts on a subject that they just researched.

4.) **Wikis, blackboard, discussion threads.** Setting up a discussion thread that students can contribute to through one of these platforms has powerful consequences in and out of your classroom. I like to pose questions to my students like "What if...." and then give them a scenario to solve using information they have learned in various contents. Students enjoy reading the logic/opinions of their peers and can better flesh out their own ideas to add. I've heard from parents that this adds to a lively dinner table conversation some evenings during the week. And what teacher doesn't want their students talking about their class in such an animated way?

These are just the tip of the iceburg, by the way. There's also wordles, creating comics through ComicLife, and much more! I encourage you to explore the technology in your own district and see how creatively you can use it in assessing your own students. What I find most interesting, by the way, is that these very same methods could also be used to assess teachers. We could have digital portfolios of our work, contribute to a discussion thread, create a podcast about a classroom management technique, or create a YouTube video of a lesson to share with colleagues in our districts. These can all be used to show our growth as educators and our commitment to continued learning experiences.

Technology is here to stay - we can either embrace its possibilities or scorn its acceptance out of fear. One thing is for certain: I know which side of that coin my students are going to take. As their teacher, I want to be on that side with them.

**Professional (Blogged) Development**
Today's topic is one that we're all very familiar with: blogging! Blogs are a great way to keep up with this fast-paced world of ours - they are updated constantly, are full of information (some accurate, some not) and can be a very helpful resource when it comes to professional development. I happen to love blogging - it helps me to sort out what works and what doesn't in my classroom, gives me an outlet to make a bigger contribution to education than just my own school, and has provided me with some great connections to people I would never have otherwise "met". All of these same things can be used in developing a professional development program at your school, too!

Now, I use blogs for a lot of different things. My main one is right here! But I also have a blog for my photography site, one that's just a personal one for me to remember my journeys as a mother, and then there's the one that I have developed for our school. I am the teacher development liaison for our school (which is just a fancy sounding title for the sucker who gets to plan all the professional development in the building - insert chuckle here) and had the dilemma of trying to design professional development that would meet the needs of all the teachers in our school. The problem is, everyone's needs are so different! How can you choose just one focus and have it be meaningful? So, I decided to develop a "pick-your-own" PD program this year. I interviewed each team last school year to find out what they most wanted to learn about this year. I then combined that list as a wordle and found what the biggest areas of concern were. From there, I developed 5 PD focus strands for this year: inclusion/differentiation, arts integration, technology, teambuilding, and instructional assistant support. People were then allowed to choose which group they would like to participate in for the year and they met 5 times this year for an hour before school. Each team had a leader from within the building and had objectives that aligned to professional development plan outcomes that are provided to us by our school system.
To keep track of all of this, I set up a blog so that people could see what each group was doing. It was a way to build in some transparency, as well as to keep everyone motivated and supporting each other. We documented the progress of each group throughout the year and the blog also allowed teachers to comments on what their teammates were doing. I also included a blog roll for each strand so that teachers in those groups had other resources from around the web that they could use to investigate their topic further. Finally, we created a "virtual gallery" where we posted our final products, made available our resources from throughout the year and included some powerpoints, movies and pictures from our journey. Each staff member could tour the gallery throughout the month of May, take a quick survey on the effectiveness of the program and then be prepared to discuss the galleries at our final staff meeting in June.

Using a blog for this was a great way to keep our professional development organized, differentiated and meaningful all at the same time. I HIGHLY suggest using a blog to document your own school journey. You'll be amazed at just what you can accomplish throughout the year! Happy blogging!