

## **The Media Center: Let's Get Practical**

Mary Alice Anderson, Media Specialist

Winona Middle School, Winona , Minnesota

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OK, we all know about multimedia projects, collaborative web projects, school news broadcasts, and a myriad of other technology based opportunities available to students and teachers. We get excited, but what about those who don't have time, access, interest or the skills to work with some of the higher profile applications of technology? What about the teacher who is just beginning to use technology, the teacher working in a school that has minimal technology or the media specialist who is acquiring technology in the media center for the first time or is just now assuming technology related responsibilities? Easy to implement options for integrating technology in teaching and learning are abundant, and often right under our finger tips. For, you, the reader, this article is an attempt to share ideas that you can apply immediately or share with others.

Even I can do this. A staff development workshop I particularly enjoy teaching is "Practical Tips for Integrating Technology in Your Curriculum." The pleasure in facilitating this workshop is the "light bulb" effect when people discuss things they hadn't thought about before or come to the realization that they can be successful.

I begin the class off line and a discussion of these questions?

- \* What technology is most appropriate for the task?
- \* What resources are available?
- \* What skills to students need to be successful?
- \* What value will the technology add?
- \* Will the project be meaningful for tech-savvy students?

The discussion encourages participants to think carefully about what we are trying to accomplish. What do we want the students to be able to know and do? It never hurts to remember that technology is the tool to help students learn a content objective. A basic tool may be all that is needed. The same considerations are useful in planning with an individual teacher.

What about the new teacher or the student teacher who has never used technology but know it's time to get going? Encourage the person to start small, begin by doing something that will ensure instant success. Keep it simple and uncomplicated.

Some easy beginnings. Electronic information access is a good way to ease into technology use. Quality databases are appealing to those who may be skeptical of the internet and the problems inherent in its usage. Many states now provide some type of state wide database access for K-12 schools; We've had statewide access in Minnesota since 1999, yet I've found many teachers do not know they exist or have not taken the time to learn how to use them. Similarly, not all teachers are aware of what online encyclopedias are available to them.

I can't believe it's all right here! Rachel, a teacher teaching a new curriculum, needed information on Mt. Everest. She couldn't believe how much was available to her with a simple search in World Book Online. She was excited to learn about the vast amount of information readily accessible in the related web links, magazine and newspaper articles and back in time articles. When teachers like Rachel learn how much they can find with one quick search they are hooked.

Another practical and easy hook is the combination of an online database and a scan converter or other projection system that is ready to go "just in time." Sandi, a technology newbie in my school is a recent convert. A video tape she planned to show in her family and consumer science class malfunctioned; we found the images she needed on World Book Online and connected a scan converter to her classroom computer and television. The ready access to the encyclopedia provided an opportunity to find appropriate information when Sandi realized her students needed more information to understand the lesson. Sandi was excited about how well the lesson went and wished she used the equipment earlier. Sandi's success is an excellent example of how the right technology at the right time can enhance a teachable moment.

Spreadsheets, one of the old standbys are another hook. Spreadsheets are fun, motivating, and are one of the things computers can do best. They can be used in almost all curriculum areas and even the youngest students can be successful. A number of teachers in our district provide meaningful and authentic learning experiences for students in math, science and economics. It's always interesting to see how motivated students are to manipulate the data in spreadsheets and how they enjoy the "instant" changes that occur.

Timelines are another tool for achieving "instant success." Our 6th grade students use Timeliner to create a timeline that parallels the life of a family member they interview with historical events of the time. They insert family pictures they have scanned.

Another productivity tool that's well suited for almost all curriculum areas is Inspiration. Teachers and students alike can learn the basics of concept mapping quickly; it works well for whole-class brainstorming or individual products.

Digital cameras are "old-hat" to many, but not to the person who has just discovered them. Teachers who may have been frustrated by the wires and software involved with the first round of cameras will quickly learn how to use the newer models. Once people have achieved success with taking a photo we introduce them to software edit the photo. We have had good success with the shareware title GraphicConverter.

Teachers appreciate being able to find web sites at a primary reading level when they use KidsClick! I helped one elementary teacher find information on popcorn that was just perfect for a science fair project. We've created a link to some search engines that are great for younger students on our building web site;

The abundance of web quests all ready for us to use are also appealing to many teachers. I always turn to The Matrix of Examples to show people examples of web quests for a huge variety of subjects and learning levels.

We try to always put the web sites students are being asked to use on our school's curriculum links web page. Ready to go links help students, especially those who don't keyboard well, get to the sites quickly. Students with home internet access can locate the resources even when they've lost the assignment sheet. Curriculum web links are also a great PR tool; a parent's eyes lit up when I showed her curriculum links

for her daughter's subjects. The key to success is to keep the links specific to your curriculum. If your school doesn't have a web site you can create content specific hyperlinks in Appleworks or Microsoft Word documents. Students can move back and forth between the word processing documented and the web browser. Another option is creating a web page for your class at one of the free web hosting services such as Homestead.com.

What about the person who's convinced Powerpoint is too complicated or doesn't have a computer powerful enough to run it? It's easy to make a great multimedia slide show with Appleworks or any version of Clarisworks. Teachers can use it to display daily announcements or assignments; students can use it to create a multimedia presentation that stands alone or as a background for an oral presentation.

Soft skills are the building blocks of technology usage. Too often in the rush to schedule the lab or resources we forget about the "soft skills" that make or break a lesson. Soft skills range from search strategies and note taking skills to manipulating graphics. Take time to think through the small components of a bigger project. For example, a student inserting a self image in a cover for a word processed document most likely needs to know how to manipulate the graphic and move back and forth between graphic software and the word processing software. Or, students will also have to know how to save/open files on their server folder and how to select the color printer. Simple and routine, yes, but not obvious to the novice. I like to take a few minutes during media specialist/teacher planning to go over a checklist of skills and things we have to be sure to teach or review to ensure success.

**Tips and Handouts.** You can never have enough of them! Very few people want to read manuals; they want one-two page step by step directions. Once they know it's easy they can take off on their own. We maintain a help sheet rack on most of our commonly used applications such as spreadsheets, Hyperstudio and Timeliner. We also maintain help sheets on many of commonly asked questions. One of our most popular tip sheets is a series of "Practical Tips for Using the Internet." It's full of ideas to help teachers develop successful and worthwhile internet based learning activities.

Never assume that everyone knows about some of these tried and true resources and productivity tools; in our busy educational environments many people simply have not become aquatinted with what is readily available to them. For every one of us there is a time when we suddenly need or want to learn how to use something that others may have been using for years.

Mary Alice Anderson is a frequent contributor to professional journals, a conference presenter, and an adjunct instructor in the College of Education at Winona State University. The Winona Middle School Media/Technology Program has received both state and national recognition and awards. She is also the lead media specialist for the Winona Area Public Schools and was a Library of Congress American Memory Fellow in 1999.