

The Media Center:
Early Technology: Why we love it and what we learned from it
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I spent part of New Year's Day setting up my new computer and putting obsolete technology in storage--floppy disks, applications for earlier operating systems, assorted wires and cables, even old automation system disks that ran on a 48K Apple II! (The sentimental part of me just won't let me throw some things!) The occasion led to reminiscing and wondering what memories other media specialists have of now old technologies. A quick post on LM_NET brought instant response; apparently many media specialists were eager to share their fond memories and favorite experiences with the technology we experienced as technologist pioneers.

Dumb terminals, Apple Iie's, Mac Classics, Color Mac Classics, Mac IICi's, Atari's, Commodore 64s and Tandy TRS 80's were among the most enthusiastically hardware components mentioned by early adapters. Others mentioned knock off Iie's, PC Juniors, a Xerox computer, and even dedicated word processors. These were all hot stuff items, often costing as much as \$3000.00 with a couple extra Megs of ram. One person even mentioned paying as much as \$5000.00 for a system that included a radius monitor. Many proudly claim their old computers still work

For storage we used 5 1/4" floppy disks, (two if we were high-tech), cartridges, cassette drives and the forward thinking among us even bought a spare hard drive or tape backup system. A few mentioned the old "IMB" punch cards.

Software fondly remembered included *Word Perfect*, *Appleworks 1.0*, *VisiCalc*, *Lotus 123*, and *My Type Artist*, "which still works even though it's ten years old." Others cited forerunner operating systems like DOS and BASIC with lo-res graphics. I warmly recall a simple application made by a tech pioneer that was used to create catalog cards, a real time saver. "And who remembers Betty Costa's OPAC catalog...so simple. but so revolutionary at the time. (Thanks, Betty, for getting the automation rolling.)" I also fondly remember *Multiscribe*, the font program that made an Apple Iie function like a Mac and *ClarisWorks 1.0* with its smooth integration of graphics, drawing and charts and graphs into word processing. Cool stuff!

One media specialist "loved the CD version of EBSCO databases. We had them prior to the Internet and the kids thought they were wonderful. As soon as the Internet came along - that was the end of EBSCO et al for research information, unless they are forced to use them." Another person fondly remembered EBSCO's first online databases shared a glitch. "I introduced EBSCO's online *databases* to a class researching Elizabethan times. I tried it out the afternoon prior to the class and all was fine. So, I confidently typed in "Globe Theater" - and got a list of articles about "white mice". I tried the alternative spelling of "Globe Theatre". Still - "white mice". I went on to something else, assuring the kids that it was a temporary glitch. As we progressed, I discovered that one side of the lab got "white mice" and the other side got actual articles on "Globe Theater." Go figure! " My personal favorite database story is piloting World Book's *Information Finder* in our media center. The stand-alone CD was text only, but the kids were fascinated and stood in line to use it. Even more memorable is how the CD survived theft and a dunking in a school toilet, a situation that convinced me of the almost invincibility of electronic information formats. Seeing the excitement in kids use an online catalog for the first time also stands out. Our early video broadcasts that integrated scavenged audiovisual tools and computer software were a rewarding example of the powers of scavenged media and collaboration.

But it's more than the hardware and software; it's the experience of being early adapters and the potential possibilities that shaped what we did as media specialists and helped our media programs evolve. Like several enthusiastic LM_NET respondents, I sometimes I long for those days. The technology was primitive by today's standards, but the excitement was there and the conditions were often right. If our skills were in place we were indispensable and in demand, an enviable position. Teachers who were early adapters were excited about the potential and not yet jaded. Teachers who

only wanted to use encyclopedias or almanacs in their classrooms gradually became fans of resource-based teaching that incorporated technologies into literature and social studies units. We fought the battles of malfunctioning or erratically functioning technology, but the battles were relatively simple. Those were the days unencumbered by the demands of NCLB, filtering, and policies that limit the use of technology we've worked so hard to acquire and learn how to use.

So what do we do with our old stuff? What do we do with our past experiences?

Dealing with the old stuff can be fun and easy. The Smithsonian's Museum of American History displays the first Apple II; why shouldn't your media center display one of the first computers the school owned? I threw out the last 16 mm projector when the teacher who used 16mm films retired--the films went into the archives display! If you still have some oldies in your school set up an archives display—it will be your media center's own personal museum. Old technology can also be a teaching tool. One media specialist explained she "hosted a used book sale. One book had a 45 black vinyl record with it. The first two classes came and went, but from the third class on, all the kids wanted to see the "black CD."

Past experiences are for building and growth. Those first tools taught us transferable technology skills and helped us acquire technology confidence. Our early troubleshooting skills are the basis for the assistance we provide today. Our first implementation experiences gave us a foundation for transferable implementation and collaboration skills that we can build on as our programs grow. The staff development skills we used when we taught teachers to word process or create *ClarisWorks* charts and graphs can be used to help teachers create blogs or work with assessment data. Today's students and young teachers come to our media centers with new skill sets, but are still people we teach and people we collaborate with. Technology and skills may change, but why we do what we do remains the same—helping students become effective users of information and ideas.

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