

The Media Center and The Internet: Selection, Supervision and Staff Development

by

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Selection, supervision, and staff development go far towards wise use of the Internet in schools. In many ways the Internet is just another resource, but its unique scope, characteristics, and potential make it a vehicle for media specialists to model good use of information technology and provide far reaching instructional leadership in the school setting.

Selection.

It is well established that the Internet's unedited, unstructured, and uncontrolled nature necessitates critical Internet site selection. Prior site selection and specific directions for students are often key to a successful information experience. Technology savvy students who want to be self reliant may resist teacher selections or directions. Teacher strike out on their own developing Internet based projects that only involve media specialists at the "scheduling the lab" stage. Proactive media specialists jump in to establish partnerships where teachers and media specialists can grow and learn together. Media specialists can be role models, setting good examples by being at the forefront of curricular based Internet site selection. Trained in the task of materials selection, media specialists can lead the way by selecting a core web sites for their teachers and students to use in much the same way they select other instructional resources. The time spent perusing the sites ahead of time will save student search time and provide positive P.R. to time-stressed teachers. Sites selected need not be comprehensive or representative of the entire web. Teachers and students will appreciate knowing that they have a solid, core collection of curriculum specific sites and may find it more useful than large, encyclopedic sites with links to all areas of knowledge. Less is more.

Forward thinking media specialists who come across web sites can maintain bookmark and data base files or send the URLs to staff as they find them. We've found it simplest just to copy/paste URLs along with a description into an "under construction" web page accessible to teachers. Sites that definitely meet our curricular needs are added to the curriculum sites web site either as a general set of links for a broad curricular area or as a collection for a particular unit.

Encourage teachers to forward their favorite sites to the webmaster. We encourage teachers to send their choices via email so they can be quickly checked and added to files. Print Internet resource guides are helpful if they are current. Elizabeth Miller's Internet Resource Directory published annually by Libraries Unlimited and Classroom Connect's Yellow Pages are especially useful when staff request sites on a particular topic. Tech columns in newspapers, listservs and professional journals are also excellent sources of ideas.

Many educators concur that directing students to specific sites at the beginning of a lesson or unit is necessary . Students will waste less time and be able to hone in on the information quicker. For example, our 7th grade health students are generally assigned to use teacher and media specialist selected sites linked from the curriculum sties section of our school's web page, an preferable alternative to students stumbling on inappropriate sites.

Quite often there is an assumption that net-generation students know how to search the Internet; it is a fallacy to equate knowing how to navigate the web or use Yahoo! with knowing how to really search. Taking time up front to teach search strategies will save time in the end and help students become information literate. Once our health students have demonstrated they know how to search, take notes, and stay on task they are encouraged to do their own searching following appropriate instruction and review. If the topic has the potential to be dangerous or controversial we ask them to use elementary and middle-level student friendly search engines such as Ask Jeeves for Kids < <http://www.ajkids.com> > and Kids Click < <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick/> > as a way of keeping them in safe sites.

Signs listing recommended search engines and general search tips < http://wms.luminet.net/curricsites/search_engines.html > are posted by workstations.

With several years of solid Internet use behind us it might be easy to think these simple and basic techniques are not needed; they are needed, and they are appreciated and recognized as key to success.

Supervision

Supervision of student Internet use continues to be a topic of concern to parents, educators and the general public. A lack of proper supervision will send up a red flag that may ultimately affect all students' rights to equitable information and technology access.

Common sense should govern. Students should not have access to any networked computers that are not easily supervisable. Ideally all monitors should be visible from a circulation or teacher desk. District and school policies must be posted; even if students' don't read the fine print you have done your job. We frequently remind classes of the guidelines and encourage teachers to review school's guidelines and appropriate Netiquette before beginning research projects. The district's Acceptable Use Policy is included in student, staff, and parent handbooks. Our district no longer requires parental signatures for students to use the Internet; each student automatically is given permission in the district management system; parents not wishing to have their students use the internet may opt out, but only a handful have.

Brief Internet use guidelines posted on each computer will be adequate for most situations. Our signs simply remind students that email and inappropriate sites are not allowed; Other schools remind students that the internet is for school assignments; chat rooms, games and surfing for fun are not allowed. Most students take their privileges seriously and do not want to lose them.

Beyond common sense, the time and intricacy of supervision varies with school policies, individual philosophies, available technology and available staff. Some media specialists assign students a specific computer and note the student on a chart like those used to assign restaurant seating. Some schools require students to login and logout every time they use the Internet; others require students to complete a search form before they begin. Others issue internet driver's ID cards that must be displayed at the computer and some schools use network software to monitor usage of individual computers or check out the computer they are using with the media center's automation system. Whatever works best for your situation is best for you.

The complexity of your school's guidelines and the amount of freedom given students will vary with the age, maturity and behavior patterns of your students. Realistic and enforceable supervision practices policies will ensure that media/technology staff will not have to be Internet police officers and offer assurance to parents and the community that students are supervised.

Staff Development. Knowledgeable of resources, curriculum, and "the big picture," media specialists are well suited to provide meaningful staff development. Teachers are the door keepers of instructional activities; by first making sure teachers are knowledgeable there is a better chance that students will have sound Internet based instructional experiences. Media specialists should strive for a leadership role in establishing, implementing, and maintaining staff development

activities that evolve along with skill levels, curriculum, and technology. Classes should include technology skills, integration, information literacy, and instructional strategies that match the type of learning the Internet supports.

Staff skills and knowledge typically range from non-existent to highly sophisticated. Never assume that all educators understand what the internet is or how to use it in instruction; teachers just entering the profession are likely to know how to send email and search, but are unlikely to have integration skills; staff returning to teaching after an absence or at an older age may have had very limited Internet experience. Even that those who use the Internet daily and in instruction may not fully utilize it a tool for engaged, active learning.

Our district has had an ongoing series of Internet classes since 1994. They've run the gamut from "What is the Internet," and "Introduction to Browsers" to "Web Page Design," "Search Engines" "Critical Use of the Internet," and classes with a specific curriculum focus. There can never be enough staff development! Tips, tricks, and resources for younger students are appealing to teachers struggling with even deciding if the Internet is for them. A partial listing of Internet classes offered in our district can be found @ http://wms.luminet.net/maryalice/internet_staff_development.html

It's time to move on. With the majority of our staff comfortable with the basics and beyond it is time to focus on specifics such as the Library of Congress American Memory Collections, Internet based subscription services, developing web quests, online courses, and using the Internet to promote more engaged learning. Additional highly technical classes are needed for those want to keep moving forward with web page design or publishing student multimedia. The continuum of classes will continue to evolve. A strong, ongoing staff development program is the best insurance for successful internet usage in your school; make it an integral part of your leadership role.

Selection, supervision and staff development are all practical and common sense concepts that should not be forgotten in the rush to get the latest and fastest equipment and connectivity. But don't forget the basics for providing a good foundation for the internet users in your school.