

In the January 28, 2016 issue of ASCD EXPRESS, Kathy Schrock discusses using technology to provide academic support and individualized instruction for all students. She recognizes that the plethora of technology can overwhelm teachers and their students and provides a few ways to integrate technology. She reminds teachers that designing formative and summative assessments with higher order thinking skills is one way that instruction will drive the conversation, not the technology. Even with this suggestion, however, I fear that the wealth of technology can incapacitate a teacher as s/he tries to implement various technology without the benefit of working side-by-side with an experienced colleague to collectively problem-solve and collaborate about what works in classrooms.

“Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important” says Bill Gates. This is one thing with which I agree... technology is wonderful to help teachers expand their students’ knowledge base and to help teachers generate some additional practice work for their students. But, without ongoing conversations identifying the goals for the lesson and how technology supports the learning, the technology will not improve the teaching and learning; it may only serve as the tool for the learning, just like the pen and paper it replaces.

Kathy continues by including the SAMR model as a way to change practice, i.e., substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition which can provide both transformation and enhancement in classrooms. Again, how does a teacher begin to understand this kind of model and integrate it into the daily routine so it becomes the norm for teaching and learning without the continued support of another skilled practitioner?

Call me the *dinosaur* but I still remember being visited by textbook publishers who brought an accumulation of materials for me to use in my classroom. Those publishers brought new textbooks which my district could not afford to replace if student copies were lost, transparencies with amazing color images which could not be displayed because I didn’t have an overhead projector, cassette tapes of every Shakespearean play and sonnet but I didn’t have a cassette recorder, and of course, the magnificent handouts that without all the other “tools” were useless. (I did mention that I was the dinosaur, right?) In fact, these textbook publishers even hosted a “Publisher’s Dinner” at a local hotel thinking that drinks and banquet food would convince me to purchase their products. Unfortunately, my purchasing power was determined by the budget and we all know how that story ended.

So, what’s my point here? Good question... we know that we must teach some “old” things in

new ways as well as teach new things in new ways. And, we know we must help our students get ready for college and their careers equipped with 21st century skills. None of this can happen, though, if we do not provide teachers with opportunities to collaborate and discuss innovative ways to transform student learning.

We know that we must do what Jeff Utecht says "...creat[ing] new and different learning experiences for students supported by the use of technology." We know that we must help teachers understand how to use several tools, not just those with which they are the most familiar using and we know that we must help teachers apply their learnings. That does not happen automatically. So, as we move our thinking forward, our practices must follow.

We need to remember that the abundance of technology is not the panacea to changing the landscape of teaching and learning, just like the supply of textbook bells and whistles were not. We need to change the mindset of all the members in a community of learning and support ongoing professional development that translates into professional learning. We need to have consistency in language and practice so that all students are in classrooms with highly effective teachers. But first, we have to communicate regularly with the teachers and administrators and let them know that trying a new strategy or new tool works effectively if the teachers can "rehearse" and talk with a trusted colleague about using that strategy or tool. That's what instructional coaches offer... intentional and deliberate encouragement in real time to plan, help deliver, and give feedback designed to improve practice.

That's the role of the instructional coach ... continue to support the teachers with whom you work following the BDA cycle of consultation, focusing on school wide improvement, building teacher capacity, and increasing student engagement. That will make all the difference!

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