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CONNECTING for HIGH POTENTIAL

TODAY'S TOPIC
The Technological Revolution

A Teacher's View

My school recently adopted the policy of Bring Your Own Device, or BYOD, which allows students to utilize any tablet larger than 7 inches all the way up to a full-size laptop at any time during class. This means note taking, web searching, and desktop publishing as needed. How am I possibly going to manage this? I can't even get my students to stop texting during class. Seems like a big policing issue for me.

Furthermore, my administrator has added "use of technology" to the annual review of my classroom teaching. Are we really supposed to incorporate technology during every lesson? With the infinite amount of apps, programs, and web features out there, how am I supposed to know which one is the best to use? And, how much is enough?

A Parent's View

I have difficulty enough managing my middle school child's use of devices at home, much less now having him required to use a device at school. Now, the majority of homework is completed on a device, whether it's researching, creating, collaborating, or posting assignments online. It seems like he's online all the time—and often gets distracted and ventures off to text or surf the net. Devices seem to have taken over our lives and the additional layer of using a device for school creates stress in our home.

Also, technology is starting to touch all aspects of my child's life at school—from devices in the classroom, to social media sites for extra-curricular activities, to portals that include personal information—I'm concerned about my child's privacy and security.

At school, chalkboards and overhead projectors have been replaced by smart boards and digital projectors. Curricular enhancement comes in the form of web quests, interactive websites, educational apps, and the use of online "flipped" classrooms. Notebooks, daily planners, and grading systems live in "the Cloud"—and homework is often handed in, corrected, and returned digitally. And, thanks to Skype, FaceTime, texting, and collaborative applications, children are connected to their schools, teachers, and classmates round the clock.

Technological advancements are creating a major cultural shift with respect to education, as technology is redefining educational goals, instructional methods, and the roles of teacher, parent, and student. No matter which side you sit on the digital divide, it's a fact that technology is here to stay. The latest frontier it's touching is the classroom, and it's up to the adults to guide our high-ability children to harness the benefits technology offers and to become good digital citizens.

Here are three strategies to help teachers and parents navigate the new experiences technology has brought to the classroom:

DON'T FIGHT IT. Technology is here to stay, so educating yourself and creating a mindset to embrace the benefits will help set a positive tone both at school and home.

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SET REASONABLE LIMITS. Both teachers and parents can work together to establish the right balance between going overboard and avoiding technology use altogether. Technology is a tool for enhancing the learning experience—but there are other tools that can and should be used.

PLAN, EDUCATE, COMMUNICATE. It's essential that parents and teachers be empathetic to each other's goals and aware of how technology affects both home and school life. Lines of open communication between school and home help in creating understanding and insight.

1. DON'T FIGHT IT: EMBRACE THE BENEFITS

AT SCHOOL

Becoming educated on the benefits and ways to use technology in the classroom is an essential element of every teacher's job description today.

Developing 21st century skills, collaborating online, customizing learning, and increasing affordability are a few of the many benefits to using technology in the classroom. This recent article highlights the top 8 reasons why technology is here to stay: http://elearningindustry.com/why-digital-learning-is-here-to-stay. You'll be surprised at the benefits of incorporating technology into your curriculum.

Also, the latest data is in from Project Tomorrow's Speak Up report, http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup/2014_OnlineLearningReport.html, which indicates that 53% of students would like to use their own mobile devices in the classroom, and want a classroom environment that more closely replicates the way they use digital tools outside of school to support greater communications and collaboration. Access the press release or full report and learn more about the direction that technology in the classroom is headed.

Once you've accessed all relevant information—and decided how you will use technology in your classroom—be sure to share the information with the parents of your students. Try sending out an e-mail or constructing a newsletter highlighting the apps and other technologies that you'll be using in the classroom. This will ease their minds and allow them to explore, discuss, and help support their child at home.

AT HOME

If your child texts, Skypes, or plays online games with friends, you know that technology is an important part of his or her social life. However, accepting the fact that technology has become an integral tool for *learning* is the first step in supporting your child's need to be online and connected for school.

Second, it's important to become educated about the benefits technology brings to the classroom: its educational value; its ability to allow students to create, collaborate, and connect; and the organizational benefits it offers. Technology offers a students the ability to receive increased differentiation. Students can progress at their own pace and go deeper into subjects that interest them. Online books offer the ability for students to use more current, up-to-date learning materials, and to avoid having to haul heavy books back and forth. (A recent article in the *Daily Democrat* is worth a read: http://www.dailydemocrat.com/general-news/20150213/goodbye-textbooks-hello-free-online-resources.)

If it's unclear how technology is being used in the classroom—or there are concerns about security and/or privacy issues—parents should feel comfortable contacting the school or reaching out to the classroom teacher to politely inquire. Parents who are equipped with an arsenal of information will feel less overwhelmed and more in sync with what's happening in their child's school.

2. SET LIMITS: CREATE A BALANCED APPROACH

AT SCHOOL

Instead of banning devices from your classroom, welcome them. The more you use them for educational purposes the more students will lose the immediate interest to text their friends or check their social media sites. The key is to keep students busy and on task. Work with your school to universally block access to gaming, video, and entertainment sites throughout the building to minimize classroom distractions.

In order to help plan a curriculum with the right balance of tech and traditional tools, check out: Edutopia's technology page, http://www.edutopia.org/technology-integration. Also, check out the professional development offerings on http://edtechteacher.org for educating teachers on the role and use of technology.

For the past eight years, *Teaching for High Potential* has featured a regular technology column. Originally authored by Brian Housand and now written by Kevin Besnoy, *Technology Untangled* and *The Digital Ecosystem* provide relevant and up-to-date resources intended to have you explore ways to utilize tech in the classroom. Go to: http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/nagc-publications/teaching-high-potential/thp-articles-spotlight-curriculum#Technology.

Lastly, remember that technology is just one of many tools intended to support instruction. Every classroom presents different challenges and situations, and not every learning situation calls for the use of technology. There will be times when it is not needed and the key is to find a healthy balance that your students will enjoy.

AT HOME

As stated by Winifred Lender in *A Practical Guide to Parenting in the Digital Age: How to Nurture Safe, Balanced, and Connected Children and Teens,* parents need to help their children develop balanced lives—with the right amount of physical activity, schoolwork, social time, digital time for homework, and digital time for play. However, in many households today, parents feel that digital interests are tipping the scales over other activities.

Experts agree that it's important for parents to set the digital tone for their own homes, creating limits that complement individual parenting styles. From creating a digital floor plan (e.g. where the Internet access and computers are located in your home) to setting usage guidelines, parents can help their child find a balance that supports tech-driven homework and allows social connections, but does not consume the household and/or their child's attention. I really like Dr. Kate Robert's *Children's Technology Use Guidelines for Parents:* http://drkateroberts.com/childrens-technology-guidelines/.

Creating a structure and schedule that separates homework Internet time from free-access Internet time is also helpful to show the distinction between work and play. Some families "check in" their devices in a central location at specific times, or create "blackout periods" where devices aren't accessible—such as mealtime, before breakfast, and at least an hour before bedtime.

Professionals also suggest that parents should model the behavior they expect from their children, with respect to setting limits, controlling impulses to check for emails or notifications, and in creating an environment that allows for focused, productive work. Check out the April 2014 issue of *Parenting for High Potential,* http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/nagc-publications/parenting-high-potential/parenting-high-potential-april-1, which offers tips and tricks for parenting in the digital age, along with other resources.

3. PLAN, EDUCATE, COMMUNICATE, AND GET INVOLVED.

The most successful adoption of technology practices for a school or district by teachers, students, and parents are those in which all constituents have been involved in the planning and implementation process.

PLAN. Whether you're an administrator, educator, or parent driving the adoption of technology in the classroom, it's important that everyone has enough information and adequate planning time to ease their concerns. Any cultural shift takes time, so a thoughtful technology plan and rollout is essential for acceptance by all stakeholders. Both parents and teachers can ask to join the school's technology planning team or to help their school develop "rules of the road" that are agreed upon and discussed with students.

EDUCATE. Common Sense Education, www.commonsensemedia.org, offers a free "Connecting Families Program," which includes a program overview, discussion guides, conversation topics, and printable resources to help teachers, parents, and students have meaningful conversations about making great digital choices. These programs can be launched in conjunction with "Back to School Nights," a special "Computer Family Night" at school, or ongoing meetings.

COMMUNICATE. Ongoing communication between the school, teachers, and parents with updates on successes and areas for improvement will ensure everyone remains focused on the interests of the children. Education is no longer an 8 a.m-3 p.m. event. With 24/7 access and thousands of apps, students are engaging in learning, whether sitting at a desk in school or on the couch at home—and parents and teachers need to work together to ensure they are communicating the same messages to the child with respect to access, expectations, and deliverables.

GET INVOLVED. NAGC has a Computers and Technology Network that works hard to educate the membership about the latest involving technology and its use in the classroom. Visit their page and link to their blog here: http://www.nagc.org/get-involved/nagc-networks/networks-computers-technology.

> **"***It is important to remember that educational software, like textbooks, is only one tool in the learning process. Neither can be a substitute for well-trained teachers, leadership, and parental involvement.***"** – Keith Krueger, CEO, Consortium for School Networking

About CHP

NAGC often receives similar questions from teachers and parents, so *Connecting for High Potential* offers an important forum for exploring how "the other side" might be facing the same issue. Both groups can benefit from the same information even if perhaps seen through a slightly different lens. Feel free to email, copy, print, or post to share with a favorite teacher or parent in your community.

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