

Jamieson McKenzie: Teachers Must Help Students Learn to Manage Information

Dianna L. Crim
Curriculum Coordinator, SAU # 59

DLC: Jamie, how did a former English/Social Studies teacher like you get so heavily into technology?

JMcK: During the late 60s and 70s, I was teaching English and Social Studies and recognized the instructional value of simulating historical events. By the time the PCs arrived, I was an elementary principal. Being a "humanities" person, I was concerned about what the "technology people" would do with kids. When computers first arrived in schools, there was talk that computers would take the place of teachers. Computers are powerful tools for kids to use to solve problems, but they are not teachers. Teachers are as necessary as ever, but their new challenge is to help kids handle the information.

DLC: How would you recommend a district or school most actively move towards integrating technology?

JMcK: Many districts are jumping on the "mistake bandwagon"...They put a PC in every class wired to the Internet. All they do is wind up with what I call "Screen-Savers Disease." The problem is they have no clear educational plan for the computers. Technology isn't an end in itself: it should not be a separate curriculum. There should be a clear plan to integrate technology into the rest of the curriculum and plenty of staff training. Most districts don't have nearly enough. Illinois now has a policy that 25 percent of each technology expenditure will be spent on staff training so that the hardware and software will be used appropriately.

DLC: What are your recommendations for using technology in instruction?

JMcK: Districts need to look at whether they are focusing on "teaching" or on "learning." "Teaching" doesn't need a network; "learning" does. Learning requires investigation and problem solving, *not* regurgitation. Teachers have to make the transition from being the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on the side." Many educators are too easily impressed by technology used for "flash and dash" presentations. But, technology—and by that I mean *any tool*, not just electronic—should be used to help students think, reason, and problem-solve.

DLC: Most schools seem to be connecting to the Internet, but there is also a jungle of software out there. What software do classrooms need most?

JMcK: Most software should be "toolware," that is, word processing, database, and spreadsheet programs. The fact is, there are just

not enough spots on the Internet for kids who have an academic focus. There is nothing in the way of biography. The history you find on the Internet is a "flattened history" vs. truly important people. Districts also need to buy information software like encyclopedias, etc. There are just not enough "curriculum pages" and sites that are valuable for education.

DLC: Tell me about your site on the Internet.

JMcK: My Internet site is *From Now On—the Educational Technology Journal*. The address is: FromNowOn.Org. It has over 6,000 subscribers and averages 400-500 visits per day.

(I visited Jamie's website and it is worth checking out. . . especially if your district is struggling to get technology literate!)

DLC: There are many people in New Hampshire who have great interest in getting back to "the basics" and really want kids to know a lot of "facts." Some of them think of technology as a "frill."

JMcK: They need to realize that the workplace requires people who are thinking, analyzing, and solving problems. Technology can help to anchor all other skills and learning that the back-to-the-basics people want students to learn. Using technology, thinking, analyzing, problem-solving are basic skills for the modern workplace. Managing information is at the heart of success.

DLC: Jamie, you've been a teacher, a principal, a superintendent of schools, and most recently, Director of Libraries, Media, and Technology for the Bellingham, WA schools. I understand you are leaving that position. What's next?

JMcK: I am going to be doing independent consulting. Texas is heavily involved in implementing technology in instruction and I will be working with them as well as doing conferences across the country.

DLC: You've written dozens of journal articles and books, and have developed your website. You are a sought-after presenter at conferences. What do you do when you want to unwind and get away from all your professional pursuits?

JMcK: I relax by writing poetry. I also do a little song-writing, play guitar, and enjoy mountain hiking and sketching. *(I think we should invite Jamie to present a time management workshop).*