Five Points for Evaluating Use of Technology in the Classroom

As an instructor, you realize that technology is here to stay. Most likely, technology has helped you with lesson planning and delivery, grading, and reporting. Yet when software or apps are poorly selected, designed, or understood, when equipment doesn’t work, or when cellphones are abused for non-learning purposes, technology may seem more like a curse than a blessing. When technology feels overwhelming, it is time to evaluate current practice and consider future possibilities.

As you search for ways to productively integrate technology into your classroom instruction, or evaluate your current use of technology, ask yourself how well you are doing on each of the following points; or better yet, write a written report for yourself and a plan of action for improvement.

1) Analyze and describe exactly what equipment you have available and when it is available (already in your classroom, available for sign-up to be delivered to your classroom, offered in a lab or library). Note any Internet filters you are working with, and be sure you understand any school policies regarding use of school equipment.

2) Consider these reasons to integrate technology into the classroom. Rank them according to the greatest need for your students, as well as ease of implementation to create your plan of action.

a. Increase student motivation through curriculum-related hands-on projects (project-based learning)
b. Increase student motivation through self-guided, decision-based learning (individualized learning)
c. Increase student motivation through immediate feedback (clickers, apps like Nearpod or GoClass)
d. Increase student motivation through novelty, interactivity, and media-rich delivery of content
e. Increase classroom time and efficiency by using technology in cases of individual remediation or enrichment (differentiation)
3) Decide how available technology best enhances your curriculum; avoid making your curriculum fit the technology available.

4) Model productive use of technology. White boards, digital projectors, and creativity will help you demonstrate to students how to conduct effective searches, utilize informational websites, and conduct classroom-wide Skype conversations or Google Hang-outs. It can also maximize limited hardware availability.

5) Use technology to stay in touch with parents. At the beginning of the year during open house, offer parents the chance to give you an email address where you can send personal notes of praise or ask for more parental involvement. For public communication to all your students and parents, consider using Twitter.

Most of all, embrace all the opportunities you have available to learn about the latest uses of technology in the classroom. Modeling openness to learn new things is one of the greatest things a teacher can do in his or her classroom. Do not be afraid of failure. Showing students that, “It is better to try and fail, than not to try at all” is a great life lesson.