

Conduct a Staff In-Service

By Mallory Goetz

After discussion in class about technology integration, I decided to conduct a staff in-service about exactly that: How can staff begin to integrate their classrooms with technology (painlessly!)? I went to a technology conference this past year, in Panama City, where I had the opportunity to hear Heidi Hayes Jacobs speak on her idea of “updating” curriculum, one unit or lesson at a time. She talked about how we have to help teachers throw out the old, outdated ways of teaching that are not “preparing your students for 2015 or 2020” (Hayes Jacobs, 2010). In order to bring this to the International School of Panama, I will take Hayes Jacobs’ idea of updating curriculum and turn it into an accessible presentation about technology integration.

In order to do this, I wanted it to actually be authentic, I contacted my principals to see if I could have time during staff in-service week before the students come to school. Both the middle and high school principals were thrilled with the proposition and I am on the agenda; I will give an in-service twice next week. My presentation is focused on getting started with integrating technology because my staff is on the beginner side of the spectrum. Very, very few staff members are integrating technology regularly and many have yet to try to integrate any technology at all.

Based on the research on effective leaders (Las Vegas 2006), I want to be considered as similar to the teachers that I am training as possible and so decided to go with a very informal presentation tool—Popplet. Popplet is well organized, easy to use, and a great example of a tool a teacher could use with students in a classroom. I also decided, in order to make the presentation concrete and accessible, that I would use a real example of how a 6th grade social

studies teacher, Julia Reynen, and I used Heidi Hayes Jacobs' idea of updating an old project with a technology rich one. Julia and I took one of her old projects last year—a poster, research project and presentation on a region in the Americas (geography unit) and took the same content standards and learning objectives to turn the project into a documentary video project using Windows Photostory 3.

In my presentation, I will give the background of the project Julia and I did, show a student example (embedded in Popplet), and then give teachers “best practice” tips about how to implement technology: which were learned from flipping this old project with Julia. The last piece of the presentation will be teachers taking workshop time to actually think about a project they know they are going to do this year and making a plan to flip it into a 21st century project. The teachers will all sign up for a planning period with me to follow up on this plan and to actually implement it during the year. Administration is fully on-board with this idea and will be reminding teachers during the year (not during this presentation) about the technology use piece of their yearly evaluation. I have asked administration to not mention this during the actual staff in-service to try and steer teachers away from thinking they are being forced to do something... but to force them to create a plan and then sneak in later to help them implement it.

This is the beauty of Hayes Jacobs' idea to update at least one thing a year—it is not intimidating. I fell in love with the idea of easing teachers into technology integration by simply taking their existing curriculum—already aligned with content standards, battle-tested for teaching students the content skills they needed—and powering it up with technology that supported and enhanced an already solid lesson. This strategy immediately takes away the idea that teachers will have to recreate their whole curriculum or that technology integration means that teachers have to start everything from scratch. Updating one unit is completely achievable

and with the success of one technologically-rich unit under their belt, teachers are more likely to feel empowered and have the confidence and motivation to do more.

The language of the presentation is purposely non-academic. Again, this is a move to make sure teachers see technology integration as something they can do and that I am not a lofty expert (because I certainly am not!), but I am indeed a teacher like them and am here to help and support them as we both learn more about technology. The presentation is set up as, “things we learned from making this lesson tech integrated,” not as, “things you must do.” I am sharing my experience to make theirs easier, not preaching at them.

This is just one of the many steps to technology integration at the International School of Panama, but I know it will be an important beginning one. This presentation and workshop is designed to get teachers thinking about how they can start preparing their students for 2020, not for 1995. It will give them a real start on a real project, not just a futile exercise where we talk about what we are theoretically going to do in the future. This is a make it-take it presentation with follow-up from myself and eventually from administration. I already know the obstacles in this strategy will be teachers who claim they have no projects or lessons that can be updated, and teachers who do the exercise, but try and wiggle out of implementing it later this year. Combating these will take an arsenal of creative ideas and technology resources, and a lot of follow up and perseverance.

The next steps in this project, then, are exactly the above—making sure I follow through with every teacher and help bring their lesson to reality. For every teacher who does one updated unit/project/lesson, it will be easier to get them to integrate another technology lesson later. Rome wasn't built in a day and changing the culture of a school takes more than a year. I feel

confident steps like this in-service and subsequent follow-up in-services and trainings with my staff this year will help us to build the 21st century ready school we want and our students absolutely need.

Bibliography

Goetz, M. (2012). Technology Best Practices. Panama City, Panama. <http://popplet.com/app/#/167481>.

Hayes Jacobs, H. (2010). *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

