Technology Tips for the Coming Year

Craig Roland

This is an exciting but challenging time for using technology in the classroom. Mobile computing, interactive whiteboards, student response systems, streaming video, digital cameras, blogs, podcasts, and wikis are just some of the new technologies that are transforming education. Indeed, there are so many different digital tools and services available today; it's easy to feel overwhelmed with the prospect of learning how to use a new technology, let alone with figuring out how to incorporate it into your curriculum. To alleviate some of this stress, the following six tips offer practical strategies for helping you plan or expand the ways you and your students use technology during the coming school year.

Tip One: Take stock in what you have available.
Make an initial assessment of the technology that's available in your classroom and school. How current are the computers? How accessible are they to students? What software is on hand? What additional digital tools are available? What kind of technology support is available? Having some idea of what technology resources you have to work with will help you to lay the groundwork for deciding what you will ultimately do with them.

Tip Two: Focus on curriculum outcomes, not tools.
The aim of introducing new technology into a classroom is to build a richer learning environment in which teacher and students pursue meaningful curriculum goals. Thus, any decisions regarding the use of digital media or other emerging technologies in your classroom needs to be based on what you expect students to learn and accomplish with those tools.

Tip Three: Start with something small and manageable.
Don't try to integrate technology into your curriculum in one swoop. Begin by adding a "technology boost" to one of your existing lessons with a digital tool or online resource that you feel comfortable with, and build from there. For instance, have your students use VoiceThread (**ed.voicethread.com**) to record personal reflections on the artwork they create to share with others online.

Tip Four: Use free and open source software and tools.
The availability of free online tools like Blogger (**Blogger.com**) and WetPaint (**Wikisineducation.wetpaint.com**) along with open-source software (like Firefox, GIMP, and Blender) distributed at little or no cost for public use, offer a wide assortment of alternatives to commercial software. Taking advantage of these options can be especially helpful when you're working within a tight budget.

Tip Five: Learn from other teachers.
Explore school websites and blogs to see how other art teachers are using technology in their classrooms. Social networks like Art Education 2.0 (**arted20.ning.com**) are another great source, where you ask other teachers how they use technology with their students and learn what works for them. Also, consult with other subject area teachers in your building or district who use technology regularly in their classrooms. Their insights may be applicable to your own classroom situation.

Tip Six: Become informed about your school's technology policies.
Familiarize yourself with the security measures taken by your school to protect students and teachers from abuses of technology. Find out how the filtering software in use works. Who decides which websites are available to students and which are blocked? What can you do when students are prevented from accessing legitimate sites that you want them to visit? What policies are in place regarding posting students work and pictures online? Learning more about these issues will prepare you to make informed decisions regarding the role of technology in your classroom. ✏

Craig Roland is an associate professor of art education in the school of art and art history at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. He is the author of The Art Teacher's Guide to the Internet *(Davis Publications, 2005). rolandc@ufl.edu*