

WHY TECHNOLOGY?

Providing Technology Leadership for the Pacific

By Andrew Kerr

Making decisions about educational technology is always a challenge, but it is even more complicated when the schools in question are located in the Pacific. Almost everyone agrees that educational technology is important, but not many seem to know why.

We hear statements that computers are the future, that our kids must have computers to compete with the rest of the world, and that computers are the key to success. While there is some truth in all these statements, it is hard to justify spending resources to equip schools with computer labs when many of them lack basic necessities like plumbing and regular power; blackboards, desks, and textbooks; and qualified teachers, who are in short supply throughout the entire region from Hawai'i to Palau.

Educational technology is expensive. It is expensive to make the initial investment, expensive to maintain the equipment, and expensive to train teachers and staff to use it. With school systems already overburdened – and with no noticeable improvement in student performance – it is no wonder people are starting to ask “Why technology?” Will technology help students learn?

Yes – and no. Will a hammer help build a house? Yes – and no. You can also use a hammer to destroy a house. But use the hammer and other tools and materials according to a well thought-out plan, and you can build a solid house. The same principle applies with educational technology. Computers, video cameras, digital cameras, DVDs, and videotapes are the tools, as the house we are building is a strong education for our students. The quality of this education depends not only on the types of tools we use, but on the plan we follow when we build the house.

A two-story house made of wood is great for many parts of the world, but in the Pacific there would be problems with wind damage, termites, and keeping cool. A house with a thatched roof and open windows is comfortable in the Pacific, but would fail to keep people warm in North Dakota. Different houses meet different needs.

The same is true of education. The use of technology in schools should not only be planned, but planned locally with the needs and interests of the community in mind. The New Jersey State Education Plan could not be copied and pasted into the Hawai'i State Education Plan. Hawai'i's plan would not serve Chuuk, nor would Chuuk's plan serve Yap.

The key to successful use of technology in schools is not a computer in every classroom or a computer in the hands of

every child, but an educational plan that effectively utilizes all the resources available to any given school system. If there are not enough computers to equip all the grade schools, middle schools, and high schools, a district might choose to focus on computer labs for the high schools and only a few computers



Photo: Kavita Rao

▷ Best use of educational technology varies in different school systems. Where the budget can't accommodate computers in every classroom, labs can provide access for everything from community use to teacher professional development.

for the elementary and middle schools. These could be used for administrative tasks, as well as staff development for teachers. For example, teachers could enroll in the Internet-based PR*TEC Basic Teaching Credential offered through the University of Guam and Northern Marianas College. Another alternative would be to place the computers in community centers for everyone to use, rather than in the schools.

It doesn't matter what the technology set-up looks like; what counts is the plan the teachers, administrators, and community have developed together. So back to the original question – why technology? Because technology opens doors to the mind, as well as doors to opportunity and success. Technology tools like the Internet can provide students and teachers with greater resources than any library could ever hope to hold. But like any tool, technology is only as good as the plan that drives it.

For more information on technology planning and technology integration, please contact the Pacific Regional Technology in Education Consortium (PR*TEC) at prtec@prel.org, or visit the website at www.prtec.org. You may contact the author directly at kerra@prel.org.

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