



MOBILE LEARNING MINDSET

**THE TEACHER'S GUIDE
TO IMPLEMENTATION**

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INTRODUCTION

“I’m not very tech savvy”

This is a statement I have heard ever since I started teaching back in 1998. At that time, technology was creating HyperStudio stacks on colorful flavors of iMacs. Although I didn’t have a technology background out of college, I was open to trying new things and figuring out ways to solve problems. At one point late in my teaching career, a teacher approached me and offered to watch my class. When I asked her why, she said “I’m not very tech savvy, but I’m trying to do something with PowerPoint, and I can’t figure out how to make it work.”

I realized at that moment that teachers have the power within them to try new things as long as they feel some level of support. That support can come from administration, parents, peers, or even students. Many of the things I tried in my classroom failed. When I added technology to the equation, the opportunity for failure seemed to increase exponentially. However, I didn’t stop trying.

When we first started down the road of our L.E.A.P. initiative (then called the “Westlake Initiative For Innovation” or WIFI Project), our state had recently reduced the amount of funds allocated for public schools. Although we didn’t lose any teachers due to these cuts, it did mean losing more than half of the support staff we had in place for technology integration. So on the heels of launching our first ever 1:1 pilot, we now had to figure out how to help teachers with the integration of a mobile device in their classroom with less support than they were used to. Add to that, the reduction of their extra planning period and we were forced to commit two cardinal sins: removing support and reducing time.

Classroom teachers in our district had a couple of options. They could abandon the use of the new mobile devices because of fear, lack of time, and lack of support. The other option was to persevere and take a risk in the hopes

Making the Shift

To anyone who was trained in the Madeline Hunter (<http://mrhook.it/hunter>) model of instruction, shifting to something more project-based may seem like letting go of the reins of the horse. The Hunter model of lesson design emphasizes knowledge repetition (sometimes called “drill and kill”) for students. In an era where standardized test scores can make or break a school, this model might seem to be the most appropriate for educating our students. But there is one major flaw with this method of teaching: it’s highly prescriptive. The only questions asked are those in the plans, and the goal of every lesson is to get to the end. When students get through the standards and expectations, they are then given directions or modeled on what to do next. When I taught using this method, I would often find 22 examples of student work that looked strangely similar to my model example.

God forbid a student should ask a question that wasn’t exactly aligned with the objectives of the lesson, or maybe seek some deeper understanding. There was a finite amount of time to make it through this type of instruction, and rarely did that allow for differentiation, with the exception of “independent practice” time. For me, shifting off of this method required taking a long hard look in the mirror. Were students truly learning with this method of instruction? Or were they just able to regurgitate what I had taught them on the test?

Late in my teaching career I began to see the errors in this method of instruction. In 2003, which would be my last year in the classroom as a full-time teacher, I decided to abandon this method for the most part. I was teaching first grade at the time, and rather than going through a standard scope and sequence, I decided to work with others on my team and play to our strengths as well as to the interests of the students. We designed our lessons to be much more centered around student outcomes rather than knowledge regurgitation. We expanded our activities from a single stand-alone math activity to ones that would encompass multiple layers of subject matter. It was essentially inquiry-based learning before that term became commonplace.

By the time we entered the final nine weeks of that school year, my students had reached all the goals and checkpoints required of first graders in the state

8. Do Not Neglect Parent Communication

Parent communication is important in any classroom, whether it be one that is digitally enhanced with mobile devices or not. In the mobile learning environment though, you are now afforded some new ways to communicate and new channels with which to do so. Social media can be a great ally in the world of parent communication and many classroom teachers are now figuring out ways to engage parents with Facebook pages, Instagram feeds, and Twitter accounts.



Figure 2.2 My daughter's new light-up shirt being shared on her teacher's Instagram feed.

My daughter's first grade teacher regularly uses Instagram to post snapshots of learning almost every day (Figure 2.2). As a parent, when I pick my child up and ask the typical question "What did you do in school today?" I'm better prepared to respond to the typical dreaded answer of "nothing." I now have a glimpse into the classroom that I didn't have before.

Taking this a step further, as we'll hear in the interview with Cathy Yenca in the next chapter, bypassing the teacher-parent communication piece and having students take some level of ownership in sharing information with Mom and Dad can be powerful. Having a class "documentarian" to take a photo or post a tweet every day is a good first step to

Centering Learning around the Student

In looking at the examples I've just given, it becomes more and more obvious that in order to truly capture students' attention and engage them, the learning must be centered around them. There is a big difference between saying that and actually doing that, and it's not something that happens overnight. And, as we've seen up to this point, the fear of losing control and the need to deliver all content to the students can get in the way of it happening at all.

The reason project- and inquiry-based learning models work so well is that they shift the heavy lifting of learning from the shoulders of the teacher to the brains of the students. Making that shift doesn't happen overnight, but it can be done with some simple first steps. One of those first steps that I've seen work well is letting students make some choices as to how they will demonstrate their learning.

I once visited a third grade class that was doing a unit on celestial bodies in our solar system. The teacher had planned to give them some time to research their object of choice and then asked them to create a presentation using the Keynote app on their iPads. When I asked her why she chose that, she said it was a program she had used before and felt most comfortable helping them with it if they ran into any issues. I then asked the students if there were other programs that they could use to demonstrate their learning. They mentioned a few other apps, like iMovie and Explain Everything. The teacher, hesitating only briefly, then asked the students which apps they preferred. Students listed several different choices that they felt comfortable using.

In a couple of cases, the students mentioned apps that the teacher wasn't aware of. Rather than turn them down because of her own discomfort, she instead asked them to come up and give a brief demonstration of the app and how they would be using it. She then turned and looked at me and said, "Wow, that wasn't so bad. In fact, it was actually kind of cool!"

She had created a safe environment and encouraged the students to try something new. She realized that by making it a lesson around a certain app or a lesson that followed specific directions, she wasn't making it about the

Introducing technology into the hands of students can be overwhelming in much the same way for teachers. Besides sorting out all the apps or programs that can be used, teachers are also balancing new district initiatives, cramming through curriculum, and dealing with assessments, grading, and parents. To tackle all of this at once can become overwhelming, and many teachers are tempted to abandon the latest new thing (in this case, devices) for the things they are most comfortable with.

Changing Habits

The human mind can only handle so much change from routine and habits. During her session at the 122nd annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Wendy Woods stated, “The thoughtful intentional mind is easily derailed and people tend to fall back on habitual behaviors. Forty percent of the time we’re not thinking about what we’re doing.” Wood went on to explain that “habits allow us to focus on other things. ... Willpower is a limited resource, and when it runs out you fall back on habits.”

As teachers, we can only expect to change so much of that reaction to what isn’t routine. As Wood explains, everyone’s will power is limited when it comes to change of habit. That said, we can make small changes in our routine and at first find places where technology “fits in.” Eventually, though, using technology at just a substitutive level needs to evolve into a habit so that it can be used for deeper thoughts. That comes with sustained, supported use of mobile devices in the classroom. That also comes with an awareness of what “deeper” learning looks like.

Swimming in the SAMR Pool

Before our own mobile device initiative, I spent a couple of years researching best practices and similar use cases in education. It turned out that 1:1 wasn’t a new concept at all. The state of Maine began their Learning Technology Initiative in 2001 (aka “MLTI”—www.maine.gov/doe/mlti/) and had already

Another tool that is a little less linear than Today's Meet is Padlet (<http://Padlet.com>). This tool is also device agnostic, web-based, and requires no login. What makes Padlet a little different is the ability to sort and drag responses around the shared space. Students can also post videos, pictures, and audio comments. One of my favorite activities is using Padlet to ask students (and adults) to reflect on an idea or preconceived notion by posting “I used to think ...” and “But now I think ...” as categories of reflection (Figure 7.1). As you can see in the following Padlet sample (with credit to Lisa Johnson @techchef4u for the background image), the reflections are posted for all to see, but can also be rearranged.

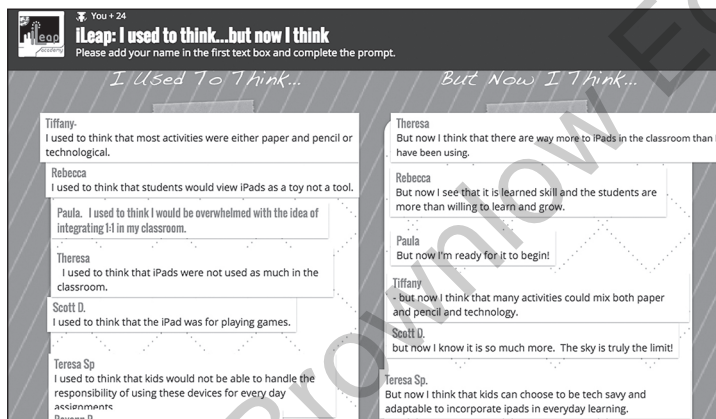


Figure 7.1 Using Padlet to reflect on learning.

Rapid Quiz and Polling Assessments

Reflective assessments provide some deeper insight into the minds of students through the use of an open response, but for some situations, the teacher just needs a quick check for understanding of a subject. Luckily, this market has opened up wide in the past several years as many software companies flock to replace the “eClicker” market of yesteryear. Now, with mobile devices, all students need is a link or join code to get into a quick assessment.

Before technology like mobile devices, this type of assessment could be given by students raising their hands or writing responses on a whiteboard and holding it up. However, in these situations, the data is lost the second the