

# Changing with the Times: How Do We Lead Technology Integration, Including Mobile Devices, in Schools?

**Stacie Barnett-Slusher**  
Morehead State University  
P.O. Box 130  
Calvin, KY 40813

## Abstract

Because of the availability and growing use of mobile technologies and communication models, “Enthusiasts argue that the presence of such technologies would push schools in the direction of embracing the liberating possibilities of new media rather than limiting their use through acceptable use policies” (Collins & Halverson, 2009, p. 26). Unfortunately, some schools are not enthusiastic about the presence of mobile technologies and restrict use through policies. Regarding such policies, schools vary widely in their approach and acceptance of integrating these technologies, especially mobile devices. Some schools limit access and exercise control of the use of mobile devices through restrictive or outdated policies and procedures governing both employees and students, while other schools have more welcoming “bring your own device” (BYOD) policies.

## Introduction

“For it is inescapable that every culture must negotiate with technology, whether it does so intelligently or not” (Postman, 1992, p. 5). Historically, new technologies are viewed with wonder and/or suspicion, especially in educational institutions. Some challenges to technology integration are due to caution, change resistance, existing infrastructure, and resistance to disruption. Some technologies prove unable to meet the needs of the customer (institutions, systems, teachers, and students) better than traditional methods or established technologies; therefore, it is naturally difficult and unlikely for those technologies to form a disruption. On the other hand, the prevalence of technologies, such as mobile devices, is responsible for new customer demands.

Previously, many technologies available within the school environment required an institutional purchase and were not readily available to the end-users because the school determined both if and when the technology would be available. The prevalence of mobile devices that are owned and supplied by the user changes this dynamic. The shift of availability and control has changed. “Hence the imperative of technology is toward more learner control, and schools are fighting a losing battle to control what students learn” (Collins & Halverson, 2009, p. 18). The result means that customers (students) and members of educational institutions have the potential to drive integration, if not disruption.

Similar to the negative stance the American Federation of Teachers once took regarding video use, some institutions feel that the opportunity for misuse is too great. The National Education Association (NEA) and many other institutions approach device use as something they can control, asking students and employees to only access the Internet via school networks that are governed by such policies. Since many users not only have their own device, but have independent access to the Internet through personal data plans, is it realistic to expect that schools can exercise complete control over these technologies? Are schools refusing to change with a technological change that they don't own?

Decreasing the digital divide, or the access to technology, has long been a concern. More recently, the concern has evolved to a second-level digital divide, the ability to use technology. Literature in the early 2000's through the present reflects the second-level digital divide, “the difference, or “divide,” in how technology is used” (Reinhart, Thomas, & Toriskie, 2011). Wei, Teo, Tan, & Chan (2011) refer to the second-level digital divide as a “digital capability divide.” The confounding issue regarding mobile technologies is that access is available, but institutions are limiting students' use that can increase proficiency beyond purely social applications.

Mobile technologies provide an opportunity for students to learn and use technology skills for applications are common in the workplace and outside of a school environment. Furthermore, using available technologies increases students' 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner skills. The Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning is a set of standards meant to prepare students “to thrive in today's digitally and globally interconnected world” (Partnership for 21st Century

Learning, n.d.). These standards are intended to prepare students to respond to and be adaptable to rapidly changing technologies. In addition, it is equally important to realize that today's students will use technology in their everyday lives. Access and proficiency in technology is directly related to access to information, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

A discussion within a community of practice addressed some historical experiences with "new" technologies in schools, such as the belief that radio, then television, would revolutionize education and seek to compare past technology changes to modern technologies. Based on experiences in learning communities and organizations, policy reviews, and surveys; existing policies were presented, and the educational technology practitioners shared their own experiences with policies and procedures in a variety of educational settings as both professionals and as students.

Participants engaged in the following discussion points:

Do schools spend more time fighting the technology instead of embracing it?

How much control is feasible?

What are the policies and procedures that allow the best chance of technology integration?

Should schools look at the technologies as a possible disruption if the customers can meet their needs and still use a device that they aren't willing to allow the schools to govern?

Does the wide range of policies add to the digital divide?

What is the role of educational technology professionals in leading change?

### **Conclusion**

Schools are traditionally change resistant and slow to embrace change. Generally, change and "successful implementation depends on the commitment of top management" (Januszewski & Molenda, 2008, p. 183). As professionals and educators, it is time to recognize that these technologies do not fit the mold of some current policies or the needs of students. Schools no longer can ensure control by not purchasing, not using, and condemning new technologies. The users have some control and the playing field has changed. Schools will not be able to control all tablets, phones, watches, and other mobile technologies. Perhaps it is time to lead the change to implementation and embrace the learning potential for users rather than focusing on restriction. If "the end purpose of educational technology is *using*" as suggested by Januszewski and Molenda (2008, p. 168), then leaders should encourage institutions to transform policies and views regarding technology and mobile devices into ones which demonstrate appropriate use and usefulness in learning and communication.

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