Elements of Technology Expertise for School Administrators: What Are They and How Do We Get Administrators to Use Them

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The genesis of this proposal stems from my personal experiences dealing with building principals and superintendents who are charged with authority over technology programs, but haven't the foggiest notion of what details are involved with technology. While interviewing building technology coordinators for my dissertation, I sensed a wide variance of support offered to these individuals from their administrators. Some of these administrators were portrayed as wanting to learn technology, while others couldn't be bothered. In my own professional activities, several administrators to whom I reported expressed similar attitudes. Some were helpful, some thought they "knew it all," and others could care less.

Computer technology appeared to some administrators as just another program at school. During the 1980s and into the early 90s, I was repeatedly told that computers had to last seven years and had to be maintained in tip-top condition. One sympathetic administrator told me about the financial considerations that governed computer purchases. I observed a computer lab set up in a school in a hot climate in a room without appropriate ventilation, and the administrator wondered why computers were repeatedly breaking down. Another administrator roared that she "had no idea" that computers had to be regularly maintained. Still another administrator who glowed over her computer labs admitted she had not considered the costs for software in equipping a lab.

While taking classes for my doctoral minor, educational leadership, I observed a number of individuals in class who had no idea of their responsibilities concerning technology, technological products (programs, artwork, etc.) made at school, or of the rampant reproduction of copyrighted works, including graphics, pirated software, and professionally made music (MP3s, etc.). I know this because I have asked them. I am aware of a situation where copyrighted music was mixed into a multimedia presentation which was shown publicly and, rumor has it, copies were made and sold within the school community. Even more recently, I have observed students glibly discussing how many CDs they have "burned" at home. My wife is an elementary art teacher and is often asked by students if they can draw well-known characters from Disney, Warner Brothers, Pokemon™, etc.

For me, educational computing is my principal interest. In the greater school community, I can't always be assured that others have that same level of concern. So many competing activities occupy the school administrator's mind: academics, accountability, politics, parental involvement, discipline, legal matters, building maintenance, testing, sports, Federal programs, cafeteria, etc. All of these facets of the administrative day existed long before schools were wired, and function regardless of whatever new technology is implemented.

At the university where I received my doctorate, I asked the school law specialist (a lawyer, yet) what he knew about the administrative role in technology. He admitted he knew very little. He was vague over the laws concerning copyright in schools. It seems the blind are leading the blind. Granted, things might have changed in the few years since that conversation, but it doesn't seem that attitudes have changed at the practitioner level.

In our state (Texas), current standards and job descriptions for educators have only recently included indicators and descriptors that relate to technology. Since 1986, we have had a statewide standard evaluation instrument for principals, etc. to evaluate classroom teachers. One wonders why it has taken so long for technology usage to be a part of the standard evaluation.

Individually, these incidents appear as isolated anecdotes, but as a whole, they demonstrate to me a pervasive administrative attitude of simply being administrators, having the need to be in charge of something, yet not fully understanding what it is they administer. Administrators are still tied to making decisions based on the "bottom line."

I want to meet with individuals who have expertise in training administrators with dealing with technology in their buildings. My limited arsenal of strategies are simply my own observations and experiences. I really need folks who have practical savvy with administrative personnel who can assist me in developing research on

administrators so I can more accurately develop curricula to assist them in integrating technology into their practical experience.

Some might aver that we DO have a leadership cadre who are already skilled enough with technology that such instruction is unnecessary, that any research would be unneeded, but some of the incidents listed above have occurred in the past year with relatively young administrators. Moreover, there is the trend, at least in our state, where novice administrators can go into internship with as little as two years in the classroom, or none at all in some cases. At least to me, it seems that some sort of specific instruction on technology might be in order for these individuals.

New studies can be instituted for exploring administrative attitudes and expertise. Some research sources for investigation would include the following:

1. A quantitative survey of collegiate educational administration departments, and interviews with professors;
2. A review of state and local job descriptions for administrators; and
3. Structured interviews with sitting administrators, interns, and potential administrators.

Annotated References:

Atkins, N. E., & Vasu, E. S. (1998). The Teaching with Technology Instrument: Effectively measuring where teachers are and planning for staff development. Learning and Leading with Technology, 25(8), 35-39.

This instrument (included) is for assessment of what teachers already know for planning staff development. The instrument requires simple yes/no answers.

Bailey, G. D., & Pownell, D. (1998). Technology staff development and support programs. Learning and Leading with Technology, 26(3), 47-51, 64.

Authors list major themes in addressing staff development. They refer to Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" to explain how well technology integration is accomplished.

Becker, H. J. (1998). Running to catch a moving train: Schools and information technologies. Theory Into Practice, 37(1), 20-30.

Becker insists that schools use appropriate instructional planning before using cutting edge technology. Likewise software developers, etc.

Collier, C. (1999). Project-based student technology competencies. Learning and Leading with Technology, 27(3), 50-53.

School district uses grant funds to develop a "teacher leader" cadre of professionals to implement technology in the district. A matrix is provided to spell out student competencies for technology.

Coughlin, E. (1999). Professional competencies for the digital age classroom. Learning and Leading with Technology, 27(3), 22-27.

Report on Milken Exchange listing professional competencies with technology: core technology skills; curriculum, learning, and assessment, professional practice; classroom and instructional management; administrative competencies. A paper assessment and an online assessment is available.

Dias, L. B. (1999). Integrating technology: Some things you should know. Learning and Leading with Technology, 27(3), 10-13, 21.

Discussion on technology integration. Cites Everett Rogers' elements of diffusion as applicable to integrating technology.

Kajs, L. T., Sanders, R. L., Willman, E., Alaniz, R., Brott, P. E., & Gomez, D. M. (1999). Technology education that school principals want. Paper presented at the SITE Conference, San Antonio, TX.

Administrators want and need more technology training, but especially in Internet and e-mail usage. This is a practical article on procuring specific products that will aid the administrator.

Kwajewski, K. (1997). Technology as a core value. Learning and Leading with Technology, 24(5), 54-56.

Clarifying the use of technology as a basic core value in the school system. Whatever is a core value is generally successful (i. e., athletics, band, academics, etc.) Methods of establishing benchmarks for evaluating success are listed.

Lipinski, T. A. (1999). An argument for the application of copyright law to distance education. The American Journal of Distance Education, 13(3), 7-21.

A detailed discussion of copyright issues, particularly with the Internet in classrooms and libraries. How educators craft web-based lessons is critical in following existing copyright law.

Maurer, M. M., & Davidson, C. S. (1998). Staff development: A community of learners, a community of leaders. In Leadership in instructional technology. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Listing of problems commonly encountered with staff development. Listing of conditions for successful staff development. Assumptions that underlie an interactive staff development model.

MacNeil, A. J., Delafield, D., Friedrich, K. R., Bruysschaard, J., & Villarreal, L. (1999). Inhibitors to computer use in schools: The principal's perspective. Paper presented at the SITE Conference, San Antonio, TX.

The usual problems, time, money, and infrastructure are the major inhibitors. The principal's role in technology usage is discussed.

Schoeny, Z. G., Heaton, L. A., Washington, L. A. (1999). Perceptions and educational technology needs of school administrators. Paper presented at the SITE Conference, San Antonio, TX.

A comprehensive review of competencies that administrators must have in dealing with technology in their districts and buildings.