

## **Learning to Live With Technology**

*Gary Johnson, Teacher, Fraser Valley Adventist Academy, Aldergrove, BC*

Sometimes teachers, especially those of us who have been around for some time, start to feel that we are in a vortex of information and innovation with technology spinning out of control. It can often seem overwhelming. I can recall a workshop we once had on the topic of technology and the teacher. We dealt with expectations and the time frames for their implementation. One of my colleagues, in the face of the pending challenges, was heard to mutter, "I hope Jesus comes before then!"

How do we as teachers keep current with technology and the benefits that it can bring? In my own case, I started teaching in an era when the biggest technical challenges were deciding whether to use "spirit masters" or a "Gestetner" to produce tests. Or whether we should replace blackboards with greenboards and white chalk with yellow chalk. Now I find myself in a world of cell phones and iPods, of digital video cameras and GPS's.

The first thing I would suggest that we accept the fact that the average 10 year old has more technical skill than the average adult. Turn this to your advantage. When I want to use a video projector for a DVD or a PowerPoint presentation, I "let" a student volunteer to "help" me set up because I know that they can accomplish the job faster and more efficiently than I can.

Students have an innate desire to learn and to create. Their frustration – and ours – is that often their creativity is at odds with our predetermined goals and learning outcomes. I recall several years ago teaching a student who was very challenging to his teachers, full of out-of-control energy and enthusiasm. In his grade 10 year his family had purchased a video camera for Christmas, which at that time was a rare item for most households. Of course, he brought the camera to school and became a complete nuisance to his teachers and fellow students.

Faced with this challenge I made him a deal—he could bring his camera to class, but only if he would use it to produce a video on the trial of Louis Riel, which was the topic we were approaching in Social Studies at that time. He accepted the challenge with enthusiasm and soon, with a little assistance on my part, had the entire class of about twenty students organized as actors and script writers and technicians. The final result was definitely not Oscar-worthy, but it was acceptable and the whole class learned about Riel. Years later I still have students from this class come to me and ask if I remember the Riel video. As a footnote, this same student went on to become a pastor, using video production as an important part of his ministry, and eventually came back to spend four years as our campus chaplain.

What can you do in your classroom to make technology work for you? To maximize the learning experience for your students, and to make learning exciting for them? My simple answer would be: "Any thing that you want" – especially if you keep in tune with your students and the things they find exciting outside the classroom.

Let me tell you a couple of things that have worked for me and can work for any teacher.

1. PowerPoint presentations. I am sure that most of us already use this in our lessons, but

what about using this concept for assignments and projects. In Social Studies I have always required the students to write a formal research paper with the proper bibliographical format. I now supplement this with a formal PowerPoint presentation on an agreed topic with the appropriate end notes and bibliography. Students are encouraged to include slides, sounds and even video clips in their presentations. Don't worry if you do not know how to do these things – they do.

2. Video Presentations. I have found this to be a very effective way of covering a series of topics through small groups with the results being shared with the rest of the class. Some of my students have produced very high quality work including special effects.

The size restraints of this article prevent me from dealing with the many more examples that are possible (such as the whole issue of using the internet in the classroom), but if you wish to contact me my email is [fvaavp@shawlink.ca](mailto:fvaavp@shawlink.ca). Or if you have found some way technology has worked for you in the classroom, I would appreciate hearing from you.