Shaping the Future

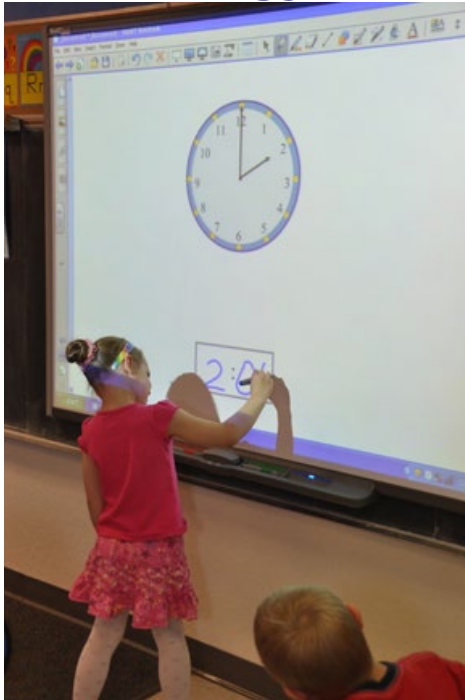| Summer 2010 ▼ | Features ▼ | Networks ▼ | Letters ▼ | Resources ▼ | Convocation | LEA Home |

LEANetwork Elementary Teachers

Technology in Lutheran Schools

Shapingthe**Future** had its inception in a corner office on the campus of Concordia University in River Forest. While thinking about the role of the Lutheran educator, Jill Zempel, who is now the editor, and I stumbled upon the concept that Lutheran educators shape the future as they work with students and help to prepare them for a life of service to our Lord and His Kingdom. Profound? Not really. Wiser individuals than we have worked through similar concepts long before our discussion, however, it is a clear descriptor of what a Christian educator does. We shape the future—teaching, guiding, modeling, and molding students! What a great profession!

Another reality. In recent years we have been molded and shaped by technology. Technology has found its way to impact our daily lives in more ways that we can imagine. Just a couple of weeks ago my telephone rang early in the morning. It was the grocery store. They wanted to inform me that a product I had purchased (french onion dip to be exact) had been recalled. They warned me that I should return the product (too late) for a full refund! Think about it. When I went through the check-out counter I displayed my bar-coded store card, and the rest is history. What I purchased, when I purchased it and more was recorded ... thus the phone call. The integration of technology is all around us. Our cars need computers to start, and the brakes need computers to help us stop. The list goes on and on.

What about our Lutheran schools?

A walk through the hallway of one Lutheran school looked pretty much as it had 20 years ago. Students were working in workbooks, teachers were in the front of the class writing on chalkboards, tests were taken to measure content memorized, and students worked carefully to select the correct multiple-choice response. A bit harsh perhaps, but in many settings all too real. Significant change has not taken place.

A walk through the hallway of another Lutheran school looked quite different. Students were working at a smart board as they grouped concepts and discussed the similarities and pored over the differences. Down the hallway, students were using tablet computers to draw triangles as the teacher projected the work of one student after another comparing angles, length of the sides, and discussing the way to calculate the area of the triangle.

A walk through the hallway of one more Lutheran school revealed students working in groups to identify the various parts of a dissected earthworm and taking pictures with their laptops to post on their wiki for all to see.

Preparing students for the 21st century means we need to understand the impact of technology and to retool our teaching skills to help students engage in new ways of learning. It is exciting. It is challenging! It is not an option!

Lutheran schools are critical for students today. In an ever-changing world, where jobs come and go, where households go through significant turmoil, where even countries can dissolve overnight, it is critical that Lutheran schools share with their students the loving God that does not change and will be with them for their lifetime —through known trials and the unknown future before them. It is in the arms of our Savior that students will find strength to march forward in life and to reach out to

Review, Reflect, Resolve

In what ways will excellence in use of technology advance the mission of your Lutheran school?
How will familiarity with constantly changing technology prepare your students for their future vocations?
How can technology influence parental choice of schools for their children?
What must you do to keep up?

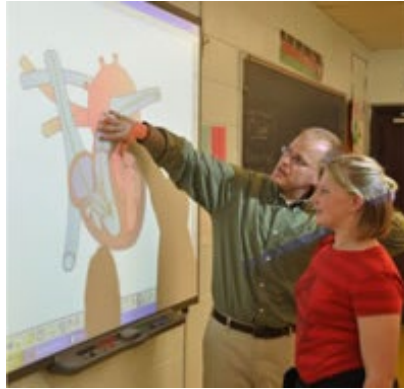**Links & Resources**

Technology in the Lutheran School Classroom

Dave Black's page on Technology in Lutheran Schools

Technology in Lutheran Schools

The MTM Project

those around them. Lutheran schools are critical for students today.

We live in a time when parents are very careful when selecting a school for their children. They want a school that will reinforce the teachings of the home while preparing them to live in a world that is ever-changing and constantly influenced by the technologies of the day. Briefly stated, a shopping parent will select a school that integrates the use of technology in the curriculum and will pass by a school that does not embrace the use of technology. If a Lutheran school is passed by, if a shopping parent does not select a Lutheran school for their child, the real loss is not the enrollment number but that the student will not have a chance to hear about their Savior from a Christian teacher. It is too big a price to pay!

The integration of technology is needed to meet students' educational needs. It is needed for our schools to move toward excellence and to remain viable as educational institutions. Most importantly, we need to integrate technology into the instructional process so our schools will continue to be sought out by parents and serve students with the Good News of Salvation at the heart of our ministry.

Technology is all around us. Technology is shaping our lives. It has impacted learning in many ways, giving us new tools to use, providing access to a wealth of information, and allowing us to create and design as never before.

What is a Lutheran school to do?

- **Recognize and discuss the need.** Recognize that this is not about adding a subject to an already full day—it is about integrating the use of technology into the existing curriculum and helping students explore, process, and create with new tools. Recognizing the need also means we have to grasp the sense of urgency. The time for action is here! The students are ready! The technology is available! A board, faculty, and staff will be ready to take on the required change, if they sense the urgency!
- **Help teachers expand their technology toolkit.** The process of engaging technology in the instructional process requires teachers to increase their toolkit with a new set of skills. They need to understand wikis and blogs, digital storytelling, and more. To understand these skills, we all need to engage in ongoing professional development.
- **Understand the concepts related to instructional design.** Planning lessons in a new way that makes use of the technological resources and encourages students to process, discern, and apply what they have learned begs us to retool our teaching process. This does not mean we teach every subject and every lesson using technology but does require us to ask the question—how can my students best learn to address the topic at hand?
- **Remember: the integration of technology is not another course to add to the day.** It is not about the technology—it is about the teaching-learning process and the methods of instruction that can help students learn. Todays students engage with technology and process in ways that are unfamiliar to many teachers. We need to seek new ways to engage our students.
- **Invest:** Schools need to invest in their infrastructure and other technologies so teachers and students have seamless access to the resources. We need to address wireless issues and internet access to the point that they just work, dependably and consistently!
- **Collaborate:** Lutheran schools will need to help one another—building on the strengths of one and learning from the mistakes of others. We also need to encourage student collaboration as we build a global community based on a common belief in our Savior.

One does not have to look very hard to find a Lutheran school where students are using technology effectively.

A science classroom is busy as students monitor experiments using probes attached to laptop computers.

A social studies teacher is comparing world events using the morning paper from 10 different countries.

A geography class is traveling around the globe using Google earth as they explore distance and topography moving from one country to another.

Students are busy with writing projects as the online system reads their work and offers suggestions on sentence formation, punctuation, and choice of words.

A student from one state is having a face-to-face conversation with a missionary in another land as they discuss what it means to share your faith in a non-Christian environment.

A Kindergarten student gets an "ah-ha" moment when the letter b is placed on top of the letter d using a smart board and the student understands the formation of the two letters.

One does not have to look very far to find great teachers, challenged by the technologies of the day, motivated by the Gospel message, doing great things with and for their students.

Some Lutheran schools will resist the influence of technology on the instructional process. Some Lutheran schools will shape and mold the future as they embrace the opportunity to engage their students in new and exciting ways to learn about God's great creation!

Will your Lutheran school **Shape**the**Future**?

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Photos by Gerry Thomas, technology teacher at Mayer Lutheran High School, Mayer, Minnesota.

Web sites to reference:

21st Century Learning

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