Shift to the Future

The future is an interesting place to go. Readers of this blog will primarily find articles considering how technology and education may increasingly cause and experience disruption as the future unfolds.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2013

Life Balance with Technology

I was asked to speak to a group of managers and supervisors recently about how technology can help them manage their seemingly ever increasing work load. That's an interesting question really given how technology see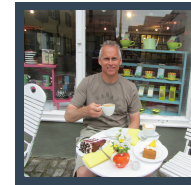ms to often be the catalyst for increased work load. I shared some thoughts about how technological advancement is accelerating and creating whole new ways to manage our work and lives and then some tips on how the tools they use at work can help them (Outlook e-mail, calendaring, and OneNote). As professionals who use technology every day in our jobs, we need to own the responsibility for learning about our technology and helping each other (and our staffs) use it effectively to manage our work.

It is remarkable what we can now do with our phones... e-mail, text, tweet, Facebook, calendar,task reminders, search (for anything), maps / directions, record / share audio – photos – videos, read blogs – wikis – books, listen to music – books, watch movies - TV - videos - courses, banking, pay bills, track weather, stocks, and flights,… to name a few. These can distract us or help us – it's up to us to decide. I remember not long ago having to carry a phone, laptop, digital camera, and video camera depending on the work I needed to do – now I often just have my phone! I think our mobile devices are finally being innovated into tools that can help manage our work and personal lives in powerful ways. I've been experimenting with Siri on my iPhone and although it's pretty good, it needs some work. But, I can see in a few years how it and it's relatives will be personal concierges and save us significant time.

Self-regulation in an always on world has never been more important than it is now. I was speaking to some teachers at one of our

About Me

Brian Kuhn

I lead and oversee the technology group for a large K12 school district in British Columbia. In my spare time I read, mountain bike, snowboard, and occasionally hike. On a personal note, I have three grown boys and an amazing wife who is a fearless learner and my best friend. I am the CIO for Vancouver School Board. Find me on twitter: @bkuhn

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secondary schools last week about my thoughts on where we are heading with technology. I talked about three immediate strategies: infrastructure, equity, and learning & work systems. As part of our infrastructure strategy we are (finally) rolling out wireless network access to schools. This particular school had some basic self-provided wireless in select areas but as of January now has wireless access designed to be like "oxygen", everywhere, always on, and available. The teachers expressed frustration with this type of access for students.

> **"This is evident by increased texting and facebooking by students during class having enabled wi-fi only devices (iPod touch) to join in the fun. Even walking down the halls has become more of a hazard due to everybody having their eyes glued to their device.", a teacher's observation.**

Students now connect anywhere on any device – exactly what we intended but this school was not prepared for the distraction factor. Students are walking the halls using their devices, they are on them in their classes, etc. This brought to light for me a key step we've missed as a District in preparing schools for this radical change. It would seem that we assumed teachers and principals were ready for this change when in fact we need to provide better guidance in how to arrive at a balanced use of the technology. We that promote technologies virtues need to always remember not everyone is able to adopt, adapt, and benefit without specific guidance. We need to implement well! Next year we intend to pilot a BYOT initiative in some of our schools.

As to self-regulation, this is as important for adults to get as it is for kids. We must be masters of our technology and our time. People are becoming increasingly harried and frazzled in our always on ever faster world. Personally I try to balance my use of technology but I'm not always successful. There's a relentless tug from our devices – they want to be checked for new e-mail, Tweets, Facebook posts, pins, blog posts, LinkedIn updates, texts, and voice mails. A simple practice would be to dial down the notices and sounds of your devices. Do you really need them to notify you for every type of new item? Definitely turn off sound alerts for most everything – the alternative will drive you and others crazy.

I think we could do well in this technology powered era to shift to being more respectful of each other. For instance if you are present with a few people in a meeting or engaged in a private conversation, I think it is rude and disrespectful to answer your phone (unless you can tell from the caller id it is urgent / critical). Let the call go – it is not as important as the people in front of you. Oh and do you really need
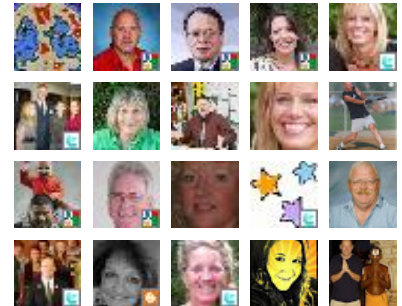
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to be talking loud and long with your phone / blue tooth ear piece in Costco or the mall – seriously? In meetings with a group of people it is trickier now to manage our engagement… I'm as guilty as the next person in checking / responding to my e-mail, Twitter feed, or text messages. I don't think this context has a black and white answer but it is important to remember to be respectful of others and to be mentally present when necessary.

Families are increasing bombarded by technology's intrusion. I've heard of parents declaring dinner time to be technology free – everyone puts their devices away. I think it is important to set boundaries in our personal interactions where and when it's appropriate for technology to be present with us. This is sometimes a struggle for me – my iPad and/or iPhone are often within reach and calling to be checked… Whenever I leave the house to go for a walk, to go on an errand, etc., my phone comes with me. I check it while waiting in a grocery line or lining up for gas at a station. It's with me when out mountain biking in case of "an emergency" but also to take pictures. But, I don't talk on my phone, check my e-mail or update my Facebook while I'm riding… why do people still do this while driving their cars?

We do need to master our use of technology or as I wrote here, we may become slaves of our machines. Even though we increasingly use it, it does allow us to accomplish more with our time. It facilitates connections for us through easily sharing pictures, videos, and messages posted by us and by family and friends who we may not necessarily see very often. It allows us to check on the validity of news stories, medical conditions, concepts, ideas. It facilitates our learning about anything, researching and booking travel, presenting ideas, and orchestrating our work and the work of others. Imagine the old days of trying to accomplish all of those tasks – it wasn't easy. Used effectively and in balance, technology is a good thing. Used inappropriately and in an all-consuming manner, it is likely unhealthy. It is really up to us to decide which type of user we will be. My suggestion, learn to self-regulate!

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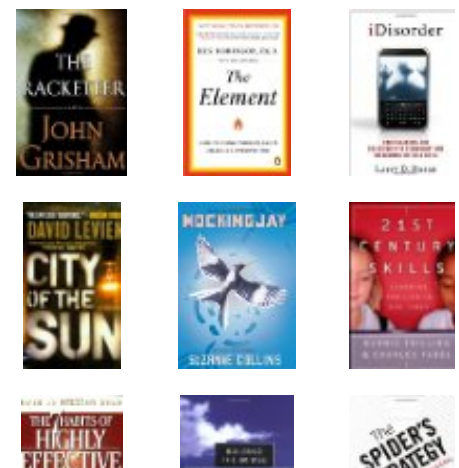• Mobify | Adaptive Platform for
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Do you remember the days of film projectors in schools when the teacher would roll this complicated device in, fumble around with the reels ...

What Kids Say About Blogging

One of my professional goals is to regularly visit classrooms and capture learning stories. I love talking to students and teachers who are...

Open Letter to Prezi

Back in September I wrote Presentation Dilemma – Powerpoint or Prezi where I wrestled with the art of presentation and the challenge I gave...

Is Technology Revolutionizing Education Yet?

Last Saturday my clock rang at about 2:45 in the morning. I got up, got ready, and headed off to pick up a colleague for our trip to ISTE 2...

Cooperative Learning, Groups in Action

I had the pleasure of joining about 40 teachers last week for a three day workshop on Creating Effective Groups (Social Theory) led by Barri...

Technology is NOT Just a Tool!

To tune into what is happening in our world I like to read a lot of books, the newspaper (yes, a
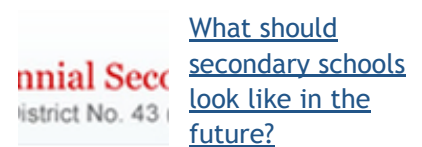
"real" one), blogs, web articles, talk to d...

Implement Technology Well

I've learned a lot (through the school of hard knocks) about implementing technology for learning, teaching, and work. I naively used to fo...

Ideas and Innovation

Take pause for a moment and consider the vast sea of ideas active in our world right this second... Can you picture it? At any given time, b...

What should secondary schools look like in the future?

I wrote a post Schools of the Future back in January 2010 where I talked about our District's Conceptual Design Group's mission and asked f...