**Going Mobile: Key issues to consider for schools weighing BYOD**

By Christopher Harris

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No doubt, 2011 was the year of the tablet. From the release of Apple’s iPad2 in March to the recent debut of hybrid ereaders like the Nook Tablet and Kindle Fire, mobile computing has made great strides. This year, we’ll see those devices go to school.

And, boy, are we in for some changes, as districts nationwide ponder BYOD (bring your own device) schemes. The lifting of restrictions around student devices was born of necessity—tight budgets, plus increasing tech adoption among kids. Practically speaking, BYOD means schools will need to purchase less equipment. The idea has merit, but needs serious consideration before it can be implemented.

First, districts will need to review school board policies regarding student devices. It may be necessary to amend the district’s acceptable use policy; I’d also recommend proactively addressing financial liability for student devices. Moreover, a school’s wireless network will need to be evaluated to avoid connection nightmares. Teachers will also require training to help them develop and administer content across mobile platforms.

But there are greater social, ethical, and cultural implications with BYOD. The following are based on media critic [Neil Postman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Postman)’s essay “Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change.”

1. The adoption of new technology amounts to a Faustian bargain. New capabilities are gained, but at what price? BYOD may be an economical way to adopt hardware, but there will be additional cost in network capacity, teacher training, and managing lost, stolen, or damaged student property.

2. Technological change creates winners and losers. Moreover, the “winners always try to persuade the losers that they are really winners,” states Postman. So of course, families able to afford smartphones and tablets want schools to allow them. And the notion that the school can then buy devices for the students who need them sounds great in theory. But can districts actually make good on this commitment? And will the devices be comparable?

3. Technology carries its own perspective. If you have a hammer, the saying goes, every problem is a nail. If students all have smartphones, does that make every lesson social? How else could mobile devices change schools? The iPad is a “lean back” technology, said Steve Jobs, better suited to use in an easy chair. So will couches replace desks, transforming the traditional classroom environment?

4. Technological change is ecological as opposed to additive. Schools that adopt BYOD are not the same institutions plus a few smartphones, they’re an entirely new ecology. Or at least they better be. When students have mobile access to information, standard assignments become obsolete. BYOD means students can engage in actual research and create authentic content for sharing with their peers and beyond.

5. Finally, beware of the mythos of technology. BYOD is not a panacea. Smartphones won’t make kids any smarter unless the devices are used to their full potential.

This isn’t meant to scare you off BYOD. But we must rise beyond the hype. Now is the time to seriously consider the possibilities of bringing personal devices into schools as well as a strategy for getting our administrators to say yes to BYOD.

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