

MY DIGITAL LEAP INTO SIMULTANEOUS MULTI-ACCESS E-BOOKS



By Sabrina Carnesi

A SCHOOL THAT EMBRACES TECHNOLOGY

This year, my faculty has let me know they prefer online and digital resources over print. This is in no way a surprise. Our STEM magnet school embraces BYOD and utilizes eleven computer labs and seven mobile laptop and iPad carts, completely changing the culture of our building. This has had a domino effect on our sense of access to information and participatory learning. There's absolutely no need to convince the faculty, staff, and students in my building on the forward thrust of e-learning. Walk in on a classroom or library session and you will discover a class enthralled in a tech-driven lesson. The entire building is wireless, and every classroom and lab has a SMART Board. All faculty members have district-issued laptops and use technology to facilitate their classroom learning experience.

THE COOLNESS QUOTIENT

This new attitude directly affects how research is conducted in the building, how library and collaborative lessons are planned and carried out, and, most recently, which book formats are trending with students. The current trending format, based on accessibility and coolness quotient, is e-books! Fiction and nonfiction. Boys more than girls (Marie Holland Patron; circ. statistics, Sept.-Dec. 2013).

A sixth grader said, "It's the beast, Ms. Carnesi"—the answer to why e-books are so popular in our building. Other students have said they like the empowerment and exclusiveness of remote checkout whenever they wish and not having to be in the physical

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building. There's also no risk of someone taking and damaging your book or returning the book late, because the borrowed book simply disappears from the reading platform when the time period for using it has ended.

STEPPING THROUGH THE DIGITAL ACCESS PORTAL

This has affected selection choices for my bi-annual library purchase orders. At the start of the 2012-2013 school term, the first year of BYOD at the school, I wanted to make sure there were a variety of e-book titles available for the users of personal devices. I added forty-eight popular fiction and twenty curriculum and noncurriculum-based nonfiction titles to our collection just in time for the fall premiere of buildingwide broadband open access. We stepped through the portal of digital access, beyond digitally recorded books on CDs and mp3 devices, and began to get our feet wet with downloadable e-books. User response was initially hesitant. Most students, as well as faculty and staff, were not used to open usage of personal devices. Once we settled in with this newly found freedom, a new and wonderful shift began to occur in the culture of our building. An unwritten code of honor developed. I witnessed students reminding each other not to leave their device unattended. I witnessed students bringing abandoned devices to their teachers, the library, and the office. I witnessed a drop in theft. I witnessed students administering mini tech lessons to their peers and adults. I witnessed teachers shifting the design of their lessons to incorporate technology beyond basic PowerPoint presentations and website access. Teachers began to include online programs that allowed for simultaneous digital communication and an exchange of questions and comments which not only

could be addressed by teachers, but also by students. All of a sudden building labs and mobile carts were not available. More and more final projects were in digital format, turned in electronically. This shift caused me to move to a more paperless format in the library for final products in research projects and lessons. I began to use online forms from Google Docs to provide me with immediate feedback on lessons and decrease my carbon footprint.

REFLECTING NEW KINDS OF USE

I've been wringing my hands over what to do with the shrinkage of circulation statistics in science and social studies. For the past four years, the building science staff has gradually stopped referring students to the library to use our print materials for science fair projects. There were never enough books available to share with the multiple grades participating in the fall science fair. Not enough funding was available to maintain the information updates needed for 21st century technology and engineering information to meet our building's needs demands. The go-to medium of choice for science fair information was all online because the websites could be simultaneously accessed by unlimited users.

The same thing was happening in the social studies department, but to a lesser degree since their research did not happen simultaneously at a schoolwide level. The same issues, however, were surfacing: multiple users in need of the same information from the same book in print. I needed to provide unlimited access to as many students as possible. I knew the best choice for new resources would be e-books, hands down. To make sure I was meeting the needs of my building, I approached science and social studies faculty members to share

my dilemma. After explaining characteristics of the single and multi-access e-books, I asked which type they would prefer. Both science and social studies staff preferred simultaneous multiple access e-books. I then presented the same information to the English and math teachers, who said their issues were more in the area of providing equitable access for inclusion classes. The text-to-speech and note taking capabilities in e-books supply this support.

ALIGNING GOALS WITH PURCHASES

I knew my next step in providing information resources would include multi-access e-books. I decided to solidify my digital leap by aligning my book order with the core curriculum needs and with attentiveness to the critical need for broader access. It made sense to purchase one e-book with unlimited simultaneous access rather than purchasing four or five print books of the same title. Based on our most recent standardized test results, our critical needs were in the areas of life science, physical science, and economics. My fall order had to be accompanied by three goals that prioritized my requests using three funding level criteria. It also included the districtwide emphasis on adding rigor to the available reading resources via nonfiction.

I focused almost totally on nonfiction. My choices were validated along the following goal criteria: 1) Materials that support low-scoring standards and honored teacher requests for materials; 2) Materials that concentrate on STEM magnet subjects that have been sorely neglected; and 3) Digital materials to support reading efforts and enjoyment for both general and special needs populations. Each goal statement was assigned to a funding level. Funding Level 1 was aligned with goal number one. Funding Level 2 was aligned with goal number two, and Funding Level 3 with goal three.

Curriculum Area	Status (# of areas and type)	Book Order Distribution Levels					
		Funding Level 1 Goal Statement		Funding Level 2 Goal Statement		Funding Level 3 Goal Statement	
		Items	Amount	Items	Amount	Items	Amount
		Subtotal 1		Subtotal 2		Subtotal 3	
		Grand Total					

My final order contained 148 items: 74 percent natural sciences; 20 percent social sciences and biography; 3 percent technology; and 3 percent fine arts. For equity purposes, I ordered two print versions of every e-book.

NEXT STEPS

Once the books arrive, I will set up a series of staff development sessions to show the faculty how to access the e-books and manipulate the electronic shelf. A recent study by Jim Johnson of Indiana State University shows no difference in the reading and test scores for students, no matter the gender, between those who use e-books and those who do not. Most of these studies, however, have been conducted on college undergrads (<http://gadgets.ndtv.com/internet/news/students-perform-well-regardless-of-reading-print-or-ebooks-study-372392>). I am curious to survey my middle school students to see if their use of e-books for enjoyment impacts their learning.

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