

Spring 2021

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Technology Transformation: From Avoidance to Advocacy

By: *Angela Cleveland,*
MSEd, MEd, MA

What did you want to be when you grew up? As a child, did you dream of being an astronaut, a doctor, or a teacher? How closely does your childhood dream connect with your current career?

As a child, I knew I wanted to help others, and I wanted to achieve that goal by being a hand model. Yup, a hand model! I watched commercials and perused advertisements, fascinated by the way people used their hands to highlight how to use a product and make something mundane, like toothpaste or dishwashing soap, look exciting and inviting. I practiced for years, imitating the hand placement and gestures of people on commercials. I'm sure it must have looked odd, but I was pretty confident that this was exactly how you were supposed to use products since I saw lots of commercials where someone would put down a product and do a little hand flourish.

As I moved into middle school, I realized that technology tools like photoshop meant that my carefully honed hand skills as a 10-year-old could easily be replaced or edited. I reflected on what I loved about being a hand model, and the mission of sharing a story of how a product helped someone resonated with me. The goals are easily connected with my love of literature and my favorite place - the local library. I dreamed of helping people to understand their stories and life experiences but also to connect to others' stories and experiences. My career aspirations shifted to being a librarian. I practiced wearing a bun, placed my toys around me, and sat in a chair and read to them wearing fake reading glasses. I used my fancy hand flourishes to highlight pictures in the book!

When I entered high school and college, I soon learned that my childhood experience with librarians did not reflect the evolving role of this profession. School librarians were called

"Media Specialists," and my favorite memories of my fingers dancing across the card catalog were replaced with heavy desktop computers and the clack of a keyboard. Once more, I felt like technology usurped my dreams. I needed to rethink my career aspirations yet again.

I reflected on my goals to help others and on the vulnerability in the power of story-sharing. I realized that I could follow my career goals AND I would not need to use technology if I pursued a career as a school counselor. I felt like I finally landed in the right spot. I dove into school counseling and loved the work I was doing with my students, but I soon faced some professional challenges that made me question how I could continue to meet the needs of my students.

Challenges:

- I had no budget for classroom curriculum! Many lessons were too expensive, and even when I purchased them, I still had to modify them to meet the needs of my students!
- Data Collection?! I wasn't a math major, and my students, teachers, or families didn't want to fill out boring surveys! How could I engage folks to respond to questions to inform my program?
- Another week of late nights and weekends spent doing paperwork! How could I be more efficient and address the paperwork avalanche more effectively? I loved working directly with students, but I procrastinated on my paperwork, and it seemed to always feel like a dark cloud looming over me.
- Budget cuts? Again?! Few decision-makers know what we do as school counselors, and our department was repeatedly at the top of the

position layoff list. How can I let others know about the critical role school counselors have in the K-12 ecosystem?

■ Where can I find and collaborate with other school counselors quickly, easily, and at no cost? I also need some free resources and ideas for bulletin boards and lessons. Where do I find my community of support?

I had spent most of my life avoiding technology, but I was motivated to solve these professional challenges and suspected that shifting my mindset to be more open to using EdTech might provide some solutions. I saw some fun, flashy tech tools the teachers in my district were using, but I felt overwhelmed at the thought of trying to figure out how to fit these tools into my program. My district offered technology training professional development, but everything was geared toward classroom teachers.

A design-thinking approach and considering the needs of my students and my own self-care framed my technology exploration. I thought about what would work best for my students and how my own skill sets, abilities, and time to invest in self-paced learning aligned with these tools.

I used the challenges listed above to inform and guide my exploration. I made efforts to be intentional and strategic about the tools I was going to use. I was guided by the challenges I faced and the solutions I needed to find.

■ For classroom lessons, I did not have the time or money to invest in building out my own content. I turned to Nearpod where I found free lessons I could use asynchronously, synchronously, in a virtual setting, or in person. Reputable partners like Common Sense Media and Teaching Tolerance offer free, differentiated content. I could even upload my own slides and add engagement tools! Instead of scouring YouTube for video clips that highlight concepts, like conflict resolution strategies, I was able to search the Nearpod library by grade level, state standards, and type of content.

■ I needed engaging data collection strategies I could use in-person, virtually, or in a blended model. My students, families, and staff were “surveyed out.” I discovered Mentimeter, which helped me to embed fun, formative data collection tools in my lessons and meetings.

■ I struggled with completing paperwork and following up on tasks until I discovered the G Suite, all of the free tools Google offers from slides, sheets, forms, calendars, and more. It made

my job so much easier! Instead of working from stacks of paper and worrying about losing items or forgetting tasks, I used reminders on my calendar and linked it to documents I was working from. I discovered a series of formulas for my Google Sheets that helped analyze data immediately.

■ Each year, the administrators and other key decision-makers wondered if the counseling department should cut positions. I soon realized this was because they often did not actually know what the current role is of school counselors in a K-12 setting. When I was in school, the counselors simply maintained attendance and managed the course scheduling process. Today, the role of school counselors is completely different and is more focused on the holistic well-being of students. This includes academic achievement strategies, managing emotions and applying interpersonal skills, planning for post-secondary options (higher education, military, workforce), and more. I found that my best advocacy tool was using social media and marketing tools to promote my comprehensive school counseling program and support my students.



■ I needed to find a Professional Learning Network beyond my local community. I was looking for insights and ideas beyond my region, and I soon realized that I could find that Community of Practice with grade-level school counseling Facebook groups and following key hashtags on social media.

Get started by searching these hashtags on Twitter or Instagram:

- #SCCHAT = School Counselor Chat
- #ESCCHAT = Elementary School Counselor Chat
- #MSCCHAT = Middle School Counselor Chat
- #HSCCHAT = High School Counselor Chat

Are you new to using educational technology tools? Here are three tips to get you started!

- Make a list of some of your professional challenges. These do not have to be tech challenges! Notice that my list was about budget, lessons, collaboration, and advocacy.
- Prioritize just one or two places to begin exploring.
- Identify where you want to search for information based on your comfort level.
- If you are already on Facebook, consider joining a Facebook group for your demographic of students you work with, such as High School Counselors Network, Caught in the Middle School Counselors, or the Elementary School Counselor Exchange. You can search by keywords in the group to see what other counselors have already shared on the topic OR post your question (without identifying student information) in the group.
- If you are not on social media, you can still search YouTube for topics such as “School counselor + remote” for videos and tips from school counselors.
- There are lots of fantastic podcasts made by school counselors and designed for school counselors. You can listen right from your

computer and many podcasters video record their session so you can watch as well! Check out Counselor Accents Podcast for a list of topics on current trends in school counseling, including virtual school counseling, engaging families, and the school counselor and administrator partnership.

- Search the archives of your favorite school counselor magazine (LINK for Counselors)

Angela Cleveland is an advocate for student equity and access to technology, both in terms of content and the design-thinking process that informs intentional and inclusive integration practices.

As the co-author (with Stephen Sharp) of “50+ Tech Tools for School Counselors: How to Be More Engaging, Efficient, and Effective,” Angela sets forth 50+ tactics to help non-classroom-based educators have a direct impact on how students grasp content and incorporate design thinking in all aspects of their lives. The book is a powerful instrument that enables virtual and in-person, synchronous and asynchronous experiences that enrich the educational process while also helping counselors guide decision making, streamline work, and enhance communication. Learn more about Angela at www.AngelaCleveland.com.

School Counselors Say Great Things About Salisbury University

“SU falls into that ideal mid-size university category: small enough to afford personal attention yet large enough to provide a wide range of opportunities.”

Linda Campbell • Lancaster, PA

“After touring SU, I now understand why kids fall in love with Salisbury University!”

Paul Sommers • Mullica Hill, NJ

“Salisbury provides a warm, caring atmosphere in a beautiful setting – with strong academics.”

Bettina G. Heiman • Wilmington, DE



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