This past month, I authored three articles: "Being College-Ready", "Being Career-Ready", and "Being Life-Ready." It was fun, and I received favorable responses.

This month, I am going to take a different track and talk about "technology." The first of three articles will be about "Then and Now." The second will be about "What our students are doing with technology in school." The third article will be about "What teachers are learning about technology through inservice."

Back then (when I was coming out of high school)… I had learned to type on manual typewriters. Electric typewriters were just then coming out. If you made a mistake, you had to use either a special rubber eraser or use a white correction paper and backspace while typing the same key when you made a spelling error. Typing was such a slow process back then. I still recall receiving an electronic typewriter as a high school graduation present to take with me to college.

Back then… we had wall telephones. There was such a thing as a "party-line"—meaning someone else on another extension from another household could listen in on your conversation. On street corners, there were phone booths. To make a local call, it would cost a quarter. A person would have to drop more money down the coin slot of the phone if he/she wanted to make a long-distance call. It was possible to resort to requesting "operator assistance" if we wanted to make a collect call (i.e., someone at the other end of the line had to be willing to accept the charges).

Back then… if a person had car problems somewhere out on the open road, he/she would hope that someone would come along and lend a hand—that is, if you couldn't fix it yourself. However, some people had what was known as a CB radio. It was a means of communicating with someone else if help were needed. "Breaker, breaker… anyone near_____ who can lend a hand?" A person with a CB radio could listen in on conversations held between truckers.

Back then… if a person needed to do research and locate information, he/she went to a public library to search through references (e.g., encyclopedias, atlases, dictionaries, thesauruses, etc.).

Back then… as a new teacher, if I needed to make duplicates of handout materials for my students, I used a mimeograph machine or, "the blue wave machine" as I referred to them. There was such a thing called "ditto masters" that a teacher could either write on or type then run copies on such a machine. Using a Xerox machine was a privilege. As a classroom teacher, I could display masters on overhead projectors. We had access to the old Bell and Howell movie projectors that we had to hand-thread ourselves. The same was true of using filmstrip machines. Turntables were used to play vinyl records

that came in 33 1/3 sizes. Of course, we had chalkboards back then to write information out on the board for students to see.

A lot changed in the 1980's. I remember that during my third year in teaching, the first personal computer came out. The district I was working in at the time offered a co-op buy plan in which we could purchase an Apple 2e computer for home use. A lot of the work was done on a 5 ¼ floppy disk to store information on.

Those were my early recollections of the kinds of technology we had at our disposal back in the 1970's-mid-1980's. Then, things changed…

Now, there are many different kinds of computers—stand-alone and laptops. The prices vary, but many are affordable. Besides typing on a hard drive, work can be stored on a flash drive to transport between home and school. Likewise, if we have a need to retrieve information quickly, we can find it on the internet (which came out in the early 2000's) as opposed to having to visit a school/public library. Of course, a person needs to be wary of what sites to get on as there are "safe" sites, and some that should remain "off-limits". Today, a person would be "lost" if his/her computer were to go down and not be able to use it for a time. It just goes to show how dependent on computers we've become.

Phones are much different these days, too. The line between phone and computer has blurred. Who doesn't have a "smart phone"? Having a smart phone is like having a computer in your hand. You can access the internet with it. You can get the time. You can get music. You can download videos or email. There are many, many uses with a "smart phone." And, you can just "Ask Siri" when you don't know something and "she'll" provide you with the answer. There are many apps and extensions out there to make your work and play that much easier and efficient.

In terms of classrooms, we now have whiteboards, "Smart-boards", mini-slate boards, Chromebooks, laptops, stand-alone computers, etc. You don't see overhead transparency machines, movie projectors, filmstrip projectors, etc. A teacher can access media, music, movies, etc. to show on his/her Smartboard or VCR projector. Access to You Tube clips create an immediate, up-to-date example for whatever the teacher is discussing in class. Flatscreens in the classroom are also being used extensively in today's classrooms.

Times have changed. We live and exist in a digital age. There's a sense that if one doesn't keep up with the technology, life may pass you by.

In my next article on technology, I'll focus on those who are growing up in a digital age. I'll share what students are doing in our classrooms when it comes to making use of technology. Students are very good at using technology and, in many cases, have a greater proficiency in some tools and applications than their teachers. Teachers and students are learning from each other. The best piece of advice I can give someone is "don't be afraid to try something new." Continued practice will instill confidence.