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Starting the week of July 3rd, for three weeks, we're going to be taking a well-needed summer break from the Ten-minute Teacher. But I wanted to take the chance today to thank those who have supported me on Patreon. You can go to patreon.com/coolcatteacher. And you want to give a shout out to Evelyn PV, Deborah Johnson and Gina Boyd. I also want to give a shout out to four people who have recently left our team's reviews; William D. Parker, Diana Maher, Always Learning Admin, and Teacher Mike. I do appreciate those reviews, and it does really help other people find the show. I am so grateful for all of you listening to the Ten-minute Teacher and telling your friends. For this first season, I also have to thank Lisa Durf, the most amazing research assistant, extraordinaire in the world. And also, my dear husband Kip, who has been an incredible producer. And I hope you guys will give him a shout out, because he's really done a tremendous job editing the show. I had no idea we would be on such an adventure or so many of you would listen, and I'm really grateful. Thank you so much. And have a great summer.

Episode 108. The Amazon Echo in the classroom. This is a special ISTE Episode. And I do want to warn you. After some discussion, we decided not to bleep out what we say to activate the Amazon Echo. So if you have one, you might want to listen on headphones or turn the Echo off so we don't activate your Echo. Enjoy the show. And I hope all of you have enjoyed all the ISTE goodness.

The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.

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VICKI: Happy Edtech tool Tuesday. Okay, so I have an Amazon Echo

(Note from Vicki Davis: There is the Echo - <http://amzn.to/2uz1KHp> and the smaller, Echo Dot <http://amzn.to/2tcp6PD>. Technically, I have the Echo Dot hooked to speakers in my kitchen. Many people who have speakers in their classroom already are just using an echo Dot and hooking it into their class speakers.)

in my kitchen and I love it. But Bill Selak @[billselak](https://twitter.com/billselak) is using it in his classroom. Bill, how are you using the Amazon Echo?

BILL: Yeah. So that's a great question, Vicki. We actually have it in all of our first and second grade classrooms. I got the idea talking with Scott Bedley; @[Scottteach](https://twitter.com/Scottteach) he's a fifth grade teacher in Irvine. He applied for a grant and actually got four of them for his classroom, and put one in each corner. And just, he had kind of a hunch and was like, how might we use these as learning tools? Because he was feeling overwhelmed with students coming to him, what's this and what's that. You know, in fifth grade, the state report is a big thing in California. So, like, you know, well, what's the capital of Massachusetts; and he's like, just look it up. So

all those kind of low-level stuff, students were able to actually use the Echo to get the information from, which freed him up for the more interesting things that I think teachers would want to be doing, like looking really critically at some of these projects.

So I heard him talk about that about thought, wow, how might we use those at Hillbrook School? And so was just telling the story at lunch to Sarah Lee, one of our second grade teachers, and she was like, that's amazing; I would love to have one of those in my classroom; imagine the things you could do. So at the lunch table, I just took out my iPhone, bought an Amazon Echo for her and put it in the second grade classroom, and she was blown away. And so she got it. And the we have two sections of second grade; so then the other second grade teacher thought, well, that's really cool, I hear students talk about it all the time. You know, they share students an awful lot. And so they would go into the other second grade class and say, you know, where is the Echo? Or even better, sometimes they're just...

VICKI: Where's Alexa?

BILL: They're just like, hey, Alexa; what's the – and nothing replied.

VICKI: Oh. Talking to nothing. I guess she's not in there.

BILL: I know. And then first and second grade, all four of those classrooms, share one building. We call it a pod. And the first grade teachers had a couple of Amazon Echos at home, and so they asked, how might we use these in first grade? And that seems to be the sweet spot.

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Talking with the kindergarten teachers, and they weren't particularly excited with the use of it. And we even tried it in a third grade class, and third-graders got just so excited that no matter what, Alexa will always talk back at you. And so just kind of first and second grade for us, kind of for our culture to be the sweet spot for it. So we're using it a lot for just really basic facts that are so super important as a first-grader and as a second-grader, so, like, how to spell things and double-checking math facts. So things that students want to know they got right, so it's not like a way to cheat, which is a great thing about the Echo. If you're doing like two-digit addition, if you shout across the room, hey, what's 24 plus 36, everyone is going to know that actually the Amazon Echo is giving you the answer. But if you're doing a little bit of work on your own, you can just walk over quietly and say, what's 24 plus 36; you get the answer and go, cool, I'm right. So it's enabled us, in first and second grade, for students to have way more control over their learning and in double-checking things, and it's freed the teacher from that bottleneck of, how do you spell this, how do you spell this, considering writing time; the teachers are able to work on the more interesting things like story, and let's try and get a really good hook, and the students write the spelling, which,

again, is a really important part of second grade; to be able to spell correctly, it empowers the students to take ownership over their own spelling. So it's been really cool.

VICKI: You're blowing my mind. But I have a couple of questions. So those of you who have not had an Amazon Echo, the way that you activate, it's kind of like "OK Siri", and now probably all the devices on my desk are going to go crazy. And I'm actually hoping that Alexa doesn't hear me from the kitchen. You say Alexa, and then you tell Alexa what to do, and then she'll do a variety of things, whether it's, you know, play Jimmy Buffet or set a timer or what's the news; there's just so many things you can do. Now, do you have more than one Echo in a classroom?

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BILL: We have not tried that. We're just putting one in every classroom.

VICKI: See, I'm afraid to do that. Because I would be afraid that she would hear the different places. Now, here's the next thing; does the school actually have the Amazon account?

BILL: Yes. So that's how we did that.

VICKI: Okay. But you turned off purchasing, obviously. Because if you turn on purchasing at the house, you can say, you know, Amazon, deliver some dog food, and she'll do it.

BILL: Yeah, exactly. We have one account right now. And I've heard that Amazon is looking at ways of schoolifying these to make them so that a school can own it and it feels a little bit less like, hey, buy some more fruit loops, and you're able to use it. Like, the interface becomes more education-facing.

VICKI: Yeah. The thing I love is that you can actually look back and see all the things that have been searched on Alexa. So you can monitor it. It's not like she's being asked all kinds of things without you knowing what they are; you can actually look and see what those are.

BILL: Exactly. That's so powerful, actually, for the teacher to get the analytics on what are students wanting to double-check spelling on.

VICKI: You know, when I heard, I saw it on Facebook, and you all were talking about using the Echo in a classroom. And I'm like, why didn't I think of that? I use it all the time. And I'm calling her her, and it's a thing. What are your teachers thinking about this?

BILL: It's great. They actually don't talk that much about it, which I think is one of the greatest things you can have with technology, is that it just becomes another tool. Like, our teachers aren't talking about scissors; oh my gosh, we have these new scissors, can I show you how great the scissors are? You might do that like the first day, and then it's another tool. So Amazon Echo has really just become that

pretty quickly. We went from one classroom to four classrooms in just two years, and it's another tool; it's another great thing they can do. We also have TVs, Apple TVs hooked up; beginning of the day, had some kind of mellow, chill music as students come in.

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And that used to be on the TV. And I've seen, depending on, I guess, their mood, sometimes they'll just be playing on the Echo, just having some nice music in the background.

VICKI: You can just say, you know, Alexa, play some calm music or play some piano music. I mean, you can just say whatever and it just plays it.

BILL: Exactly.

VICKI: So as we finish up, now, we have to say that this is actually part of your whole school life movement to more flexible classroom. And we are going to do an upcoming episode on that, because that's really the big picture. This is just a tool that's part of this student-customized environment. But, Bill, what do you think the biggest mistake that you made with the Echo when you first got it?

BILL: I think the biggest mistake was not setting expectations with students. If you introduce it and say, this is the coolest thing, you can ask it anything, and all you need to say is, hey, Alexa; if that's how you tee it up, then every human, I would imagine, is going to go, hey, Alexa. But if you talk about, hey, there's this amazing tool that will help us check math facts, help us check spelling, will give us all kinds of facts, will actually tell jokes also; that's a big part of the culture at Hillbrook School, is telling jokes. We do that schoolwide every Monday. And so, you know, Alexa will even tell us jokes. But saying, here is what we're going to be using it for so that students see it immediately as an educational tool in the classroom and not just, oh, I can ask it any random question, and be silly around it. And that's so important. And that's just, you would do that classroom management-wise with any new thing.

VICKI: Yes. And they can be silly because you can tell Alexa to talk like a pirate, can't you?

BILL: Yes, you can. You can also – you might not know this one. One of our parents actually built a skill – that's what these little apps are called on Amazon Echos – a skill called the Hillbrook bear, so you can download that skill and say, hey, Alexa, ask Hillbrook bear, and the Hillbrook bear will give you, like, what letter day it is and what schoolwide events they are.

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So we've actually used that as part of kind of our morning meeting each morning to find out what's happening schoolwide. So that's been a really cool thing also. It's more than just talking like a pirate.

- VICKI: Yeah. Because skills are something you can add features and functionality. So we have 30 seconds left. What are the – you’ve already talked about math, you’ve talked about spelling, and now you’ve talked about a special app just for your school. Is there anything else cool that people need to know about the Amazon Echo will do in the classroom?
- BILL: So I love just the inquiry that second-graders do around it. When they got it, it was just, what questions do you have. And the second grade class shared that with me, and it was just 100 posted notes. And they went through, like, what’s a question that a database can answer and that can’t answer, and talked about opinions and facts. And it led into so many amazing authentic discussions. Instead of just saying, today, we’re talking about fact and opinion; you can frame it around, so Alexa didn’t answer this question because it’s an opinion, let’s talk about that. So it became just really authentic learning that was much more student-driven than it otherwise would have been.
- VICKI: Would you call Alexa AI, artificial intelligence, or not?
- BILL: I don’t know. I think the jury is out on that one. I think that it’s a specific thing; you could make a case either way.
- VICKI: Yeah. Because, really, it’s almost like the semantic web; it’s just accessing the web with your voice, right?
- BILL: Yeah. I think it’s more of just that and other specific things. It can search and query and give you the results of. I don’t think that it really learns in the way that we think of as artificial intelligence.
- VICKI: Yeah. Okay, so we’ve hopefully given you an exciting new tool to consider for your classroom, the Amazon Echo. Happy Edtech Tool Tuesday.

VICKI DAVIS @COOLCATTEACHER

Thank you for listening to the Ten-minute Teacher Podcast. You can download the show notes and see the archive at coolcatteacher.com/podcast. Never stop learning.

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