



# From the President's Desk

## To Be or Not To Be

Dear Colleagues:

It may seem like a stretch to connect Hamlet's soliloquy to our new Smart Classroom technology, but here goes.

Today I was given a personal tour of West's gleaming new Learning Studio on the fourth floor of the HLRC. The Learning Studio is a true "smart classroom" and was designed as a training prototype so that faculty would have a permanent place to learn how to incorporate technology into their classroom teaching. Well I've seen the future and it works!

It took me about twenty minutes to learn the rudiments of the equipment and then I started to design a model lesson on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I've taught the play many times to students from the seventh grade to grad school, most of whom had no familiarity or even interest in Shakespeare. In the past I always tried to make the play "relevant" but had to do this in a lecture and text-based way. And when we started to try to read and interpret the most famous dramatic speech in the English language, let's just say that we didn't get very far past 'to be or not to be'.

But today I started a lesson on the smart board titled "Disfunctional Families" since Hamlet is decidedly from one. Then instead of "teaching" the soliloquy, I uploaded onto the board in a matter of seconds three film clips from YouTube of the speech as delivered by Laurence Olivier, Mel Gibson (yes, he once played Hamlet and he wasn't bad), and Kenneth Branagh. Then I focused my questions not on the text itself but how each actor interpreted the same text quite differently. And then I asked what was being communicated by such non-verbal means as scenery, lighting and movements. I was able to stop the clip and highlight certain gestures right on the smart board.

The best part of it all is it really got me going with a sense of excitement at sharing this with my real students. I imagined a classroom environment in which in a matter of an hour my students and I are absorbed in dissecting Olivier like we were a group of film critics. What will West be like when every classroom is "smart"? That, dear Hamlet, is the *real* question!

In hope and heart,

*Mark*

## Words for the Week

“

*I forget what I was taught.  
I only remember what I have learned.*

”

--Patrick White, Australian author,  
1973 Nobel Prize for Literature

November 16, 2009

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

**NOVEMBER 16, 1873:**

W. C. Handy, the American composer known as the "father of the blues", was born. He did not invent the blues but popularized them with such works as *St. Louis Blues* and *Beale Street Blues*. He died on March 28, 1958. A postage stamp in his honor was issued in 1969 (it was 6 cents).

### ON TEACHING: WEST'S NEW SMART CLASSROOM LEARNING STUDIO DEBUTS NOVEMBER 17

I just took a tour of our new Smart Classroom Learning Studio for faculty in HLRC, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Room E. It's GREAT! On November 17, our colleague Jan Vanderpool will be conducting two Tech Fair sessions in this new studio, one of which is a great way for any faculty member to get acquainted with this wonderful new training resource: 2:00pm—*"Embedding Technology into Instruction."*