Professionals Against Improperly Labeling Active Learners
PAILAL Newsletter

October 2008
Volume 1, Issue 2

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About this issue of PAILAL

By Timothy C. Clapper, M.A.

This month we continue to spread the word that learners do learn in different ways. Whether one subscribes to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences or Kenneth and Rita Dunn's learning style modalities (or both as I do) we know that educators must create a learning environment that addresses the learning needs of their learners.

As the fall season moves in on us we can be reminded that the leaves on the maple trees are all different colors and yet their objectives are the same; to nourish and protect the tree. Good student-centered instruction can be just as varied with useful strategies for getting learners to the same lesson objective. Technology can bridge education gaps and reach learners through their learning styles and educators must not be afraid to incorporate it. When many of learners of my generation were younger we were given such toys as Lego blocks® for Christmas. Blocks have often been replaced by electronic gaming paddles as holiday gifts. Many children have been using technology shortly after learning to walk. It makes sense then to teach learners using the intelligences, learning styles, preferences, and modalities that they are most familiar with. This issue will be dedicated to using technology to enhance the learning process in the classroom. I hope you enjoy it and continue to make a difference.

Contents

Fear of technology

Many educators may be afraid to incorporate technology in their classrooms. Computers and interactive whiteboards are making their way into the classrooms and many are lying dormant. Sadly, I have also witnessed too often the interactive whiteboards being used as a mere aid for the "death by lecture" direct-instruction approach to teaching. This would not be a good example of using technology to reach the learner through their learning styles, particularly of active learners, in the classroom. While many excuses are available for not incorporating the technology (time, test-prep, the computers don't work sometimes, etc) I sense the real reason is fear. This includes fear of technology and fear of failure. Many educators themselves are not familiar with common tools included in Microsoft Office® so sometimes their response is resistance. My answer is that you have to learn sometime and now is the time for the sake of your learners. Start slow and keep it simple. As you expand your knowledge through trial and error, expand the lesson opportunities as well. Approach it with the same positive attitudes expected of your learners. Have fun!

Did you know?

Microsoft wants you to be able to use their Office products. They offer free online training at: http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/training/default.aspx

Using technology to reach your learners

By Timothy C. Clapper, M.A.

Technology is being used in their classrooms. If you ask an educator if technology is being used in their classroom most might answer yes. A visit to their classrooms might show varied interpretation as to what they believe is applying technology in the classroom. Using technology in the lessons is more than simply projecting the lesson onto a whiteboard or screen. Instead, it is using available technology to address the way one learns. Simply put, it is what happens with the information once it is projected onto the whiteboard or screen that is most important.

With their Understanding by Design model, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) suggest that educators determine what really needs to be taught, select the objectives, develop the essential question, devise the appropriate assessments, and then develop the strategies for meeting the objectives. If educators are not applying the appropriate educational technology mix in their lessons, they may not be fully reaching and engaging all of the learners in their classrooms.

In the world of curriculum, there are essentially five curriculum perspectives that an educator may adopt including technical, deliberative, academic-traditionalist, constructivist, and biblical. Academic and technical are most closely aligned and the term technical does not imply at all to the use of technology but instead as a systematic manner in which the teacher and student collaborate (i.e. direct instruction, teacher-centered). The deliberative perspective focuses on prior knowledge and making meaning of the material to the learner while the constructivist perspective is student-centered and offers varied choices for the learner as *they* develop their understanding. Of course our entire purpose and foundation of education was based on the biblical perspective. Today, this biblical worldwide perspective serves as the basis for respect in some classrooms along with its moral and character implications.

"Exploit those technologies that allow the learner to feel it, do it, and be a part of constructing the learning"

Unfortunately, some educators are locked into one perspective and that is often the academic-traditional perspective. So what does this have to do with technology integration? In a study on the impact of primary school teachers' educational beliefs on the classroom use of computers Hermans, Tondeur, Van Braak, and Valcke (2008) found that teacher perspectives and attitudes were significant determinants in whether or not the teachers adopted computers in the classroom. Subsequently, they also found a positive effect of constructivist beliefs on the classroom use of computers while traditional beliefs had a negative impact on the classroom use of computers. The effective educator is one that can pull from all of these perspectives in their own context and from this develop a tool bag of strategies that can be used to reach the learner.

All of the suggestions discussed in this article will address the needs of the visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic learner and incorporate or can be tailored to many of the characteristics of the five perspectives. Remember that the latter is the main focus of the PAILAL newsletter so we want to exploit those technologies that allow the learner to feel it, do it, and be a part of constructing the learning material.

In the last issue, curriculum webs and WebQuests were spotlighted PAILALVol1Issue1. They use the power of constructivist learning theory and the Internet to supplement textbook information to make learning more meaningful to the learner. Internet information is preselected for relevance, application, and choice and keeps the learner on-task. Learners may explore the content in various ways, which meets some differentiating requirements.

Talking storybooks are another tool that may be used to reach learners through technology. Using PowerPoint, educators can develop a story that includes their own narrative of the storybook. The subject can be a common one such as the *Three Little Pigs* or may be one made up by the educator to address a unit lesson. The educator may do a "read along" narration of the page (slide) to the learner that would be appropriate for younger learners or they may use the narrative to add depth to the written page. A downloadable example of the latter may be found on the following TC Curriculum & Instructional Design website: Global History-Cold War Storybook. By developing talking storybooks in advance, the educator may realize numerous benefits including:

Using technology to reach your learners con't

"Actively involve the learner in the learning process"

- Filling differentiation of content requirements
- Hands on, active learning by the learners
- Used to help learners catch up after absences
- Learners can advance by their own speed through the lesson (differentiating content level)
- Can be used as mobile instruction (for hospitalized learners for example)
- As a review & recap of critical information
- As a means advanced instruction providing greater depth for the gifted learner
- As a means of scaffolding learning and providing additional assistance for those falling behind

Further, if students develop the talking storybooks themselves as project-based learning many of the above benefits may be realized as well as:

- Developing research and soft computer skills
- Personal meaning with the lesson
- Presentation skills

Technology can be used to differentiate the product as well as being an assessment tool. Electronic portfolios may be developed which can help to show where learning has occurred. Suitably, projects that are developed by the learner may be linked directly to the Word, PowerPoint, or other program being used to develop the electronic portfolio. Educators may show learners how to develop an academic resume using the same word processing program that further incorporates active engagement and authentic learning.

Math teachers would surely do their students a great favor by showing them how to make math meaningful and applicable. Using spreadsheet programs such as Microsoft Excel® the student could research data and manipulate the data using the various mathematical formulas included in the program. Note that the emphasis would be on student involvement and not the student remaining in a passive learning state.

While not wishing to appear to be a salesperson for Microsoft, educators surely recognize that Microsoft Office® is perhaps the most widely used integrated programs in businesses and throughout the education circles. Along with each of the strategies that have been documented at this point, there is also the power of web pages in the learning process. Whether we are performing an "All about me" page, a synchronization of geographical characteristics, or even a WebQuest, the common Microsoft Office tools may be used to develop these learning projects. In fact, one of my workshops shows educators how to perform this process. All that is needed is a computer, some basic computer skills, and a desire to take learning to a whole new fun, and engaging level.
Many schools are improving on the modes of delivery for instruction. With each passing day, more interactive Whiteboards and LCD projectors are making their way into the classrooms. Educators should learn how to adapt these modes of delivery to their own classrooms because they are here to stay. However, to keep them from being an expensive chalkboard and reach more learners, one must learn how to integrate educational technology learning strategies that this generation is used to.

Timothy Clapper holds an M.A. In Curriculum & Instruction and is a doctoral learner. He is also President of TC Curriculum & Instructional Design, LLC.
http://tccid.dover.net

Sources

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Do Not Forget About Technology in the Classroom

By Lauren Hoffman

As I am finishing up my undergraduate studies in Early Childhood Development and Elementary Education I have been fortunate to receive a lot of experience in classroom settings. I have observed and taught in four elementary schools and in two day care/nursery schools. Each school and classroom has had different personalities and helped me grow as an educator. My teaching experiences have ranged from science inquiry lessons in a two and a half year old classroom to language arts in an honors third grade class.

I have been taught different ways to use technology in the classroom. One particular course called Educational Communication (EdComm) was a fifteen-week class that consisted of three-hour lectures spread across two days, and an additional day with a two-hour lab period to implement and apply what we learned. It covered ascetically pleasing ways to arrange information in various Microsoft Works programs as well as appropriate fonts and templates to use while giving oral lectures or presentations.

My favorite assignment was an interactive PowerPoint we had to create using Microsoft PowerPoint. I created a PowerPoint based on the solar system. I could use this as a learning center in the classroom. It is independent and interactive. The program starts off with a small introduction and directions on what to do and what to expect. There is a picture of the solar system and when a planet or the sun is clicked on it takes the learner to another page, which provides information on what a learner wants to learn more about. At the end is a quiz. If a question is answered incorrectly a sad alien comes up and says tries again and when it's answered correctly a happy alien with a motivational comment pops up. It's a great way for children to self-assess themselves without being afraid of answering a question wrong.

"A great way for children to self-assess"

As part of an Understanding By Design Unit that a small group of classmates and myself wrote using the solar system as our topic, this interactive PowerPoint was used as an assessment tool. Children were receiving a formal assessment without stressing out about having to pass a quiz.

I have been taught so many ways to integrate technology in the classroom, but sadly have not seen it utilized in all of the rooms I have been a part of. There are countless resources available to us as educators that we do not take advantage of. For one of my lessons, the professor had wanted us to go online and find an interactive math program on a reliable website and base our lesson on that. Some of us questioned his suggestion since we were always told to be original with our lessons and our ideas.

However, many of our professor's shared the motto "Do not re-create the wheel." What this professor wanted us to do is take someone's math game and take it to the next level in our lesson plan. By using a search engine I found so many useful websites for not only math, but every other content area. For example, I found a great website that created sheets that helped set up different poetry styles. When I taught third graders how to write diamante poems I went back to this website and printed out the set up form they had and turned it into a worksheet for the students to follow along with and practice poem writing.

I do not have my own classroom yet, but I have been part of enough of them that I sit here and think "Oh! I could have used this last semester." "Or I could have done this differently if I had access to a room full of computers." I can take these "oh what if's" and apply them to my future lessons so there are no more "Oh this would have been perfect way back when..." There is so much new technology that is emerging, and it would be such a shame not to use it in our classrooms. I encourage all educators to use technology in their classroom, as I will continue to plan my current lessons using the technology that is available to me.

Lauren Hoffman is a student at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. She is a dual major in Early Childhood Development and Elementary Education. She is sure to make a positive difference in many little lives. Her email address is MissLaurenFaye@aol.com