

Teaching methods today cannot be correctly conceptualized without taking into account student environments outside of school and the pervasiveness of technology and media in society. Technology has become integrated into our daily lives and students experience a wealth of information that is ever present. Yet, they often are unsure how to navigate this information, and often they do not even realize they are unconsciously receiving or internalizing information from technology and media. As teachers, we have a defined responsibility to adjust our instructional methods and classroom environments to encompass the lifestyle and future students will encounter and are already coming across.

Technology in the classroom has a multitude of benefits, perhaps the most important of which are cognitive. For those teachers, including myself, who take a Constructivist, or Vygotskian, approach to instruction, technology can assist in acting as a guide. Rather than taking the lead in instruction, both the teacher and technology provide students with the opportunity to learn within their zones of proximal development, with the teacher and technology acting as guides in material that may be unfamiliar or incomprehensible to students. It also offers the opportunity for students to learn autonomously, thus encouraging self-motivation and self-referent cognition. Carol Dweck, a leading researcher on the effects of motivation on performance, suggests that students are more likely to have increased performance when they are motivated to perform (Dweck, Mangels & Good, 2004). Whether intrinsic or extrinsic in nature, motivation is key to learning, and technology can sometimes be a stimulus for the motivation of students.

My focus is English, and while I think technology should be in every subject area's classroom, it must be in an English classroom. There are too many different methods of communication that require use of technology to maintain a modern standard of English education without technology in the classroom. Teaching students how to write correct e-mails, letters, translate text messages and instant messages, determine the reliability of online sources, etc. are all fundamental skills that English teachers, such as myself, need to be sure students are developing during the time they spend in English classrooms. Today, it is too important to not be technologically savvy, and it will be even more essential for the next generation to be skilled in technology; it is my job to teach them to be such.

With technology, students become "active learners" because the visual aspect of computers helps them to understand abstract concepts and allows them to manipulate situations and variables. They also may become more motivated to develop skills and use science, literacy, visual arts, and communication tools when experiences with these tools are in hands-on lessons. However, care should be taken to ensure that student motivation does not decrease as a result of forced participation in technological activities (Xie, Debacker & Ferguson, 2006).

Technology is a necessity in today's classroom. However, it must be incorporated appropriately and as a means to increasing learning, not merely bringing students' outside social worlds into the classroom. Learning word processing, broadcasting, and technological development skills are only a few of the aptitudes students can develop while utilizing technology. Technology is unique in that individual students can

progressively increase the difficulty in their skill development without affecting other students' learning.

Furthermore, Thomas and Rohwer (1993) suggest that the higher the level of activities in which students engage, the greater their achievement will be. Utilizing technology in the classroom can accomplish higher learning, but only when the demands placed upon the students are increasingly difficult and challenge their potential.

Technology offers great opportunities to put the world at a student's fingertips and to bring cultural experiences and world events into a personal realm. It is these aspects of technology that will give students a more diverse learning environment and occasions for learning in the real world.

References

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