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Resources and Ways to Teach in Schools Today

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Abstract: This paper addresses the need for teachers to be able to educate their students with resources that pertain to the evolving learning styles. Students are starting to learn better with the use of technology, rather than the traditional lecture. It will list and assess some suggested resources to be effective at teaching all students in the best way possible. This will look at some resources, for example electronic media, which have been proven to help students of today's generation learn in a more effective way that will stick with them throughout their schooling and their future careers.

Keywords: *learning styles, teaching strategies, electronic media, technology*

Introduction

If you were born in the evolving age of technology, you may have found it easier in either elementary school or high school to learn using technology rather than the traditional lecture. For example, how difficult and time consuming would it have been for you to write a research paper without the Internet? When you think of your developing learning style throughout your schooling, you can imagine how rapidly changing the learning style is for elementary students of today.

How can we as educators cater to the changing needs for students to learn effectively? Today's generation is mainly focused on the world of interactive media, therefore educators need to be able to use that resource to relate to the students and what they have grown up with. This net-centric generation values their ability to use the Internet to create their own learning path, by using different forms of interactive, social, and self-publishing media tools (Baird & Fisher, 2005). Technology can be a very useful tool when it comes to education, but there are some setbacks that have to eventually be worked out and fixed in order to teach students to their highest potential.

Educators of today must incorporate technological resources into their lesson plans in order to adapt to students' ever changing learning styles.

Learning to Teach with Technology

Technology is a wonderful resource to use when trying to teach to students with different learning styles, and teaching to the students of this new technologically advanced generation. For educators who have been teaching for many years, it may be a very difficult for them to change their lesson plans to a more technologically based curriculum. On the other hand, since the creation of personal computers and the launch of the internet, many educators have advocated education reforms that take advantage of the affordances of information and communication technologies (Chai, Koh, & Tsai, 2010). Teachers are being bombarded with the notion that computers should be integrated in their everyday classroom activities, yet few teachers actually receive the proper training. Without proper training, it is almost a waste to have technology in the classroom at all. Technology is not meant to be the sole way of teaching in a classroom, but it is to help engage students into learning that is meaningful and will help them remember what they are learning.

In order to integrate technology in the classroom, we need to be able to have the proper resources. One way to slowly integrate technology into the classroom is to start by introducing it to only one or two subjects at a time so that students and teachers can learn how to use this technology correctly, and to ensure the technology is adequate (Hew & Brush, 2007).

Another way would be to switch over from large computer labs to bringing laptops into the classroom for students to use. By slowly integrating technology into the classroom, this will hopefully change educators' beliefs on technology. Like students, teachers also need encouragement when they are trying something new. This is why

it would be helpful to have the encouragement of the principal, who already has an appreciation of technology so that they can be more understanding of what teachers experience when they integrate technology in their classrooms. This understanding is likely to be fulfilled by providing principals with technology training, particularly exposure to methods and procedures of integrating technology in their lessons. (Dawson & Rakes, 2003; Hew & Brush 2007).

Using Technology for Evolving Learning Styles

Before the age of technology, lessons were taught by lecturing and then doing problems, whether they be on the chalkboard or on paper. Nowadays, kids are growing up with technology and it seems as if they cannot live without it. There are many different ways teachers can use technology to give students the effective learning they need.

When it comes to using technology, there are different goals to be reached. First is the individualistic goal, where a learner works on their own so their learning meets their own criterion independently from efforts of other students. Here is where students are not concerned about the performance of others. Second, is a competitive goal, where a learner focuses their efforts on performing faster and more accurately than other students. Hence, they perceive they will be rewarded based on comparison with other students. And third is a cooperative goal, where the students work together in small groups to maximize their own and other students' learning. According to the social interdependence theory, the way goals are structured in a situation determines the patterns among participants which in turn determines the situational outcome (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Ke, 2008).

There is a strong correlation between goal structures and computer games in the classroom. A school district developed its own series of Web-based educational games called ASTRA EAGLE. The games were created to reinforce academic standards for mathematics required by "Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)." The games were originally designed for individual play, but quickly developed to be competitive and cooperative. They are mainly strategy games that focus on decision-making and problem-solving skills (Crawford, 1997; Ke, 2008).

By adding, for example, math games on the computer, this will show students that they can learn and have fun while in school. This also proves that setting goals for students, whether it be individual or cooperative, and mixing it with a fun yet educational computer game is a very effective way of getting them to retain information better. This also teaches students that they have to push themselves and strive for their next goal in order to advance in the game. Technology is a great way to tap into the potential of our future generation.

Setbacks of Technology Resources

Since schools are supposed to develop and educate the next generation of the world, they need to have adequate resources to do so. In this day and age, technology is advancing very rapidly and some schools do not have the ability to be up to date with all of it. One setback is that the schools are not adequately financed, and they are unable to have enough computers in the classroom for all the students. In most developed countries, there has been a tremendous increase in accessibility to computers in both school and at home (Chai, Koh, & Tsai, 2010). However, in under-developed countries, there isn't such easy access to computers, thus leaving them behind in this age of technological advancement as well as educational advancement.

These setbacks and disadvantages of using technology are a major reason as to why some teachers have a bad attitude towards using technology. In the years and decades to come, it is expected that both teachers and students will become more and more educated with the use of technology. As it is ever increasing now, the use of technology will only begin to grow and evolve more rapidly.

Conclusion

Technology can be a great way to adapt to the evolving learning styles of the children of this generation, however it also has its disadvantages.

Kids of this generation are growing up in a technology-centered world, and their learning style is adapted to better understand information via technology. As educators, our main goal should be to teach to students to the best of our abilities, and technology can be a major asset to a classroom. If that means adapting to the changing times then we should do so.

When it comes to using technology as a resource for teaching to evolving learning styles, teachers need to be careful as to how they incorporate it into their lesson plans. Most teachers are not accustomed to using technology in their classrooms, so that can pose a challenge. In order for technology to be a proper resource for educators, the school administration needs to offer the proper training for these resources. A way to get schools to ease into technology use would be to introduce it to one or two subjects at a time, so teachers aren't overwhelmed with the different types of multimedia they have to use.

Technology has rapidly advanced in the past ten years, and it will only continue to become more popular and with a large variety of multimedia. As educators, we need to be prepared at all times to adapt to the changing times in order for our students to learn to the best of their ability. By using technology, we can begin to understand how the kids of this generation learn the best, and use this resource to have more of a positive impact on children's learning style.

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Impact of the Community on Schools

Amy Smith

Abstract: This paper is designed to break down different impacts that the community can have on a school. The community plays a part in shaping a child into the type of student they will be; additionally, the school impacts the community. Together, these two aspects will work together to create a learning environment for the students that offers many different learning opportunities.

Keywords: *schools, primary sources, community impact*

Introduction

It has always been said that it takes a village to raise a child, and whoever said this is exactly right. Teachers working in the elementary, middle, and high schools have opportunities to involve the community into different aspect of their classrooms. If fully utilized, partnerships between the teachers and community members can be rewarding for everyone involved, regardless of the age levels (Gilliland-Swetland, Kafai, Landis, 1999).

Integrating community involvement can come in many forms. Such forms can be bringing in community members into the classroom to act as primary sources for a topic in addition to web-based sources, but also, using the community's influence and values and bringing these into the classroom. This paper aims to break down different methods in which teachers for grades K-12 can integrate the community into the classroom and look at the effects the community has in the classroom.

Bringing the Community into the Classroom

In elementary school, it is common to have events similar to a career day. These days allow the children to explore different jobs at a young age so that their vision is expanded on what they are able to do with their life. These days often have wide ranges of careers present and people working in the fields there at the school to represent the job to the students. This is a perfect case where the elementary schools are utilizing the community to enhance the students learning experience. By bringing in the community members to talk about their jobs and experiences, it feeds the children inspiration and motivation to work hard in school because they can see what they are working towards and they have the chance to interact with and ask questions of the community members. Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882), a superintendent in Canada West saw the dangers of limiting students' exposure to the outside world in regards to their education. He urged classrooms to use laboratory or museum settings while discussing history classes specifically. Ryerson felt that this would be a way for students to engage with the material they were learning rather than simply memorizing it. Ryerson is now credited with being one of the pioneers of incorporating community interaction into school in North America (Eamon, 2006).

Web-Based Sources

Another way to incorporate primary sources, which are defined by the Library of Congress as "are the raw materials of history — original documents and objects which were created at the time under study. They are different from secondary sources, accounts or interpretations of events created by someone without firsthand experience," into the classroom is to use web-based sources. Though this limits the actual interaction with the community, web-based sources are plentiful on the internet and some sites offer interactive learning options, many of which can be found on a local library's online library. Often times, local libraries have websites or search engines that are linked to many useful sources for the classroom.

Navigating to these sites from a library's home page can leave the educator confident in the quality of the source because of the search engine

used. By switching to a web-based source for teaching, it offers the students a new way to take the information in. This different way of information intake from textbooks to web-based cites forces the students to change the way they ingest the information which can be extremely beneficial because the students now have to pay attention to the way the material is presented which forces him or her to pay more attention to the material presented. Social Studies teachers are the most frequent users of web-based learning due to the large amount of primary sources available on the internet (Doolittle, Lee, 2004). The internet allows for teachers to have multiple documents, for example, presented to the students at once which open up doors for easier comparison and discussion on a topic as well as having the extra information about the document.

Encouraging Community Service

Community involvement with a classroom can come in many forms. One way is to bring the community into the school with the specific goal of teaching the students about a topic, another is to use community resources to enhance the students learning and offer new ways to interact with the material, and yet another way is to encourage the students to become involved with the community.

Community service can have a positive impact on the students learning. Service-learning is viewed as a way to "educate students about their public responsibilities and their roles as citizens" (Markus, Howard, King, 1993). In a study put on by Gregory Markus, Jeffrey Howard, and David King, results showed that students that were exposed to service-learning had higher attendance rates as well as over all grades (Markus, Howard, King, 1993).

These results show that by incorporating community involvement into a students' learning environment, their overall performance can be enhanced. This fact of students preforming better when they are involved in community service is similar to the fact that students who are involved with extracurricular activities perform better.

Forming Bonds

By bringing the community into the classroom or bringing the classroom into the community, bonds are formed between the two groups. The Department of Human Development at the University of Maryland- College Park conducted a study in which researchers found that students who had the opportunity to interact with non-parental figures from the community consistently had a brighter look on life, engaged in extracurricular activities, and typically performed better in school.

The thought behind these results is that because the students have formed a bond with the community, he or she will feel that his or her actions have an impact on the community. This feeling of direct impact is what seems to be driving the students to work hard inside and outside of the classroom (Nettles, Mucherah, Jones, 2000).

Over time, the student will likely keep this work ethic and bring it into his or her adult life, where these qualities of optimism and hard and quality work will set him or her apart, especially in a job market. Students with qualities like the ones formed in a learning environment such as a service-learning classroom are the students that will most likely grow into being strong, successful, working adults.

Community and School: Intertwined

The community a child is raised in has a major impact on the person the child will turn into, and though the community naturally works its way into the classrooms, teachers can take the extra step to bring the community in and utilize it as a resource.

The community offers many primary sources for teachers to bring in, whether it is talking about a specific topic or to talk about what the world has to offer post-schooling. By bringing the community in this way, students can interact directly with the primary source, which gives the student a greater sense of connection with the topic at hand. In addition to bringing the community into the classroom, teachers can bring the classroom into the community.

By taking students to a museum, for example, students can interact with the information in a way

different other than simply reading about the topic from a text, and by bringing the students outside of the classroom, the community has the chance to see the students learning and exploring. This view typically brings a sense of belonging to the students because bonds will have been formed between the student and the community itself.

Once the students feel that they have a bond with the community, they feel that his or her specific actions have a stake in the community, in other words, the bond created helps the students to feel that they play an important role in the community.

Teachers are continually looking for new resources to bring into his or her classroom to help improve the student's learning. Utilizing the community as a resource is one of the simplest and incredibly affective ways to enhance the students learning while allowing the students to gain a feeling of importance in the community.

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Using Classroom Pets to Improve Elementary Teaching

Sara Peterson

Abstract: The use of animals in classrooms has been popularly used for both therapeutic and educational purposes. This article outlines some of the benefits of using live animals in an elementary learning environment. Also covered are some concerns with the topic and how to resolve them.

KEYWORDS: *classroom pets, elementary education, therapeutic animals*

Introduction

For a child, a pet is not an animal, but a friend. Kids are often known to play with their dog as if it were a person, or to argue and reason with a cat as if it will understand and meet them in the middle on an issue. Children naturally hold a great love and fascination for animals. If that interest could be directed towards their education, learning would become much more efficient.

An animal in a classroom is not an unheard of occurrence. In fact, it is somewhat of a television trope to include the fear of losing a classroom pet into shows geared towards young students. It is a wonder that animals are not incorporated into all classrooms because, as it is published in a journal on the development of young children, animal-child interactions are "almost universally beneficial" (Meadan, 2010, p. 70). The presence of an animal in a school setting is advantageous for both the educational and emotional wellbeing of a growing child.

Animals enhancing education in the classroom

By having interactions with live animals, children excel greatly in both educational development and emotional stability. With a dog at their side, beginning readers learn much faster than their companionless counterparts. According to a study on the effects of a dog as a teaching aid, an explanation as for why the students benefit from an animal peer is that their presence is one that is "nonjudgmental and therefore the children do not feel any pressure associated with performing or practicing" (Gee, 2012). This allows children to gain confidence and experience in skills such as reading by overcoming the fear of failure or poor judgement.

Beyond reading, there are a variety of ways to use pets as teaching tools. A common practice is to teach life sciences by observing physical, non-human life. By watching a chick hatch or an aging fish die, children learn potent biology lessons that cannot be replicated through a text book (Hummel et al, 2012). Live animals provide irreplaceable lessons in sciences that secondary school teachers have been utilizing for generations, it only makes sense to share these teaching methods in the elementary school setting.

Animals are also well integrated into art activities. For example, children could be given the opportunity to study and draw living creatures (Meadan et al, 2010). Animals can also be more closely involved in the art making through methods such as letting a pet turtle crawl through paint to make trails on paper. Pets make the learning material more interesting to a child and cause students to be more aptly focused. Living animals in classrooms build a better learning environment for elementary aged students and make an invaluable tool for their teachers.

Therapeutic classroom critters

In extension of educational classrooms, it is also important for teachers to maintain healthy emotional environments for their students. Not only do students inherently act differently around animals, they also learn new social lessons. One characteristic that kids gain through working with classroom pets is a strong sense of caring or compassion (Rud et al, 2003).

A classroom pet requires the students to feed and shelter another living being for the entirety of the year. These new nurturing activities help the kids to develop a sense of empathy that translates to their interaction with other students as well. An

animal, such as a dog, working with students also fosters a stress-free environment and therefore encourages student participation and cooperation. (Hummel, 2012).

With a more relaxed atmosphere, students are more likely to communicate and work with each other without trepidation. Additionally, the children that bond with the pets do not want to disappoint their furry friends and will work hard, with a teacher's encouragement, to show the animal the best they can do. The usual positive feedback from the pet helps to support this behavior.

The same love for an animal can also provide an incentive to go to school and to remain there all day. Especially for less social children who do not have as many friends to draw them to class each day, an excited pet can be just the motivation they need to improve their attendance and attitude towards school. An animal-inclusive environment is one that builds positive and successful learning for both the student and teacher.

Concerns about animals in schools

While a happy classroom full of happy animals (and happy people) is an ideal goal, there are problems and concerns to be addressed. One common concern is for the health of those students and teachers that are allergic to animals. Luckily, this problem can be averted by using hypoallergenic creatures or an allergy powder that is applied directly to the animal in question.

It is also generally suggested that students are given the opportunity to wash their hands frequently, preferably before and after animal handling, to help minimize irritation from contact with animals (Friesen, 2010).

A second common fear is that the animals will hurt the students. An easy solution is to get an animal that is harmless- a goldfish for example- so that there is no need for concern. However, if the desired pet has teeth or any number of other defense mechanisms, it is suggested that students are taught the importance of safe and proper handling.

Establishing a designated student-pet interaction time, a specific student to interact with the creature each day, and teaching the classroom how to detect warning signs in a frightened animal are all additional ways to build a safer environment for the kids and the pets. With proper precautions in place, the chance of an animal harming a student is minimal.

Another reason for concern is for the quality of life of the classroom pets. Some animals are anxious around groups of people or loud noises and some children are rough and harmful in their interactions with pet. These attributes would make the life of a classroom pet a very poor one. To avert this it is important to know the disposition of the animal coming into the school and to introduce them to the new environment gradually. It is also necessary that proper care and habitation is provided. Additionally teachers must be constantly vigilant of the behavior of the students towards the pets and not allow violent children time to handle the animal directly.

By taking these actions, an animal can easily be provided with a quality life spent with a class of students. For those who are too extremely concerned by the idea of a live animal, it is possible to avoid them by using alternatives such as films or stuffed pets (Friesen, 2010). While it may seem like a lot of effort, doing the work to keep a pet in the classroom is worth it for the improvement of a child's education and happiness.

Conclusion

Teachers strive to provide the best learning experience they can for their students and they are always looking for new ways to do that. Bringing an interesting and fun animal into a class provides a new element for students to work with and builds new and exciting learning opportunities.

Children begin to learn better and feel better with an animal at their side, and that helps the teacher as well. In light of the new challenges that a pet offers, students grow and learn in exciting and interesting ways that make it worth the hard work. The responsibility and enjoyment of an animal is just what an elementary teacher needs to enhance the environment of their classroom.

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Pen Pals in High School Language Classrooms

By Jessica Lemerand

Abstract: In this article the use of pen pals in high school language classes is explored. The idea that pen pals can be of great assistance to students in at least year two of a language is the main focus. Students who create a personal connection to a language have a better time understanding and remembering new material. This connection can lead to the students building confidence about using the new language. Implementing pen pals or E-Pals into the curriculum is easier to do than most seem to think. Once a small grade is connected to the act students are more willing to participate and gain from the activity. Doing so will allow everyone involve to develop skills, be that teaching or in the language itself, and these skills will be useful later.

Keywords: *Language, Pen pals, Grammar, Students, E-Pals*

Introduction

More students are starting a new language in high school every year. With the increase in students it is becoming more difficult to keep them all excited about the lessons, and with any language every lesson is important. To help keep those in at least level two or higher in their selected language of study interested in the material is becoming more difficult by the day.

Adding pen pals, or students from a second level classroom learning English in a different country, may be just what is needed to help these students continue their studies. It can even give them a sense of accomplishment by being able to communicate with another student from a different part of the world. Pen pals can be used to breach the boredom of a lecture setting classroom, and boost the student's confidence with the new language outside a test setting.

Using pen pals can become an important addition to any upper level classrooms along with easy to blend material, and even be beneficial to both teacher and students.

Why would Pen Pals be important?

Most high school students are becoming more aware that starting a second language, though it is difficult, is a necessary step in their education. Universities are starting to make having at least two years of a secondary language mandatory if the student wishes to join one of the four year programs.

This means that more and more high school students are taking up a second language within school. Most high school students in a language class are there for a grade and a better looking transcript. Using pen pals would help these students connect with the language they have chosen to study on a more personal level. If the students have a goal to work towards they are more likely to strive to succeed, but if they also have a personal connection to the material it becomes almost second nature.

Language is one of the hardest subjects to learn, but having a personal attachment to the subject can help students learn and understand what they are being taught. The use of pen pals would help the students learn the grammar structure and put what they have learned into practical use. In Melinda Reichelt's research it was discovered that without implementing a personal connection, or giving explanations for grammatical errors, students do not retain knowledge or understanding to even the most basic of grammar structures (Reichelt, 2001).

This showed that the lack of connection to a language, and even a professor, caused students to learn only what was in a book or on a piece of paper. In theory that is all that is needed, but further research revealed that the students who only got feedback on a paper marking what was wrong did not advance as quickly as those who got explanations as to why parts of their paper was wrong (Reichelt, 2001).

The use of pen pals may also provide a chance for the teachers to demonstrate the grammatical rules and why certain things line up the way they do. The knowledge of actually connecting with another student of the language makes every lesson and lecture the students must participate in seem important. This creates a new way of viewing the language and will make learning more almost exciting.

Students who have pen pals may become more open to the language, and might even be almost eager to learn more about the culture. This could also work in reverse, allowing the students who are in a different country to become confident in the usage of English. In the article by Lin, Wang, Akamatsu and Riazi students of other languages learning English were analyzed to show the difficulties.

They found that without some kind of personal connections to the language, or a goal other than survival in a new country, these people learning English found it extremely difficult and almost impossible at times (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu & Riazi, 2002). Students who can create connections on a global level, and see what they are learning put to use outside the classroom setting have a better chance in retaining what they are learning.

This goes for both students learning English, and the students in the states learning a second language. The feeling of being connected in a worldly way is something that only a handful of people in high school can say they understand. Giving students a chance to gain this global connection feeling will be something that they may take with them even beyond the classroom setting. This connection may be the start of a lifelong learning adventure into the language they have chosen to pursue.

Implementing Pen Pals into the curriculum

The use of pen pals can be very beneficial to all students involved, but most students are grade oriented. Without the pull of a grade, or some kind of point system in place, most would just do what is asked without any real effort. To prevent the students from missing out on what could really help them with making worldly connections adding some kind of grade system to the task is advised.

To have a pen pal in the first place the students should be at least a second year of the language they have chosen to study. This is because the first year students would not know enough about the language structure, so the task of creating a coherent sentence would be too great for them. Once they join the second year of the language sentence structure and grammar should be some of the main focuses, and adding practical usage at this level would increase a student's understanding of new concepts. The pen pals should be from a place that uses the language of study as their main language, and those students should also be around the same age. Schools that are willing to participate in these pen pal programs should then have their students take a quick assessment about themselves so the teachers can match them to a student with similar interests.

Once the connection is made, time should be set aside in class to create these letters or emails. Each letter or email sent should be worth some kind of grade. The grade does not have to be much, but should be enough to get even the students who wish to pass without much effort involved. The area of curriculum this could take would be in a practical use section, where students are advised to use what they have already learned and communicate on a basic level.

The students will not only be learning a new language, but actively engaging in conversations with other students of that language. This can create a bond with the language on a more personal level. As stated before, a personal bond no matter how small can help a student understand the material and even its usage. The students in Yang and Chen's study on different technologies available for language learners admitted that using group emails to connect with their pen pals "created feelings of warmth and excitement in being able to improve skills on a personal level" (Yang & Chen, 2007).

These students felt that being able to implement what they learned, and explore the language on a personal level allowed for the growth of their skills and confidence. The grade and class time put into place for these activates would be used to strive off what the students in this study said they did not like such as "non-useful responses, inadequate language use and too time consuming" (Yang & Chen, 2007).

When teachers talk about the use of pen pals most think of using actual pens to write out a letter for the mail. That would not be bad way of doing a pen pal situation and may allow for easier grading in the long run. This age group that would be starting the program are more technology wrapped than most can even imagine. With this idea in mind using email instead of pen and paper may be a better way to engage students in these activities. To be able to grade the effort of the students it may be good to have them write it out on either a piece of paper or word document to be turned in for a grade. Then the students can transfer this over to an email and send it. This would also cut back on the time needed to send or receive the mail, and loosen the load on the teacher to be sure that students are able to send the letters.

Using "E-Pals" as Pokey Stanford calls it can "save time, teach students the proper use of email in a business or formal setting and save money" (Standford & Siders, 2001). The use of email may save time and money, but it is also know to lessen the personal connection to the words being said. There is something irreplaceable about receiving a hand written letter, and that is an art form quickly being swallowed up by technology today. The use of both email and letters can help students with quick letters as well as creating that close connection with the language.

The actual, hand written letters, can be used to emphasis important events. These events could be the first letter being sent, birthdays and packages of gifts such as candy for Christmas of other holidays. These little gift boxes don't have to be for a grade, but should be fun and involving for all students and maybe involve a little bit of extra credit because they are not necessary.

Beneficial for both students and teacher

Using pen pals, either through real letters or email, can be beneficial to everyone involved. Students are able to start make connections outside the classroom, and build confidence in their ability to communicate through nonverbal means like letters or email. When seeking employment they will most likely not be writing letters in a foreign language, but they will have learned how to format a formal email or letter properly. These skills will be needed as the students continue their education and wish to address employers or professors on professional matters.

The students gain confidence in not only the new language, but also their own language as they begin to read letters sent to them either in English or the language of study. This is because they are using a new language and dissecting it into English to be able to understand what is being said. This action requires a good understanding of the language of study, but also of the native language to be able to work in reverse and read the meaning of others words.

Teachers also gain from the use of pen pals. The teachers are able to witness the confidence in their students grow with every letter or email. Hertel studied the benefits of using E-Pals and found that students generally liked being able to grow and improve their skills while the teachers felt accomplished in their field with each passing student (Hertel, 2003). Teachers and their students benefit from using a global approach to learning a new language, and both grow with the language of study as the students gain confidence and teachers gain new skills for teaching the language.

Conclusion

The increase in interest in a new language is needed in a more globally connected society, but learning a language is difficult. Adding pen pals may assist these students into continuing their studies, and even give them a sense of accomplishment in being able to communicate with someone from around the world. Using pen pals can become an important addition to any upper level classroom and is beneficial to both teacher and students. Students can gain global connections, and build up confidence in a second language in a more interactive manner while achieving a grade for their efforts.

Everyone involved in the program has a chance to benefit from it. The use of pen pals in the second level of a high school language or above is a great way to get students interested. These pen pals can be the bridge to a lifelong connection with a new language, and many future opportunities that can follow with the knowledge of more than one language.

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Multimedia Integrated in the Classroom

Karisa Jensen

Abstract: Media in the classroom can be a great aspect to help children learn. This paper describes why multimedia should be used in K-12 classrooms. It also describes different multimedia such as video games, music, and written media that can be integrated into the classroom to make a positive learning affect on the children.

Keywords: *Multimedia, Media, Music, written media*

Introduction

There are many definitions for multimedia. According to techterms.com multimedia is the integration of multiple forms of media. An article called *Types of* Media and it states that "Modern media comes in many different formats, including print media (books, magazines, newspapers), television, movies, video games, music, cell phones, various kinds of software, and the Internet" (Oswalt 2010). Although I don't think cell phones should be allowed most of the media above would be helpful in the classrooms for many reasons. Some reasons are: introducing the children to many sources, makes learning more fun for the children, and respects all of the students with different learning styles.

Using All Forms of Media in Classrooms

Using all the forms of media, the children will learn from a widespread of sources like a textbook or even an educational video game. These two things are different in a lot of ways but you can learn some of the same things from it. One big difference is kids will like to play the game over reading the textbook. For example, in the subject area for math, a kid could read out of the textbook and try to understand a concept and do some problems or they can go on an educational math website like Mathplayground.com or funbrain.com and learn the same concept while doing it. I remember when I was in elementary school, I loved to go on funbrain.com and do math

exercises way more then reading out of my textbook to try and understand what was going on. Just because students will like going to play games more doesn't mean you have to do it all the time. If you do a good mix between the two, it will show them that there are many ways to learn the same content.

Multimedia is a Resource for Teachers

As teachers you can also use multimedia in the classroom as a resource to you. For example, you could use Pinterest or a movie to back up what you are teaching for a certain area subject. For example, if you are teaching about weather, you could type in experiments for weather for elementary students and it will come up with many ideas.

Another great thing about Pinterest is once you pin it to a board you will have it until it is deleted, which is a great way to keep lessons organized. In the case of the movie/show, a great one the most students love is Bill Nye the Science Guy. This allows the students to learn the basics about certain science topics in a fun and entertaining way. It also allows you to show them experiments without having a mess to clean up. A great feature about this is it has a quiz at the end of each show to see what the students have retained and learned from watching. This makes it easy to tell if they are actual learning from watching.

Music in the background

Music in the background while students work quietly can be a great practice to pick up on. According to a study done by an article *The Effects of background Music in the Classroom on the Productivity, motivation, and behavior of Fourth Grade Students* by Kevin White, background music had a positive affect on a group of fourth grade students who had behavior problems, not motivated to learn, and do not stay on task from Logan Elementary School.

With this study it was proved to be an effective tool to make students motived and to get their task done with few behavioral problems. Background music can be defined as music without words that is played while students learn and work independently or in groups (White, 2007). The president of the Music Educators National Conference, Will Earhart, stated, "Music enhances knowledge in the areas of mathematics, science, geography, history, foreign language, physical education and vocational training" (as cited in Morrison, 1994, p. 33).

This is huge because it shows that if you play background music it will advance or make the students have more knowledge for many different subject areas. In an article on the Johns Hopkins School of Education by Chris Boyd Brewer, written in 1995, states that there are many reasons why music helps us learn. Some of them include that music establishes a positive learning state, increase attention, improve memory, and releases tension. Having music increase attention is one of the key ones especially in a K-8 classroom because they usually have a small attention span on school work.

Video Games in the Classroom

When you hear video games, many people will think of the violent, not school appropriate kind. When I say video games I mean the kind children can learn all subject areas from. An example of one is My Word Coach. This is a game for the Wii or Nintendo DS. It has the feature of six different word related games and a dictionary with over 17,000 words. This game will help improve verbal communication skills through the different games provided.

With allowing the student to play an educational game in the classroom, they will be able to have fun and get to experience a new way to learn (Teachhub.com). You can also have iPads for educational video games. *Effects of iPads in the Classroom Elementary Education* is an article Wainwright, describes many reasons why an iPad should be used in the classroom.

One thing is it keeps the students' attention because they are more engaging and more interactive then a plan piece of paper with problems on it. The student will most likely get excited if they get to use an iPad over doing a worksheet (Wainwright 2016). When I volunteered my time in an Elementary School, as soon as the students got doing the worksheet or activity they were supposed to do, they would immediately ask to use one of the classrooms iPads to play educational games.

Also, the article talks about the abundance of educational apps there are. She claims that the fun educational games can take learning to a whole new level and getting the students more excited then they have been in the past (Wainwright 2016). With the younger generations most of them have some type of electronic function at home and know how to use them to a high extent. If we use electronics for video games and educational teaching it can be a great asset to making the classroom a fun learning place.

Written Media

Many people when they here multimedia they think that it only deals with electronics and such. But in the definition of multimedia it includes print media. This includes books, magazines, and newspaper. A good way to include books into the classroom is to have silent reading. This helps make the students self reading skills better. In the article *Sustained Silent Reading in the Classroom* by Cathy Puett Miller, it states many reasons on how silent reading helps the students learning.

One reason that sticks out is that it builds their vocabulary. This is important because if they read many books throughout the year they can learn so many new words. *Put Reading first: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* describes how students learn from written language. It also states that the more they read on their own the more words they will encounter which leads to learning more meanings (Armbruster, Lehr, Osborn 2001).

Also, you as the teacher can read to the students while having their snack or during a break. This will work on their listening skills and be able to relax while listening. According to an article titled *Reading Aloud – Is It worth It?*, reading aloud helps the students get settled down for the day ahead of them and it also makes the class

share excitement, suspense, and emotion together when in the depth of the book.

The article also said that it may be one of the only books that they finish fully. This may not sound like a big deal but some children don't like to read by themselves so they will never truly ever finish a book or understand what comes from a written text. You could also integrate newspaper into the social studies unit with things that are going around in the community or even the world. I know that when I was in K-12 I did not know what was going on around me. All I knew was about stuff that had a direct impact on my life. According to the article titled *A Teacher's Guide to Using Newspapers to Enhance Language Arts Skills* by Newspaper Association of America Foundation, the newspaper is a living textbook.

It also states that it can be used to enhance many different subject areas like math and social studies and uses critical thinking. Written media can have many different effects on the students and can help enhance the classroom. It is a great technique and should be implemented in the classroom. Three ways you can do this is silent reading, reading aloud, and using newspaper articles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, integrating multimedia into the classroom can having many effects on the students in the classroom as described above. Multimedia is described to be using different medias and there are many types of media. Different kinds of media are video games, written media, music, and the internet. This can be a resource for you as a teacher or as a student.

It can have emotional effects and help the students' knowledge in a certain area. Music in the background of your classroom can help enhance the students learning. Using video games within the classroom can make learning fun for the students. Using newspapers can open the students' eyes to the world around them. With all of these things together your classroom can be a positive influence on the students learning ability.

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Using Social Media as a Classroom Resource

Erik Rybak

Abstract: In today's day and age, it is hard to look into a classroom and not see some sort of technology being used as a teaching or learning aid. One thing that has started to become much more common in classrooms is social media. While many schools have started to ban the use of social media and other technologies in classrooms, others have started to welcome it with open arms by implementing them into students' projects and classwork. This paper explores how social media is being used in classrooms and its effects.

Introduction

For many people, social media is used as a means of communication between peers. They use it to connect and build relationships with others, regardless of geographical location. Many schools have been trying to ban the use of it on their premises saying that social media and other forms of technology are distracting and hinder a student's ability to learn in the classroom.

Now, educators have been trying to think of ways to take social media and implement it in the classroom in ways that will not have adverse effects on a students learning. There are many different examples of social media in this day and age; according to Nada Dabbagh and Anastasia Kitsantas from George Mason University some of these examples of social media include "Delicious, WordPress, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn."

All of them could be able to provide a way to further students' education and communication in the classroom. According to Joanne Gikas and Michael M. Grant from the University of Memphis there are 3 different reoccurring themes that involve social media in the classroom; "engaging learners with constant connectivity, fostering collaborative learning, and enabling authentic learning on the move."

Advantages

There are many different types of social media; experience and resource sharing tools such as Twitter and WordPress, Wiki software like Wikipedia, media sharing tools like YouTube and Flickr, and social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn. (Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2012) So, what this means for instructors is that there can be a pretty much endless array of options for communication among social media.

A constant connectivity between both students and instructors is a great way for them to be able to access information extremely quickly. Social media is allowing a way for students and instructors to streamline their access to information that otherwise would have been very difficult to find 50 years ago. Also, with applications like Facebook implementing instant messaging systems it is now much easier for students and teachers to contact each other with ideas and questions.

Social media provides a way for students to collaborate more easily than ever before. In many of the different social media applications students and instructors can create private groups to discuss, share ideas, and ask questions. Many teachers and students could have busy schedules which could make it difficult to actually meet in person in order to discuss projects, homework, and other class assignments. Students and instructors now have the ability to easily share pictures, videos, and documents because of social media. For example, the instructor would be able to use an application like YouTube to share a lecture or demonstration with the students who were not able to make it to a class.

Mobile devices are a huge part of social media. With many people now holding smartphones in their possession sharing and accessing media is easier than ever before. This means that students

and instructors are more than likely to be near a source of communication at all times. According to Joanne Gikas and Michael M. Grant from the University of Memphis using the social media tools that are able to be accessed on a mobile device students and instructors are able to create a "personalized and authentic learning experience."

Using social media in the classroom can be a way to keep students actively engaged in discussion and research. Having the students use social media could allow them to interact with other students to form their own questions and even find the answer to them without an instructor giving them all of the information right away. Discussions are a way to make students actually think about the questions at hand and form their own questions.

Disadvantages

Like any other teaching practices there are drawbacks to using social media in the classroom. In many classrooms instructors are already having difficulties with keeping students on task so, introducing social media into a classroom that already has difficulties could create problems for the instructors and other students. With the use of social media in classrooms this means that mobile devices are likely going to be used as well. Students using mobile devices is something that could make teaching very difficult for the instructor. Teaching could become difficult for the instructor because keeping track of students who are using their mobile devices for learning and other students who are off task is very time consuming.

Conclusion

There can be many different uses and misuses that involve social media in the classroom. Some teachers might become hesitant to use different types of social media in the classroom because it could cause some distraction among students. On the other hand there can be many different uses of social media in the classroom that could benefit the student and the instructor.

One advantage of social media is that because of the growing amount of different forms of it,

there can be a seemingly endless amount of possibilities for instructors and students to make a helpful and productive use of it in the classroom. The use of social media can also make it so that teachers and students have constant connectivity in and outside of the classroom. Students and teachers can have the chance to collaborate with each other much easier because of social media. With the introduction of smart phones, students and instructors also have the chance to be able to have connection to social media almost anywhere that has access to the internet. Lastly, the use of social media in a classroom setting can be a way to keep students actively engaged in classroom discussions and research.

With most of the research on social media in the classroom being used on higher level students it is tough to know what the use and impact of social media could be on students who are at the elementary and middle school level. It seems that instructors might be a little hesitant to attempt to use social media in younger classrooms because it might cause a larger distraction among students. The use of social media in classrooms can have different impacts on the different grade levels and professionals might not know how it will work until they try to implement it.

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iPads in the Classroom
Zac Weber

Abstract:
Our world is changing and many things rely on technology. So why not bring it into the classroom? This paper's purpose is to explain why iPads are a great resource for K-12 teachers. They are a very useful tool in the classroom in a variety of ways. iPads improve students active and collaborative learning skills and much more. Through a considerable amount of research and personal experience, this paper will explore the benefits of having an iPad in the classroom and why teachers should invest in them for their students. It will also explore a few of the downfalls when iPads are used in the classroom.

Keywords: *iPads, Educational Technology, Active Learning*

Introduction

There are many ways out there that teachers can improve their classroom. As a first time teacher you have to decide what is best for your students. One of the possible ways to do this is to bring technology into the classroom. There are many technologies that can be beneficial, but iPads are one of the most efficient. The iPad is a tool that is easy to use, and with its touch screen technology it is very compatible for students of all ages. Having the iPad in the classroom brings education to life. Students would have access to almost every good resource out there, including dictionaries, educational apps, and best of all, the internet itself. Students would almost have everything they need in the palm of their hands.

Why bring the iPad into the Classroom

Bringing the iPad into the classroom is a benefit for not only the students but the teachers as well. The thought of new technology in the classroom helps with interaction within the students. For instance, if a teacher wanted to assign a project for the students to make a video, this would now be possible because of the camera and video option on the iPad. This would allow for students to gain a better understanding of the content that they are learning and also would force them to interact with one another by making the video.

This form of technology also allows for the students to be more independent and responsible. Instead of always having to ask the teacher a question, with iPads students would be able to explore the answer themselves (Reid, 2011). There are also over 5,000 educational apps out there that students are able to use. 1,000 of those apps being free. This allows for students to learn independently, but at the same time, allows for them to learn in a more desirable way (Hu, 2011).

iPads in a math setting

Bringing an iPad into a math class for instance would be a huge benefit for the students and teachers. There are a lot of mathematic related apps that can be downloaded onto the students iPad. This would allow for them to not only work on math in the classroom, but having the iPad would allow them to take their studies outside of the classroom. A lot of younger students would enjoy the fact the they can play games on their iPad, but at the same time they are being educated. The students themselves might not think that they are getting educated but for most students they learn better when they enjoy what they are doing.

iPads in a college environment

There was a study done at the University of Indiana and Purdue University. The study was about how students would use the iPad in a college classroom. The one catch was that the students had to have a negative feeling about iPads going in to the class. 209 students participated in this study and of those students, 85% of the students came out of the class saying that they actually enjoyed have the iPad in class. They said that it improved their active learning

skills and student engagement. The students that enjoyed having the iPad in the classroom said that they plan to continue to use it in their future professional studies because it was so useful and helpful (Diemer,2013). This could be a huge advantage for K-12 teachers because of the success that it brought to college students.

iPads would also be a huge benefit for the classroom because it could eliminate textbooks. Textbooks are very expensive, especially those in the biology and mathematics department (Murray, 2011). They are also a pain for many students because either they lose them or damage them. Textbooks on the iPad would only have to be purchased once and you would not be able to lose them or damage them (Hu, 2011).

iPads helping students with ADHD

iPads are also a very useful tool for students with ADHD or other disorders. A tutoring project was done in an elementary education reading course where a student with ADHD was struggling with reading. One of the most beneficial components of the iPad that helped this child was the iBook's feature. It allowed for the student to change the font size, write notes in the text, and use the audio-enhanced dictionary. In a six-week time period the student with ADHD gained a year's worth of reading improvement. The student also gained more confidence in himself and was easier to teach (McClanahan, 2012). As you can see, this study is very promising if we brought iPads into the classroom. It shows us that it can be a very helpful tool for students with disorders as well.

iPads could be the future to our student's success and we need to really think about bringing them into our classrooms. "They allow for classroom beyond the four walls and are the biggest thing to hit school technology since the overhead projector" (Hu, 2011; p. 3)

Downfalls of having an iPad in the Classroom

As research shows, there are a lot of good opportunities when iPads are brought into the classroom. We know with every good thing comes some downfalls. Being a student from a school that had iPads really showed me that there were bad

things about them. Though they benefited me in many ways, it kind of became a distraction at times.

iPads can be a distraction to a lot of students who do not take the technology seriously. Playing games, recording the teacher, and sending messages during class are just a few of the downfalls of letting the students use iPads in class. Irresponsible students also would forget to charge their iPad or come up with other reasonable excuses that their iPad would not work. Another big problem with having iPads in school is that for most of the resources that they are used for they need Wi-Fi. The problem with that, is that if students do not have Wi-Fi in their home, they will not be able to do their assignments that they have online.

The upside to this problem is that not a lot of educational apps require Wi-Fi. Most assignments can be downloaded onto iBook's and for that app you do not need any internet connection. iPads can be a pain at times but you can plan accordingly. Another issue with iPads that many will be concerned about is the cost. But what people do not realize is that you can apply for grants and fund for them. Some of the cost will come out of the school's pocket but a lot of the money can come from other people, like the community or government.

Overall a good investment

When thinking about the positives and negatives about iPads in the classroom I hope you can see that the positives far outweigh the negatives. Overall, investing in iPads for the classroom is a very good idea. Though there might be a few downfalls in the process, they can be worked around very easily. iPads can improve students' active learning capabilities, bring things to the classroom that have never been seen, and improve student's overall education. Teachers can use iPads for many educational reasons to help improve their student's intelligence.

It will take the classroom to a whole new level and will have many wondering why they did not start using iPads earlier. Getting iPads in our classrooms would be an all around good investment because of everything it brings. One of

the best teaching practices would be to bring the iPad into the classroom for the success of our students. One of the nice things about this teaching practice is that it does not only benefit the student but also it really benefits the teacher as well.

As a society we really need to think about this and incorporate iPads into all schools. This kind of teaching will take some time but in the long run it will all be worth it. It is a different and unique way of learning that should be brought to many classrooms for the sake of our current and future students.

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Khan Academy and Its Use in the Classroom
Miranda Haack

Abstract: This paper outlines the use of Khan Academy in the classroom and how it can be used as a tool to help teachers educate more effectively. Throughout this paper, future educators and educators of today are given information about the positives and negatives of using the Khan Academy website. Educators will also be informed about how students who learn through this method may be learning more efficiently than others.

Keywords: *khan academy, learning, teaching tool, positive, feedback, classroom website*

Introduction: What is Khan Academy?

If someone were to walk into an elementary, middle, or high school classroom today, there is a chance that they would encounter students working on computers instead of using classic book and pencil methods. One of the many things that students may be using these computers for is an easy-to-use, non-profit website called Khan Academy. This website was created by a man named Salman Khan. It consists of around 3,400 instructional videos to help students learn new content, and provides interactive quizzes and software that teachers can use to track student progress (Noer, 2012). The website was started in order to teach people who wanted to learn new things on their own, but has evolved into a terrific teaching tool (Murphy et al., 2014). Khan Academy offers help in many subjects like math, science, economics, art, and computer science, as well as resources for test prep and teacher learning. This website can be accessed by anyone, so it is a program that can help everyone learn.

Times are changing, and schools should be too. It would be wise for schools to do away with the standard hours of monotonous lecture and the idea that homework is only for at home. It is time for a new way of doing things: one on one time, especially in the classroom. Khan Academy allows for teaching both at home and at school without reducing the need for in-class teachers.

Khan offers assignments by grade level, making it an even better classroom tool. Teachers can assign skills that go along with the topics they are teaching at the time, either as a way to help get the point across or as a way of initially teaching a subject.

How is Khan Academy a good teaching tool?

According to Salman Khan, the old ways of teaching are not as effective as the used to be. Schools can no longer push students together by age group and shove information at them, hoping they all learn at the same pace (Khan, 2012). While grouping students by age is not an aspect of school that must be changed, the way children are taught may need a tune-up.

Some schools use Khan's teaching videos in such a way that children learn at home by watching the videos, and then class time is spent doing "homework" and assignments (Thompson, 2011, p. 2). By having children learn this way, they are given the opportunity to learn at their own pace. This can give students the opportunity to spend more time on topics they may be struggling with and to breeze through the subjects that they find easy. Khan does not replace in class teaching, but it does allow for struggling students to catch up with difficult topics before they are tested on the subjects. By watching the videos supplied on the Khan Academy website, students can see what they are preparing to learn and gain prior comprehension of the subject before their instructor lectures the class. This shortens lectures and leads to more time for teachers to teach one-on-one with their students.

Students who are struggling often need one-on-one help with how to solve the problem instead of repeatedly listening to lectures. Many students need guided learning and Khan helps to make it easier for this type of learning to be used in schools. According to Clive Thompson (2011) "For

years, teachers…have complained about the frustration of teaching to the "middle" of the class." This means that that students who are more advanced get bored during lecture times, and students who do not understand are left in the dust. The use of Khan Academy is the perfect way to change this.

Khan Academy has many positive aspects when considered for use in school. Schools often lack resources for updated software, but Khan can help to solve this problem. As was stated earlier, Khan Academy is a free-to-use program that can be used by anybody. While the website was originally created for people to learn at home and on their own, it also has many tools that make it applicable for use in classrooms. Salman Khan is allowing schools to utilize his program as a method of teaching without charging a dime. This is a very good resource for schools since it is so useful and does not cut into the school budget.

How teachers can use Khan Academy

When using Khan Academy, teachers are able to sign onto the website as "coaches" and from this position they can get very involved in their students' learning. Teachers can monitor the amount of time their students spend on specific topics, how much time is spent on the website altogether, and what kind of topics with which the students are struggling. By using this option, teachers are able to set goals for their students, and to make sure that students get help with the content that they may be struggling to understand. If an instructor notices that a student spent almost half of his/her time with Khan working on one problem, it may mean that the student needs a little bit of extra help with that specific topic. This allows teachers to help struggling students before they allow themselves to give up on the subject.

On Khan Academy, teachers can filter their students by class in order to make monitoring class work simpler. The separation of classes can also help teachers to motivate their students. Instructors can create competition between the classes, such as comparing the percentages that students in each class have mastered or comparing how many students in each class have completed their assignments. Khan is set up in a way that

students practice skills as a way to master them. Teachers can get involved and keep students motivated to learn by offering prizes for student success and for the students who go above and beyond to take control of their learning. Khan makes it easy to award success, which is one of the best ways to keep students engaged and motivated.

What are some negatives of using Khan Academy, and how can they be avoided?

According to Graham R. Parslow (2012), the aspect of Khan Academy that allows people to learn when they want where they want can be negative as well as positive. There have been decades of research about programs like Khan Academy, showing that learning when and where it is convenient does not work. Giving people too much freedom about how they learn is a negative aspect because some students do not have any desire to learn. Khan without guidelines may only work for motivated students. This drawback can easily be reversed by graded learning. On the website, teachers have access to several tools that can help with tracking work and lead to more motivation for students. Khan's website has many tools for teachers to use to motivate students. Through the website, teachers and families can track the work that students are doing and Khan Academy has a whole section of recommendations of how to use these resources to motivate students. One solution may not work with all students in the classroom but there are many options for instructors to try, meaning most teachers will be able to avoid this "negative."

Since Khan Academy is an online learning community, it can be used in ways it was not intended for. One risk of using Khan in the classroom is the risk of dishonesty. Students can easily pass their classmates' work off as their own because handwriting cannot be traced. If teachers grade students on the time spent working online with Khan Academy subjects, there is a risk of the kids claiming to watch a few of the supplied teaching videos, while they are actually letting the video play while they do something else, just so it looks like they are filling their time. Many students are truthful and have a real desire to learn, but

others are willing to do the bare minimum or cheat to get by. Teachers are often able to detect cheating, especially during class, meaning this risk is avoidable if teachers pay close attention.

Conclusion

Students of today typically enjoy the integration of technology in their classes and teachers often look for new ways to implement the use of technology in the classroom. Khan Academy has a lot to offer to teachers and students, which can make learning more fun and easy to understand. Like all other teaching tools, it is not for every teacher or student in every school, but this resource is one that could spread out and educate the world.

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Using Learning Management Systems

Emma Johnson

Abstract: As technology progresses it is helping both students and teachers improve their work in the classroom. Many teachers have started to use Learning Management Systems (LMS), which are tools that electronically track the performance of students in the classroom. The information that is being tracked is helpful for both students to see where they can improve, and teachers to see what lessons students are struggling with. These tools come in many forms such as flipped classrooms, apps, and websites. By using information from LMS, teachers give understandable lessons, resulting in students knowing what to focus on in each lesson.

Keywords: *Learning Management Systems (LMS), Communication Systems, Learning Objectives, Collaboration*

Introduction

Each semester that goes by a teacher has a new group of students that learn in different ways than the students from the semester before. Usually this would result in the teacher relaying on their knowledge from the previous class, not knowing if the current students are grasping the lesson as well as the other.

Before technology, any information about a student's performance in the classroom could not be tracked, until after a test was already given. Also before technology, students would take notes and study, but could not see how well they understood each topic until after their grades were posted. Now using Learning Management Systems (LMS) during lessons teachers see what lessons are confusing to students, and students see what areas they need to study more. Making uncertainty with each semester a thing of the past for both students and teachers. Meaning that teachers can go from semester to semester improving their class so that every student feels confident

What are learning management systems?

"Learning Management Systems (LMS) are web-based systems that allow instructors and/or students to share materials, submit and return assignments, and communicate online"(Lonn & Teasley, 2009). These systems are mostly used in higher education to help build communication between teachers and students. As of 2009, 90% of American universities use LMS (Hawkins & Rudy, 2007, Lonn & Teasley, 2009). "An LMS delivers content but also handles registering for courses, course administration, skills gap analysis, tracking, and reporting" (Watson & Watson, 2007, p.3).

As time has passed and our technology is progressed, but the primary goals of LMS stay the same. Bailey (1993) states that the main goals of LMS in education are: "instructional objectives are tied to individual lessons lessons are incorporated into the standardized curriculum courseware extends several grade levels in a consistent manner a management system collects the results of student performance lessons are provided based on the individual student's learning progress" (Watson & Watson 2007, p.3).

These functions of a LMS allow for teachers to observe students closely while also allowing a student to study and contact the teacher in any space they personally find comfortable to learn (Cavus, Ibrahim, Uzunboylu, 2007). Allowing a student to reach their classroom goals from anywhere.

One of the biggest things that makes Learning Management Systems not only unique, but allow for such positive results are learning objectives. "A learning object can be defined as any digital media that can be reused to support learning" (Watson & Watson, 2007, p.7). Although there is disagreement on the standards of learning objectives, ultimately they are the frameworks that allow for a customized learning for each student (Watson & Watson, 2007).

The best results for an effective Learning Management System though come when both communication systems, and learning objectives come together (Watson & Watson 2007). These two pieces of learning have been proven to be the most well received and effective forms of learning by students. Therefore mixing them together will ultimately help the LMS reach the goal of supporting individual learning. Using LMS as the umbrella system to allow other proven systems work to help

strengthen the class. Therefore making the class as a whole more student friendly, while feeling customized to their own form of learning.

What are the benefits of learning management systems?

Management systems have been a debatable topic ever since they started, due to the more independent form of learning, because of this many studies have been done to try and understand how these systems affect both teachers and students. One study done at an American Midwestern university showed that in 2007 85% of teachers and 99% of students used LMS to begin with. Among the teachers 39% preferred LMS for improving communication with students, while 45% of students preferred LMS for saving them time. Altogether the study showed that LMS were favorable among teachers and students for the ability to access information.

Looking at the activity of every person in the study 95% of both students and teachers went on the site regularly to view posted information. At the end of the two-year survey the majority rated the LMS valuable or very valuable to education (Lonn & Teasley, 2009). This survey is an important step in understanding how effective LMS are. Obviously many teachers and students use them and find them very beneficial in communicating between teachers and students to obtain notes and class work.

It makes it clear that students felt very comfortable working on their own, but as LMS technology develops students feel more comfortable using the tools to help each other. This technology allows the students to feel confident in communicating and doing work independently, because they have access to schoolwork and their teacher, as well as classmates in the same place.

In a Learning Management System experiment, computer-programing students were given a test online. The class was split into thirds, one-third having an advanced LMS, another third having a standard LMS, and the last third did not use LMS at all. The test had all the students work on course work and look at notes online, then afterword they took an online assessment that would automatically be graded after the test was done.

For students with the LMS communication systems they could set up times to chat with their teachers, and for the more advanced systems students could chat with one another and have

discussions on each topic. After the study, it was clear that there was not much difference when it came between the standard LMS and traditional learning, but there was a significant difference between the group of students who had the standard and advanced communication systems (Cavus, Ibrahim, Uzunboylu, 2007).

This research shows the being able to discuss the information from class with other students dramatically affects a student's success. "Through socially based interaction, such as collaboration, mentoring, peer tutoring, and negotiation of meaning, students are able to construct knowledge, and this leads to meaning-making"(Watson & Watson, 2007). By looking at these two studies it is clear that communication and collaboration are two of the biggest differences between a Learning Management System and traditional classroom learning. To be able to communicate with both teachers and students through the comfort ability of a student's own space, allows for better learning environment.

Of course this could get confused with a Communication Management System (CMS), which are other programs set up to help enhance the classroom. A LMS is made to be "learner and organization focused: It's concerned with the logistics of managing learners, learning activities and the competency mapping of an organization" (Oakes, 2002, p. 74). One part of an LMS is communication systems, but many programs that are made as primarily CMS get miss labeled as a LMS (Watson & Watson, 2007). Therefore even though studies done on LMS show that communication is one of the biggest differences in technology based and traditional learning, the fact that students have an organized system to communicate, along with a way to track progress makes the systems LMS. Allowing students and teachers to not only communicate with one another, but also understand how they are leaning and progressing in the class.

How are learning management systems progressing?

Our society is in the information age, using computers and technology to improve our lives. Unfortunately our education system has remained industrial by teaching each child as an equal; therefore no child gets individual education they might need (Reigeluth, 1994; Watson & Watson, 2007). In order to change our current system there

needs to be a shift from a standardized form of teaching to a more individually based form of learning. By switching to this form students will be able to master each subject at their own pass and progress through the class when it is proven they are able to complete the work at hand (Schlechty, 1991; Watson & Watson 2007). Meaning that the teacher would act as a guide, being in constant communication and helping the student set personal goals to make sure they understand everything that is being asked of them (Watson & Watson, 2007). This means that there needs to be a balance in the classroom between complete student control and teacher control.

The struggle comes in when a teacher has to figure out both the learning objective and communication systems that need to be used for the class. Not only does it become an issue of making an effective learning objective, but also being able to fund using learning management software. (Watson & Watson, 2007). "Immense cost in developing the instruction, estimated as high as $100 million to build a comparative system today" (Watson & Watson, 2007, p.10). This high cost is due to the fact that there are only a few LMS out there, and private companies run most. By making more LMS avalable at cheaper costs more schools will be able to use all functions of the system to their fullest (Watson & Watson, 2007).

Conclusion

Learning Management Systems (LMS) are tools both teacher and students can use to help support learning through constant online communication. Using advanced LMS will help a student understand a topic better, while letting their teacher know how they can improve their classroom. Although finding and forming quality LMS is difficult to do, the results are extremely positive to the classroom. Teachers should always do their research on different systems to see what fits their classroom while staying in their school's budget. Then it is as easy as adding their lesson plans and homework to the system and watching the individual progress. This means that teachers can go from semester to semester improving their class so that every student feels confident. Overall using LMS lets students and teachers personalize the classroom, which supports individual achievement.

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Professional Development Opportunities for Educators

Emma Hengemuhle

Abstract: This paper explains the importance of professional development within the education system. Professional development opportunities create better teachers which ultimately improves the education system as a whole. This paper also addresses the importance of conferences and in-service days for teachers to successfully participate in professional development opportunities, which in turn create a better classroom environment for their students and positively impacts their education career.

Keywords: *professional development, conferences, in-service days, teacher learning*

Introduction: What is professional development?

Within the K12 education system, many teachers partake in staff development days, in-service days, or basic conferences to improve their teaching styles. These conferences are implemented within the school year in order to influence the education students receive, but often, these days are ineffective for both students and teachers.

Students view these days as a simple vacation day, instead of something that could be influential to their education careers, and teachers often view these days as a waste of time. Some focus on the time when they are able to go out to lunch and socialize with their colleagues or when the conference is over, instead of focusing on the professional development opportunity before them. Despite these tainted opinions, professional development is utilized to positively influence the classroom environment and the performance of the teacher (Borko, 2004; Garet et al, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Yoon et al, 2007). By going through professional development workshops, teachers improve their knowledge in both their specific subject areas and their general instructional practices within the classroom (Borko, 2004).

Problems with current professional development methods

The use of ineffective professional development programs is one issue within American teaching practices. Current professional development in-service seminars and conferences are said to be ineffective because they do not consider how teachers learn (Borko, 2004). These days are about development for the teachers and if they are not guided by how the teachers learn, they are ineffective.

Professional development opportunities challenge teachers to change their beliefs about education and characteristics regarding how they teach, but do not give concrete steps in how to make these changes (Guskey, 2002). If solutions are not being provided for the problematic methods in a teacher's instructional practice, how can they be expected to alter them to make their practices better? Professional development days are not as effective as they can be because they are not providing concrete knowledge and skill sets to those who participate in them.

Schools also struggle in providing high-quality experiences to their teachers during the professional development opportunities because they have a scarce amount of resources. Funding for professional development is normally stretched across a wide group of teachers instead of focusing on a smaller group (Garet et al, 2001). With the low levels of funding, teachers often participate in in-service days that are short and are thought of as a waste of time. The educators do not learn anything substantial to implement within their classrooms. This is due to the fact that during these professional development sessions teachers are instructed on one particular subject for that specific day and then it is tossed aside and never touched on again. This is problematic because a teacher cannot fully implement something into their classroom if they do not understand the basics of it.

Ultimately schools are only as good as the teachers and administrators within them (Guskey, 2002). With this in mind, professional development should be of a higher importance within the education system in order for schools to stand to their highest potential.

Importance of Professional Development Opportunities

Professional development opportunities are extremely influential in the growth of a teacher because they engage teachers in an experience that impacts their perception of their instructional practices (Guskey, 2002). These opportunities are crucial because they allow teachers to expand their boundaries within the classroom and allow them to connect with other teachers just like themselves (Borko, 2004). With this, there can be an effective flow of information, strategies, and techniques that are shared within the seminar. All teachers benefit from the process because it allows new ideas to be explored and discovered.

These opportunities also lead teachers to effective reforms within their school districts and education systems. But, in doing this, they must band together and utilize the knowledge that their colleagues and students offer (Garet, 2001). These reforms can stem from the collaborative sharing within a seminar, experimental tactics that are discovered, sustaining intensive and beneficial practice methods, and connecting with others who wish to change for the better (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

It is proven that teachers in all subject areas have benefited from professional development seminars (Yoon, 2007). These workshops improve subject teaching within specific classrooms. It also reinforces the importance of teachers to meet with their colleagues to gain more knowledge to provide to their students specific content. These new experiences will exercise the students' minds and will give teachers a new level of satisfaction regarding their techniques.

Collective participation of all teachers in professional development conferences provides the best outcomes. If teachers can change their methods together, their schools are impacted with better educated teachers, better teaching methods, and better classroom environments for students.

Teacher Learning

Understanding the concept of teacher learning is the first step to making professional development more successful within the education system. Teacher learning is how teachers gain knowledge through participation in the process of becoming a teacher and furthering their skills. Participation is crucial within professional development seminars because it enables teachers to learn practices that impact their classroom and better student learning.

Teachers need to understand their content area deeply so they can understand which students need to learn new information, what they currently know, and what they retain. In order to sustain this method of teaching, teachers need to stay up to date with theories and other information related to the subject that they teacher. This will allow them to provide productive experiences to their students. However, in obtaining the new methods and information, teachers also must personally go through conferences in order for them to understand how to connect their teachings with their students through things such as culture, style of learning, and family life (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Teachers need to know and learn more than just how to teach their content to their students. They should be knowledgeable in their personal practices because some of them may not be as effective as they think. If a teacher is able to analyze and reflect upon their teaching techniques, then they are able to use their findings to their advantage and improve the instructional practices they are utilizing. This practice is something that teachers must learn to implement within class regularly to evaluate and understand the true effects it has upon their students and within their classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Improvements

Several changes need to be made to make professional development opportunities worthwhile for the teachers that partake in them.

The structure of these seminars needs to be changed to make them more effective. Normally, professional development days are one short day filled with information that is never returned to. However, in order to maximize the benefits, professional development days should be an intensive learning process that lasts for a significant time period, meaning the conferences should be made up of several ours of extensive work (Garet, 2001). This would allow educators to discuss the positive and negative aspects within their classrooms, how to improve their instructional practices, and to share or discover information regarding their knowledge of the field.

Within the seminars, there should be hands-on opportunities in order to maximize the ability for the teachers to understand the new techniques that they are encouraged to implement within their classrooms (Garet, 2001). This will allow the teachers to truly understand how their teachings affect their students and what potentially needs to be changed to improve its effectiveness.

To make the new techniques more effective within their classrooms, teachers need to share and incorporate the skills they gain daily when working with their students (Garet, 2001). The importance of this within professional development is that this information is something that should be shared with one's colleagues in order to impact the teaching abilities of all educators within a specific field. Teaching styles are constantly evolving in regards to the needs of the new students, so it is important to take the time to analyze what is discovered throughout the school year.

A new aspect that could be beneficial in professional development days is allowing teachers to engage in researching their own questions, such as how to improve their classroom, and then sharing their findings with other educators. If teachers take the time to understand how their teaching affects their students' learning, then they can understand the process occurring within their classrooms. They are able to be more sensitive to the variety of needs they are faced with and more knowledgeable about what practices work best in specific situations (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Teachers should still be learning as they teach and it is necessary to discuss the information obtained to get new outlooks and new practices that could allow students to excel in different content areas. Schools need to allow their teachers to participate in high-quality professional development experiences in order to maximize the efficiency of their education system (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Garet, 2001). Teachers who learn together can change together and then they are able to implement the change into their classrooms.

The Benefits for Students

Professional development opportunities for teachers indirectly lead to more successful students. This is not only due to the fact that teachers feel more confident with their practices, but also because the teachers will implement new, challenging material within their curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Students are only as successful as their school district allows them to be. If a teacher is continuously learning, it reinforces that students should also be continuously learning new things that influence their path to success.

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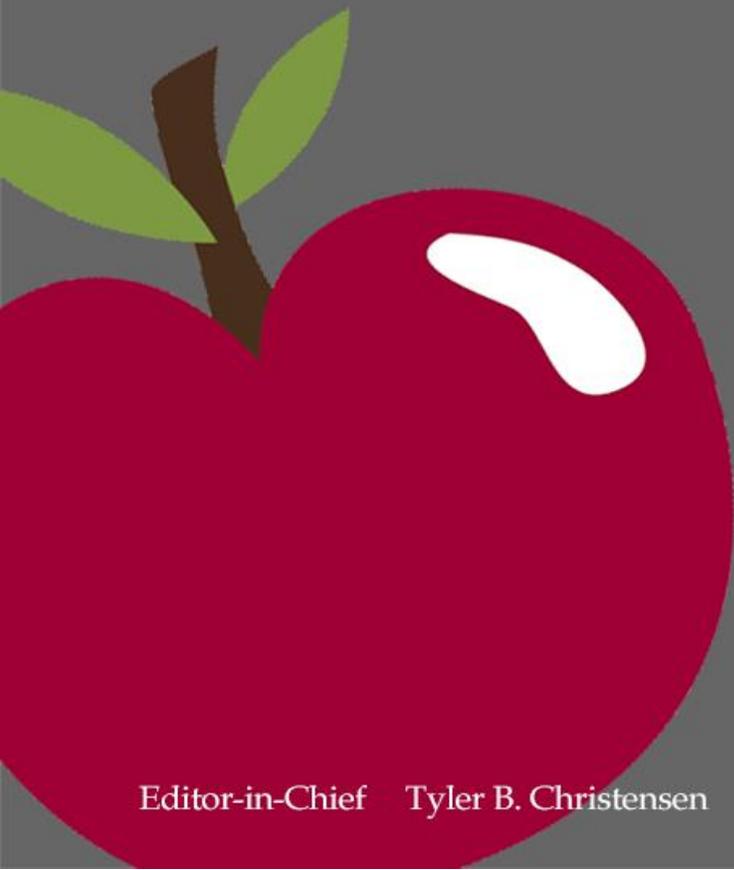
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