Using Technology in the Classroom

A Great Way to Engage and Inspire Learners

Introduction

Many people warn of possible harmful effects of using technology in the classroom. Will children and youth lose their ability to relate to other human beings? Will they become dependent on technology to learn? Will they find inappropriate materials? The same was probably said with the invention of the printing press, radio, and television. With moderation, you can use new technologies in the classroom to create a better education for learners.

Most educators were trained without a new media focus. The wide-world web really has grown exponentially in the last few years, so unless you are a very new educator you probably never had the opportunity to learn about educational technology.

These new technologies have given rise to what we call 'new literacies'. You might feel confounded by them, and the time demanded in developing them. As a result, you may be reluctant to incorporate new technologies into your classroom and performance requirements.

Yet your learners are charging ahead in a new media world, speaking their own language and trying to resolve the conflict between the worlds within and outside of school or the learning centre.

Clearly it is important for educators to gain new skills in new technologies to support their work in the classroom.

But where's the literacy?

There are many different kinds of literacies involved in new technologies:

Speaking. Delivering presentations, performing stories, delivering speeches, creating voice narratives for media projects are common and expected today.

Blending report and story. Using critical thinking skills to blend fact with story can create an appealing media product.

Technological and digital literacy. This includes being able to absorb new skills and shed old ones quickly, like writing online or evaluating web pages.

Writing. Script writing, texting, journaling are all involved in new technologies.

Reading. Researching and gathering information, images and ideas for digital projects are examples of reading.

Listening and watching. Today many of the materials we use involve multi-media formats.

Creating: New technologies let learners use literacy in creative ways.

Ideas for Using Technology in the Classroom

1. **Digital Stories**

Digital Storytelling is about using computer-based tools to tell stories. As with traditional storytelling, most digital stories focus on a specific topic and contain a particular point of view. However, digital stories usually contain some mixture of computer-based images, text, recorded audio narration, video clips and/or music. Digital stories can vary in length, but most stories used in education typically last between two and ten minutes.

The topics can range from telling personal tales to retelling of historical events, or exploring life in the learner's community.

When learners create a movie or interactive slideshow to tell their story, learning becomes personal.

With digital storytelling, students can:

- Improve their writing.
- Show creativity.
- Have a voice.
- Learn about new technologies.
- Share their work with others.

Check out these online resources
- Digital Storytelling in Plain English
- Jakes Online
- The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling
- Movie Maker for PC
- iMovie tutorial

2. Blogs

A blog (sometimes referred to as a weblog) is a web publishing tool that allows authors to quickly and easily self-publish text, artwork, videos, pictures, links to other blogs or websites, and a whole array of other content.

Blogs can be personal – like online diaries – or more formal and professional. Anyone can write a blog and there is no shortage of platforms. Postings are often short and frequently updated. They appear in reverse chronological order and can include archived entries.

Blogs work well for learners because they can work on them at virtually any time, in any place with any computer hooked up to the Internet. Teachers can create a classroom that extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Check out these online resources:
- Blogs in Plain English
- Blogger-Create Your Blog Now
- Bravenet WebBlogs
- Landmarks Blog Meister
- Classroom Blogs and Wikis
- Blogger: How to start a blog

3. Social Networking

Teen behaviour is the same behavior as it has always been. Today they're just using different tools. You used a phone (the one with a cord), they use a mobile phone (the one without the cord). You passed notes in class, they post on their friends' Facebook wall.

Social networking websites function like an online community of Internet users. Depending on the website, many of these online community members share common interests in hobbies, religion, or politics. Once you have access to a social networking website you can begin to socialize. This socialization may include reading the profile pages of other members and possibly even contacting them.

Educators and youth workers should be up-to-speed on all the social networking systems that teens are using. These include: Facebook, Bebo, Twitter, My Space, My Life, etc.

Check out these online resources:

- What is Facebook?
- Facebook Documentary
- The Truth about Facebook

4. **One Minute Videos**

Students create a one minute video about a certain topic. It could be about racism, the homeless in their community or an environmental issue that is relevant to them. Hold a contest in your school for the most interesting and eye captivating video.

5. **Wikis**

A wiki is a web site that lets any visitor become a participant. You can create or edit the actual site contents without any special technical knowledge or tools. All you need is a computer with an Internet connection. A wiki is continuously under revision. One famous example is Wiki-pedia, an online encyclopedia with no "authors" but millions of contributors and editors. The word "wiki" comes from the Hawaiian language, meaning "quick" or "fast."

Wikis are used in families, classrooms, sports teams, community groups, book clubs, fan clubs and more. For example, learners can create a wiki for an historical event. All learners in the class can contribute information, pictures and ideas to the project by posting to the wiki. Learners and educators can collaborate on an essay using a wiki. Educators can make suggestions and correct grammar and learners can rewrite their essay accordingly.

Many educators have use wikis very successfully in classrooms and with learners. It is a great way to engage learners in their learning and to work collaboratively and creatively.

Check out these online resources:

- Wikis in Plain English
- Wikispaces-Wikis for Everyone
- Wetpaint Free Wikis

6. Media Projects

Youth Media Projects provide a unique opportunity for young people to have real input and inclusion in the process of learning. A youth media project can include producing live television shows, video documentaries and websites along with visual literacy. Making media for personal and social change is consistent with strong youth development and educational practices.

The instructional process, or how educators facilitate media making in a classroom or youth centre, is critical to the success of any project. In fact, there are many parallels between the instructional process and media making – both require a great deal of planning, both need to be flexible and anticipate new discoveries, and both should lead to a celebration and sharing of new knowledge.

A Simple Five-Phase Media Development Process

This simple media development process consists of the following five basic phases:

Phase 1: Planning

Phase 2: Identifying and gathering materials, and expertise

Phase 3: Developing and implementing the project

Phase 4: Honing, editing and finalizing the material

Phase 5: Sharing with and/or showing the project to others

Internet Safety

We would be remiss if we did not broach the subject of Internet safety. The first rule of Internet safety and smart surfing is to remain as anonymous as possible. That means keeping **all** private information private. Here are some examples of private information that you should never give out on the Internet:

- Full name
- Home address
- Phone number
- Social insurance number
- Passwords
- Names of family members
- Credit card numbers

Most credible people and companies will never ask for this type of information online. So if someone does, it's a red flag that they may be up to no good.

Think carefully before you create an email address or screen name. Web experts recommend that you use a combination of letters and numbers in both — and that you don't identify whether you're male or female.

In chat rooms, use a nickname that's different from your screen name. That way, if you ever find yourself in a conversation that makes you uncomfortable, you can exit without having to worry that someone knows your screen name and can track you down via email. Some people who hang out with their friends online set up private chat rooms where only they and the people they invite can enter to chat.

Experts recommend that people keep online friendships in the virtual world. Meeting online friends face to face carries more risks than other types of friendships because it's so easy for people to pretend to be something they're not when you can't see them or talk in person.

Talk to your learners about these issues.

Check out the NWT Literacy Council's website under Digital Literacy for more information on using technology in the classroom. You will find:
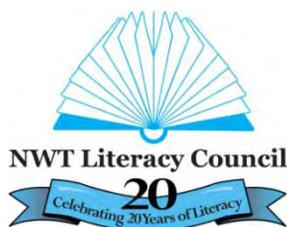
- More information on blogging

- A link to the NWT Literacy Council's Facebook page

- Information on digital storytelling

- Information on Internet safety

- Information on social networking

- Links to interesting websites and videos

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