

Everything changes. Will you?

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I'm a person (in my most humble opinion) that is very comfortable using technology. However, I must admit that as I get older I am finding myself unable to keep up with the newest advancements in technology. I try, thinking I'm doing well, but it is still evident that I cannot ever know fully how much I really don't know about the latest and best in technology. As an educator, I believe that it is pointless trying to keep up with the rapid changes of the technological world. Having said that, I must also add that as an educator, I must be keenly aware and open to the use of available technology to best help my students learn. If I will not do that, then I miss out on helping my students learn, and I fail as a teacher.

The rapid advance in technology is changing how we learn. We once lived in an education system where the teacher was the imparter of knowledge, but we now live in a system where the teacher has to be the facilitator of learning. As a teacher, I'm not there yet, but I am trying to get there as best and as quickly as I can. Below are some of the tools that I have recently learned to use to help.

YouTube. I had always dismissed YouTube as a collection of mindless videos for mindless entertainment until one fateful day and a chance encounter with a previous student. I asked how he was doing in school, particularly in math (for this was the subject he struggled most with). He said he was doing great. I asked if he had a great teacher, or tutor, or school. He replied 'no' to all of those inquiries and proceeded to tell me that his success was a result of YouTube videos that helped him understand basic trigonometry and some advanced algebra. I thought, if he could use this tool, why couldn't I use it in the classroom? As a result I now consistently use it in my classroom. I search YouTube on a weekly basis to find appropriate videos and I share them as I deem necessary. What's more, since using YouTube in the classroom, my students are more engaged because this is 'their' technology and they're happy to have it in the classroom.

Google Docs. I am confident that all of us are familiar with Google, but I am not so confident that all of us know what Google Docs is. I have only been turned on to this tool for about a year and I love it. One of the current buzzwords in education is 'collaboration' and Google Docs is the ultimate collaboration tool. It is an easy-to-use online word processor, spreadsheet and presentation editor that enables students to create, store and share instantly and securely, and collaborate online in real time. Students can create new documents from scratch or upload existing documents, spreadsheets and presentations. There's no software to download, and all your work is stored safely online and can be accessed from any computer. Previously, to collaborate on group projects, students had to use the same computer. This is not the case with Google Docs. Multiple students can share one file from multiple computers and make revisions or editions at the same time. Students don't have to be at the same location to use this tool. They can collaborate from anywhere. [Editor's note: a useful feature is that all changes to a document can be traced back to the author of the change.] Read more about using Google Docs in the classroom here.

http://www.google.com/educators/p_docs.html

Poll Everywhere. In my classroom I am fortunate to have an interactive whiteboard that comes complete with a learner response system. If I ask my students a question, and they are not so keen on answering out loud or verbally, they can use one of these learner response systems to quickly send an answer that displays itself on the whiteboard. I can truly say that since using this system, I have been able to garner more student responses than I have ever been able to do so in the past. I understand that not all teachers have access to such devices but there are alternatives. Poll Everywhere is just that alternative. The one catch is that it requires the use of cell phone with texting capabilities. Yes, I said texting. It allows your students to text in class. You can use Poll Everywhere to survey students, to have students answer questions, or to even have students submit questions. The results are displayed instantly. This is a very simple tool to use and very easy to set-up. [Editor's note: students can also respond online using computers in Poll Everywhere.] Check out Poll Everywhere at <http://www.polleverywhere.com/>

The classroom is changing and there is no doubt about that. Technology is a tool and we as teachers must be willing to learn to use these new tools. Our students are plugged-in to these new tools and therefore we must embrace them, too. The above tools are just some that I have used in my classroom and they have worked for me to engage my students in learning. If it can work for me, then I am sure they can work for you as well.

Here's an accompanying YouTube video.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tahTKdEUAPk>

Disclaimer: *Please note that using technology in the classroom does not replace the teacher nor does it replace good teaching.* The above article was written under the assumption that all teachers employ a fair degree of common sense and filtering services when it comes to using the Internet in the classroom.