

How can technology help you in your classroom? A step beyond typing

Lisa Clarke, Grade 6-8 teacher, Grandview Adventist Academy

As a teacher with a background in one room and multi-room schools, I have seen many types of students and learners. Some of us have gifted learners. Some of us have learning disabled students. Some of us have both in our classrooms. The question is how do we meet the needs of each of our students? An easy answer is technology.

Technology is great in helping us as teachers in our personal and professional life. We can use overhead projectors to give our students a visual perspective of what we are presenting. We can also use our computers for making lesson plans, letters to parents, newsletters, and keeping grades. The internet is also a helpful tool to find lessons and information to present to the class. Some great sites I have come across are [Teacher Helping Teachers](#) and [Discovery for Teachers](#). We can also use our computers at home for things like entertainment, music, and even banking.

Why limit technology to just the teachers. Gifted learners can benefit just as much from technology. One way a gifted student can benefit from technology is to involve them in a webquest. There are several webquests on the internet to choose from including one on television viewing habits

(http://www.itrc.ucf.edu/webcamp/final_projects/shearer/learning.htm). One of the topics is sure to catch the interest of the gifted learner in your classroom. In addition, there are online museum tours and field trips that your students could explore. The [American Museum of Natural History](#) and the [Ontario Science Centre](#) are just a few to check out.

Other great sites for children are [Math Brain Teasers](#), [KISS institute for practical robotics](#) and the [Mad Sci Network](#). For older gifted students the [Engineering Science Quest](#) or the [Deep River Science Academy](#) might capture their interest.

There are also many resources to help teachers with programming for the gifted learner. The [Gifted Development Centre](#) and [Hoagies Gifted Education](#) Page are just a few. Using any search engine is bound to bring up even more sites.

There are also a lot of ways we can use computers to help our learning disabled students. Sometimes we, as teachers, get wrapped up in getting our slower students to finish their classwork before they are allowed to use the computer. To me this is such a waste. With the right programs, the computer is an extremely useful learning tool in the hands of a learning disabled student.

Writing software is a tremendous benefit for students with learning disabilities. Take for instance the word processor. Some students have horrible handwriting possibly due to fine motor difficulties. Typing on the computer may help alleviate those difficulties. The student's messy work is reduced and he/she can produce visually pleasing reports and projects. Sometimes I find that the re-writing phase of the project gives learning disabled students the most amount of trouble. When the student is revising their project or assignment they can simply cut and paste or rearrange the text without rewriting it. While the computer

helps make editing easier, it alone will not make up for writing difficulties.

The word processor can also help with students who have difficulties spelling. Most spell checkers will identify the word that is spelled incorrectly and give students a pull down menu with the options of correct respellings. There are also spell checkers like Kurzweil and Text Help that can help check for dyslexic patterns. For example reversed letters (b and d, a and c, p and q) in words as well as missing first letters.

Other programs may have word prediction lists. These programs display a list of high frequency words as you type. When you type "b" all the high frequency words are displayed. These programs will also try to guess what you might want to say next. These types of programs tend to reduce the difficulties of finding the correct keys on the keyboard.

Other types of programs include voice recognition technologies or talk and type. Basically you tell the computer what to write through a microphone and it prints the words on the screen. Dragon Naturally Speaking is an excellent program for this. While any voice recognition software has a learning curve, where the computer gets the imprint of the users voice, it is well worth it if you have students in your class whose oral language is greater than their written language.

The talk and type features allow the students to type what they want to type and then the program reads back what they typed either as they typed it or when they are finished. It is a great way to help your students edit while they write. The students can also listen to their entire product when they are finished their work. This oral feedback may give the students an opportunity to correct awkward sentences or mistakes that they failed to notice.

The internet also has great ideas for modifications and accommodations for the learning disabled student. A great site to look at is [LD online](#) for ideas of how teachers can help learning disabled students. Another great site gives classroom tips for teachers who have learning disabled students or attention deficit disabled students (*site no longer exists*). This site also has specific interventions for common classroom problems. It is well worth taking a look.

Since the last tri-annual session in the Ontario Conference, there has been a great thrust to provide for special needs students. As teachers, we are all aware that there are students in the conference that need adequate programming to help them achieve their potential. Whether we are talking about gifted students or learning disabled students, technology is one way to help reach their potential. Technology should be viewed as supplementary to an effective remedial program. It should be used as a tool or add on to the entire classroom program.

*Special thanks to Karen Morrison for information about the different writing software programs.