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LT 712 Principles of Learning for Instructional Technologies
Individual Response Paper #3

Learning and education have changed quite a bit over the years. With the advancement of technology, a case can be made that education has changed the most over the last 25 years. People impacted the most by this change would be the Generation Y group and younger. Anyone under the age of 35 would fall into this category. This impact can be found in a number of different areas and ways. As teachers, we need to evaluate and make sure that what we are meeting the needs of 21st century and Generation Y learners.

Roles for teachers

As teachers, we are charged with the task of preparing students to be lifelong learners and productive citizens of our country. Because of the importance of this task, teachers need to always be learning and improving how we teach. Cody (2015) and Eaton (2011) both state that learners today are the best-educated young adults and students in history. Therefore, as teachers, we need to continue improving ourselves to meet the expectations and needs that students will have when they enter our classrooms.

Teachers are at many different levels when it comes to implementing and using technology. As technology coordinator at my school, part of my job is to encourage the use and implementation of technology in their teaching. The staff and faculty I work with has quite the range of ages, all with varying levels of technology experience. It's not easy to sit down with the whole faculty and show them how to use something in their classroom; some already know how it works, others have no idea.

I now periodically stop by every teacher's room to ask them if they need any technology help and to answer any questions they may have. As questions arise, I sit down with the teacher or teachers that are looking for assistance and provide them with the help they're looking for.

Students

Meeting the needs of our students can take many different shapes and forms, but as was stated above, our overall goal as teachers is to prepare students to be lifelong learners and productive citizens in society. So how do we do that?

The world we live in is changing rapidly. Students today are used to things changing rapidly, sometimes over night. Keeping that in mind, today's teachers need "to be sure that, no matter what subject they are teaching, they are teaching it with that future in mind" (Prensky, 2010, p. 5). Preparing students to adjust to worldwide changes 5-10 years down the road is one way we meet the needs of our students.

Children using technology seems to be expected these days. I look at my four children, ages 2-8, as examples. My oldest, Ethan, wants to use my phone every morning to see how his favorite sports teams did the previous night. My two youngest children want to watch Dora the Explorer videos on the

YouTube Kids app. The point is, children know and use technology on a daily basis. In fact, many children are on the Internet by the age of two or three (Prensky, 2010). I need to remember that "maximizing the use of technology *by students* will benefit students the most" (Prensky, 2010, p. 6).

Students know and expect to use technology in the classroom. They don't know a world without computers or technology (Eaton, 2011). Making use of what's available is another way to meet the needs of our students. All of the knowledge in the world is at our student's fingertips; making sure they know how to access it is the key. I give my students the questions we need to answers and they get to explore, research and find the answers. Once done, we come back together and discuss and review what everyone found (Prensky, 2010).

Organizations

How we meet the needs of our students will be changing in our school**.** This year, my principal is leading the faculty through a year long discussion on using differentiation. This ties in with what Prensky (2010) says about professional development:

> "Administrators should make sure that any professional development or training offered focuses not (at least at first) on using various technologies, but rather on shifting teachers' thinking and actions to the partnership mentality and pedagogy. Unless and until this is done, the technology training is unlikely to prove fruitful" (p. 27).

My principal and I work closely together in providing technology for the teachers in our school, but we need to make sure that everyone understands how best to reach the kids before they start using the technology to achieve that.

The Community

Changing the way we teach students at our school should have a positive impact upon the community of Watertown. By preparing our students to be lifelong learners, they will be ready to advance their education and get better paying jobs. Having better trained students will provide Watertown businesses with a more robust pool of workers. Competition for good workers and good paying jobs is a benefit to everyone.

New Learning Content

Currently, my school teaches classes as "subjects":math, social studies, English, writing, etc. The more reading I've done, though, I'm starting to wonder if that is the best way to teach our students. When you look at occupations across the world, they have many different facets to them. Depending on what you're doing, math, science, and English/writing skills can all be used within a five minute span. It's difficult to find a job where only one "subject" is used. 21st century learners understand "that subjects are inherently interconnected" (Eaton, 2011). The way we teach in schools and what real life is like are radically different.

I believe it's time to consider how we can better connect our "subjects" with each other. One possible way to achieve this would be to do more themes or central questions in my room that revolve around an idea. While working through the theme, all of the different "subjects" can be incorporated into what the class is doing.

New Learning Skills and Context

I've always been a teacher who teaches my students how to do something, and then have them do it themselves. I circulate through the room checking their work, helping out those that need the extra help, and challenging those that have the concept down. This class has taken what I've learned on being a teacher and flipped it on its head.

So how do I change what I'm doing? One option Prensky (2010) suggests is questioning and discussing, which includes: asking questions, moderating discussions, offering opinions within discussions, and giving feedback on projects (p. 34). He also suggests the idea of basic partnering (p. 39). This is when students are given guiding questions and you send them off working to answer the questions. Once done, the class will come have a discussion and summary of what was all learned. My mindset needs to adjust to being more of a facilitator by working with the students, showing them how to find information and connect with other teachers and students around the world (Mancabelli, 2012).

One thing that I appreciate about teaching is that when something doesn't work quite right, I can tweak it and try again. Iteration is the term that applies here; it means "putting something out there, seeing how it works, and immediately changing those elements that don't work" (Prensky, 2010, p. 57). When students are collecting information and sharing it with their classmates, they have a more hands-on approach to their learning. They are more proactive and take more out of what they are learning. If the way I have something planned doesn't work, I can change it and try something different the next day.

Collaboration

Technology has provided a level of connectedness that the world has never seen before. Students stay connected when they collaborate with each other via social media and other avenues. I feel that social media should be used by teachers to connect with students. If we want students to respond to teachers, we need to meet them on their terms (Eaton, 2011).

Using social media is an excellent way to connect with students, but I feel that some standards and limits should be set. What is considered proper interaction between students and teachers should be set and adhered to. The relationship needs to be a professional one, not a personal one. Accusations and problems can arise if proper usage isn't followed.

Other platforms exist that allow for collaboration; some include Blackboard, Moodle, and Google Apps for Education. Since my school started using Google Apps for Education, I feel our level of collaboration has greatly increased. The students enjoy being able to work together on a document or

project simultaneously. Reading, editing, and commenting on projects and papers has been much easier with Google Apps.

Information and Communication Literacy

Communicating with and passing information on to students has changed over the years. Students used to call me on a phone if they had questions about an assignment; now they text and email. I honestly can't remember the last time a student called me. How students communicate with you also depends on their age. I teach 5th graders, so they mostly contact me by email or with a text. As you start interacting with older students, however, they still use texting and emailing, but are also making use of Facebook, Twitter, and other methods of social media to communicate with you. I am working on being familiar and having a presence on these different social media types so that students can contact me if they feel the need to.

Instructional Technologies

As I consider the best way to meet the needs of my students, it's easy to feel overwhelmed with all of the options. I need to keep in mind that whatever technology I use needs to be suitable for the age of the students I'm working with. First of all, do my students meet the age requirements usually posted in the Terms of Service? Will the technology do what the students want it to do? Here is where iteration works well. The students can try out the technology and give me feedback on whether it's worth using in the future. It doesn't pay for me to master a technology if the students think it's worthless (Prensky, 2010).

Conclusion

Having access to all the different types of technology found in the world today is exciting. A few years ago, it would have been a lot more difficult for me to get my Master's Degree. It's a lot easier now that classes can be conducted online. All of the information is available at my fingertips. This leads me to wonder where education is headed. Will the time come when teachers become obsolete? I think and hope that a teacher will always be a part of the education model, but it wouldn't surprise me if education is eventually a self-contained, learn-as-you-go system that is tailored to the needs and passions of every person.

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