

My Instructional Dream Classroom

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The Classrooms of the Past



The more time I spend in the classroom and use all the cool gadgets that I have grown accustomed to I can not help but ponder how the teachers that have come before me coped. When a student asked them a question they did not know what did they do? Did the teacher actually go to the library, look up the answer, and then got back to them in a few days? Did they mumble an answer in hopes that they were not further questioned on the depth of the reply? How did the teachers engage their students without the trips to the virtual museums, Google Earth, Brain Pop, or Wikipedia that is constantly being used in today's classrooms? Every time I look at the picture above I get the chills and think to myself that it must have been so boring to teach. Forget about the learning if the teaching is so boring. Yet, I do not want to make it seem that the only way a student will learn is if you shove a bunch of technological equipped lessons down their throat and call it a day. I am sure students learned just as well back then than they do now but times have changed. However, the students are now coming in to the classroom with blogs, Wikis, search engines, and video game images already crammed into their heads. Therefore, a teacher needs to use this knowledge and these

skills to further enhance their lessons and to keep the students engaged. Yet, how can we be sure the teachers are using the resources out there to the best of their ability? You can't just throw a new piece of technology into the classroom and only use it to show pretty images. It reminds me of something Plato said hundreds of years ago:

"Someday, in the distant future, our grandchildren's grandchildren will develop a new equivalent of our classrooms. They will spend many hours in front of boxes with fires glowing within. May they have the wisdom to know the difference between light and knowledge." Well, I believe Plato was dead on and the future he predicted is here. We have developed a new classroom and these classrooms are packed to the brim with different ways to teach the knowledge that we want our students to obtain. So, how can I be sure that I am *using* these tools to the best of their ability and my students are leaving my classroom with knowledge and not just light?

My Dream Classroom

Combining Technology, Interaction, and Creativity to Engage Students



What would be my dream instructional classroom? Oh, let me count the many ways I would want the multiple approaches of technology to be used in my dream classroom. The first thing my dream classroom would come equipped with would be notebook laptops, with internet access, for every student. Let me explain why this would make my classroom a dream to work in. The community computer lab, at least at my school, is a HOT commodity. Every week the teacher gets a scheduled time to be in the computer lab but some weeks you need more time. Then you have to barter, beg, and steal with the other teachers to earn more time. When a teacher sends out an email letting others know they will not be using their computer time it goes like hotcakes. Then it is frustrating because you assume that a teacher will use their most precious computer time, yet it stays unattended because they had something else planned. Oh, the wasted resource. Now, why would I need my class to have so much time on the computer you may ask? Well, for one, so they can type up their papers (I will go in depth about that in a later paragraph), research a topic, create brochures, explore virtual museums, update their blog, the list can go on and on. It would be so much easier if the computers were there, on a constant basis, waiting to be stroked and

loved. However, some may argue that students spend too much time on the computer and staring at, as Plato may put it, "boxes with fires." But do we not want our students to be prepared for where the world is taking us next? As long as we make what they are doing meaningful then the end will justify the means. Which brings me to what tools I would use to make time on the computer and the integration of technology meaningful.



When students know they are writing for an audience that will actually see their work they put more effort into their final piece. That is why my instructional dream classroom would include having my students use Blogs and Podcasts. First off, Blogs are a fantastic way to communicate with each other. I would have my class blog that I would use for posting assignments and for having a venue for classroom discussions. When we read a book this blog will serve as an arena for book club discussions or literature circles. The students thought will be out in cyber space where anyone can view it. A certain amount of pressure on the student to give their best effort can go a long way. Students will be responsible for keeping up with the class blog and thus individual laptops would make it easier for the students that do not have internet access at home. Then each student will have their own blog they would create and maintain. This would be for more "social" purposes and a place to communicate with one another. They can post their favorite movie clips, create surveys, upload pictures--anything they desire. Of course, guidelines and rules will be addressed beforehand but hey, in a dream classroom everything runs smoothly.

Another technology tool I would use, even though as of date I am unfamiliar with how to do it, is Podcasting. To include this in my classroom I would have my students be responsible for creating the morning announcements for the school. They would research what the weather would be the next day, write a script that talks about the next day or weeks events, research major local events and national events that may have taken place, and then create the podcast. Each teacher would then pull up the Podcast in the morning and have the students listen to it. I feel this is another great way to make my student's work authentic and real for them because there is a *purpose* to the madness. My students will be interacting with each other in a creative way that will engage the students in more ways than one.



Assessment, assessment, assessment! That words haunts me at night. How do I know my students grasp what is being taught to them? Is there a way that I can immediately get feed back on how my students are going? Can this feedback be broken down for me in different ways so I can actually see the missing thread in my stitching? Why yes, there is a way. My dream classroom will come equipped with ActivStudios and ActivExpressions handhelds for all my students. I will use the Active Board to enhance my lessons and then afterward my students can interact by answering a few multiple choice questions and short answer questions. I will then get immediate feed back as to what students I need to re-teach to or if I need to re-teach the whole lesson because the majority answered incorrectly. The classroom that I assist in today consistently uses small quizzes to measure the students knowledge in a subject that is bring taught. Currently, they are being taught fractions and these quizzes act as a blessing and a curse everyday. A blessing because you know the students that need to be re-taught and a curse because you now know the areas that need to be re-taught again, and again, and again. However, it is such an amazing tool in a classroom and that is why my dream classroom will have them.

Google icons



Ah....Google how do I love thee? Let me count the ways: Google Earth, Google Docs, Picasa, Google Wave, and many, many more ways I have grown to love thee. In my dream classroom, since my students are packing laptops with internet access, I will take full advantage of all the applications Google has to offer; beginning with my all time favorite, Google Earth. First let me give you a glimpse of how I am itching to incorporate Google Earth in my classroom. Today, in the classroom I help out in, the teacher assigned a group project to her students. They have been asked to plan a trip to the Grand Canyon and in this presentation they need to include: route, sites on the way, sites to be toured at the Grand Canyon, and anything else they want to include. In no way did she breath a word about Google Earth. Now, mind you, I know they have access. This school has EVERYTHING! Does she not know the awesome possibilities Google Earth has to offer? The students can pinpoint each of their stops, embed videos, images, and information into each pinpoint, and also show an actual visual representation of the route they will take that will include the different landscapes they will pass. Yeah, the students can create the usual boring PowerPoint of their trip but would it not be more engaging to have them use Google Earth to display their work? I should think so. However, there are other ways I want to use Google Earth. So many other ways. I can take them to the places we are learning about in Social Studies. In science, if we are learning about the stars, I can take them up into space. When a teacher integrates technology into the classroom the students are more engaged and

willing to learn.

Another application I am becoming very fond of is Google Docs. Hence the reason I am turning my paper in this format. First, I can have my students type ALL their papers in Google Docs. I can monitor their changes, peer editing would be so much easier, and don't forget easy home access. Students can edit their peer's paper in Google Docs and they can also chat with each other during the process. I also like the idea of having each student create forms and surveys for their classmates to answer. Google Docs is just one of the tools that Google offers that would help me have a technology driven classroom.



Finally, and most importantly, my dream instructional classroom would include opportunities for me to learn more ways to integrate technology into the classroom. I need to stay in the loop and I want the chance to go to workshops to learn about techniques and tools others are using. When new technologies are invented I want to learn about them so I can keep up with my students. Just because I love Google Docs now does not mean something else will not catch my eye. Change is good and being open to change is even better. Just because something works now does not mean that something else will make it work better. Technology is constantly changing and improving and even though Plato may have worried that this change may not provide the knowledge I believe if we use the change wisely Plato will rest assured. He will know that even though the the process of teaching has changed knowledge is still be absorbed.