Adding Digital Content to the Curriculum

With increased availability of digital content in the educational sphere, schools and teachers need to ensure they are identifying quality instructional materials.

As educators increasingly shift from print to digital instructional materials, the question of quality becomes more critical. The criticism of print materials which go through several layers of review, especially textbooks, is that they are static and often out of date from the moment they are printed. And as more schools have access to high-quality broadband and devices for students, the adoption of digital instructional materials that can be updated in an instant makes sense. However, regardless of the type of digital content, educators need to hold all content to the same set of quality standards.

Judging quality content
The State Educational Technology Directors Association provides the following definition of quality instructional materials: "content-rich materials aligned to standards that are fully accessible and free from bias."

Quality instructional materials must satisfy several requirements. For example, they must be aligned to learning standards as measured by widely-accepted evaluation tools, and include current, relevant and accurate content that is free from bias. Full-course, core instructional materials are evaluated on wider criteria: they must emphasize key areas of focus, address learning skills progression, include resources for students who struggle as well as opportunities for students to be challenged — among other standard requirements.

The use of digital materials has the potential to empower educators to transform teaching and learning. However, in the transition to digital, we need to be thoughtful and deliberate about types of materials used and how the use of these materials change how students can learn. ■

Tracy Weeks, Ph.D., Executive Director, State Educational Technology Directors Association

4 Ways Video Games Can Enrich Curriculums

Video games known as serious games play a useful role in education by engaging students in new ways.

1. Game play is fun.
If someone can be entertained as well as educated, that is motivating for the learner.

2. Serious games are interactive.
Instead of listening and taking notes, players must participate — often in more realistic, lifelike situations.

3. Learners get immediate feedback.
They learn if they have successfully completed various tasks or make progress. When struggling, they are often directed to tasks to help develop their understanding.

4. Collaboration is a common outcome.
Research shows students and workers develop skills allowing them to engage more productively with peers.

By Sue Bohle, Executive Director, Serious Play Conference

Technology Isn't Just Modernizing Schools — It's Personalizing Them

Technology is transforming the learning experience for both students and teachers. How can schools looking to modernize overcome the challenges of implementing new IT?

By Adam Sass

Most students today are Generation Z — born between 1995 and 2010. They've been raised exclusively around technology and are familiar with devices and social media. Because of that, the way to teach them has to change in order to be effective.

"[Today's students] are social learners with an entrepreneurial spirit, and the way teachers leverage technology in education needs to address their needs," says Heather Breedlove, technology consultant with Tech2Inspire, about what's driving the tech transformation in education.

Game time
"The ability of technology to promote student engagement is huge," says Brian Louderback, director of sales for Insight Enterprises, which focuses on informational tech. "You put a book in front of a fifth grader, and [they] have no interest in it. Digital devices drive a more meaningful development. Like in video games where you do something right and advance to the next level, there's an attempt to bring gamification to learning to improve performance."

Louderback stresses the importance of understanding that children learn at different paces. "Technology is the gateway to bring personalized learning to the student," he says. "Some kids learn differently than mainstream students."

There's never been a better time to level the playing field for students. "In Google Classroom, teachers assign students varying levels of the same assignment without other students [noticing]," Breedlove says.

"Things like Makerspaces are opening up learning opportunities to students who might struggle with traditional subjects or students who struggle socially. These same students can sit next to each other and create things like 3–D printed glasses, where otherwise that opportunity might not have existed."

Classroom hurdles
"The number one impediment to successful IT integration is a school's budget, followed by the faculty and leadership's ability to adopt and support technology," says Louderback. As the classroom grows to depend on technology, its IT department (if a school has invested in one) must ensure a downed device doesn't potentially impede a day of learning.

"Our role at Insight is to work with schools' IT departments to help manage their technological capabilities," he adds. He wants to promote the transformation all schools must undergo: a supported faculty and a more personalized learning experience for students.

"When the right curriculum meets the right medium for the right student, magic can happen." ■

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