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My Learning Style

Technology is part of education now, whether you want it there or not. Students have more access to technology than they do to books. If students are given a research assignment they do not go to the library, they go to Google or Ask Jevees to find the information. Is this a positive thing or a negative? In my short teaching experience I have noticed that colleges feel strongly one way or another. I also cannot help but notice that the teachers that have been teaching longer think technology in the classroom is awful and even destructive to the education process. While the younger generation of teachers see technology as a positive addition to the classroom. I fall somewhere in the middle. I feel that, as with some many other things, technology in moderation and used correctly can be successful in the classroom.

I believe my learning style is similar to Mary Catherine Bateson’s “Learning along the Way”. There are many people that can learn by reading about information in a book or watching someone else perform the task. Personally, I have to physically do the activity to have the best understanding of it. This is a common argument in our household. My husband is the kind of learner that can learn by watching or reading kind of person and he knows more about technology than I do. So when I have to ask him for help on the computer he sits down and completes the task. When he’s finished he’ll look at me and say “ok, do you get it?”. I always have to remind him that I have to be the one physically doing the activity to fully understand it. This is a hard concept for a person that does not learn in this fashion to understand.

Technology has become a requirement in the classroom today. I feel the only way to determine what will significance to use in the classroom is to try it out. As a teacher we are constantly being presented with new technology to implant in our classroom. For the purpose of my classroom the only way I can decide if it’s applicable or not is to try it out. I generally try it out at home before hand and then do tests run in the classroom. Today’s students are so technology driven that they love it when I try something new. First of all, they love doing something different. Secondly, they usually offer suggestions that I would never have thought of. They have such great knowledge about technology that they can adapt to almost all technology changes.

My current classroom was recently updated with new SmartBoards, white boards that are interactive with your computers. This is our first year of having this tool. I am amazed every time I try something new, just how much the students have to offer. Either, they give me added information that they obtained from another classroom or they play around with the SmartBoard and discover new things in this manner. The fact that they remember things from other classrooms lets me know that they are at least paying attention to something. Whether it’s because of the technology or not is the question.

Though I think this new technology is wonderful, I am always torn with the question if we are too dependent on technology. Is all this technology a distraction, not only to school but everyday life. While watching “Digital Nation” I was surprised with how many points and/or questions that I had in common with the documentary. Are we making a dumber generation? There was a section in the movie that talked about students using Google as a source of information. They were able to obtain that information but they were unable to analyze it. I became aware of this issue while having my 11th grade math student’s work on a budgeting project last year. They were given the exact links to go to and obtain information about jobs, housing, cars, loans, etc. Multiple times they would get the information they needed but when I asked them what it means to them they had difficulty making the connection. They would continue to re-read what they found on line. They did not fully understand what they were looking at.

In the movie they also talk about students feeling they are effective multi-taskers and therefore should be afforded the right to use multiple sources of technology at one time. The students at MIT felt they could listen to lecture, check their email, text, post on their blogs, and still retain information being discussed in class. Every since watching the movie I have thought about showing this to my students. The argument about being able to multiple tasks is one I have daily with my students. Our school has just implemented a new policy that allows students to use their electronically devices during non-academic settings and in the classroom at the teachers discretion. In my room I allow the students to listen to their music only during independent work time. My classroom is made up of students with Learning disabilities, ADHD, ADD, emotionally impaired, & Asperger students. I feel the music is a good way for the students to shutout the outside noise and/or distractions. Some days when they are off task I will remind them that they can “plug in” and I’m always amazed that the loudest student immediately starts working effectively. In this regard I think that technology is a wonderful asset to the classroom. The part that I struggle with is that students at times cannot distinguish between appropriate times to use the technology and times they should not. I caught students watching movies on their iPhones and when I comment on it they will say that they can do both, watch the movie and listen to my lecture. As stated in “Digital Nation” They think they are good multi-taskers but in reality they are awful. How do we get them to understand this? How do we teach them that there is a time and place for all technology?

Autobiographical inquiry is that of self-observation. How one sees themselves in the educational setting. This is a great form of inquiry if you are able to observe yourself and actually critique yourself objectively. You have to be truly able to see what you are teaching from the student’s point of view. If you only see your teaching style from your point of view, then you’ll never be able to assess if what you are teaching is effective. I see it every day. Teachers that have a higher level of intelligence not grasping why their students are not understanding the content they are trying to teach. They don’t change their teaching style, they don’t adapt how they present the material, and they are still shocked by the end result. This is baffling to me. Then again as Einstein said… Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. This may explain some of the grumpiness in the teachers’ lounge.

Today’s student is different. We want them to learn like we did years ago and the fact is that they do not. We can either continue to teach them in the same old fashion or implant new techniques to help them become successful. Autobiographical inquiry can be successful if you can observe what is really going on in your classrooms. Sometimes it may be hard to realize that maybe you should have done something differently or presented the information in a different manner but it’s not about how we as teachers feel. I tell my students all the time that how I teach my first hour class is always different then my final hour of the day. They always find this funny. With every class I realize there is something I should have put more emphasis on or something I should have left out. I am a fairly new teacher so the amount of changes will become smaller as they teach the same subject matter over time.

This form of inquiry is very different than Paley’s form of teacher-inquiry. Though teachers are observed on occasion, we are not observed over a long enough time period that this type of inquiry would be effective. I think that Autobiographical inquiry is more along the lines of Mary Catherine Bateson’s form of “Learning along the way” style of inquiry. I think teachers have to be somewhat flexible in their teaching styles. We all learn things as we go along and it’s important that we adapt to our ever changing students. Students do not learn as students did 20 years ago. It would be unrealistic for us as educators to think that we could still teach them in the same fashion we did 20 years ago.

 Technology can be a wonderful tool to any classroom setting. Being able to engage students is our main objective in our classrooms. We as educators have to find a way to find the middle ground with technology. Too much can be distractive not enough can leave our kids board and behind the rest of the technologically advanced world. Each teacher has to look within their own classrooms and themselves and find out what works best for their students.