INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO A COMMON CORE CURRICULUM

January 2014
There was a time not too long ago when classroom technology was a rarity. Students went through their academic careers with an understanding of only the devices they were fortunate enough to use at school or at home. When these same individuals arrived at college or started a job that called for the technological knowledge they lacked, it was up to them to catch up on their own time or risk falling behind.

Technology plays a greater role in everyday life with each passing day. For this reason, it comes as no surprise to see educators embracing various forms of technology during the implementation of the rigorous Common Core State Standards, which were developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The CCSS are expected to have a significant impact on the American education system. To date, 46 states and the District of Columbia have partially or fully adopted the standards that are designed to prepare K–12 students for the future.

The Internet, computers, smartphones and other forms of technology play a significant role in higher education and work environments in and outside of the U.S. If students are to excel in these settings, they need to receive technological instruction that can help them compete with international students.

In the event that educators are not ready to use technology in their classrooms to the extent that it is required, they could find themselves ill prepared to teach according to the Common Core. For example, it may be difficult for sixth-graders to publish their writing online in a classroom if the teacher doesn’t have the expertise to lead students through the processes of setting up their own blog or writing platform.

For this reason, and many others, it is essential for K–12 school officials to recognize the vital role technology plays in the transition to the new standards.
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**THE PROMISE OF BETTER LEARNING**
If teachers are to increase the quality of the instruction they provide, there is much that has to change. Should educators want to help their students become comfortable using computers and other technology for writing, research and communication purposes, they need to have access to the devices that allow them to do so. The CCSS make alterations to English language arts and mathematics a priority, but the standards are also expected to impact other academic subjects, such as science and social studies.

For example, the National Council for the Social Studies has developed the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards, which lay out the social studies knowledge students should have by the end of high school.

Ultimately, instruction will go deeper than ever before to ensure that students develop knowledge and skills that are relevant to the real world and will prepare them to compete globally. According to the Common Core’s website, students who learn in CCSS-aligned classrooms will know how to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, language and listening skills using technology. They will also be able to discern a valuable technological tool or medium from one that may lead them astray.

**EDUCATION WITH A TECHNOLOGICAL TWIST**
Although many states have not finished implementing the CCSS, technology is already playing a greater role in the instruction K–12 students receive.

This is the case in the classroom of Shawn McCusker, a social studies teacher at William Fremd High School in Illinois and an education thought-leader and 1:1 expert, McCusker believes in the power taking students’ work and exposing it to different audiences can have. For example, McCusker’s students were able to research individuals from world history and share facts about them using Web tools. Whether pupils choose to write a paragraph or produce a video, they are putting a creative twist on traditional learning.

Then, there are the CCSS-aligned tests that will become the norm for many states beginning in the 2014–2015 academic year. These exams include the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers’ PARCC Assessment and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium’s Smarter Balanced Assessment. Both tests, which are designed to assess success mastering essential academic skills, are computer-based.

**PRESIDENT OBAMA’S PLAN**
Students’ success on CCSS-aligned tests hinges on their schools’ Internet connection. If access to the Web is not reliable or of a high quality, educators could be setting their pupils up for disaster. President Barack Obama understands this and established the ConnectED initiative to ensure this does not happen.

The White House website states that the average school has connectivity that is about equal to what can be found inside the average American home. This is a problem, as academic institutions serve 200 times as many users as can be found inside a home. For this reason, ConnectED is designed to connect 99 percent of students in the U.S. to the Internet via high-speed wireless and broadband within five years.

EducationSuperHighway, a nonprofit comprised of former educators, business executives and tech engineers, is dedicated to getting students the Internet infrastructure they need. According to this organization’s website, 80 percent of public schools do not have sufficient access to the Web, which shows the importance of Obama’s connectivity goal.

“In South Korea, for example, 100 percent of schools have high-speed Internet,” said U.S. Secretary of
Education Arne Duncan in a June 2013 speech at The Cable Show 2013 in Washington, D.C. “Here, it's only about 20 percent. We are denying our teachers and students the tools they need to be successful. That is educationally unsound and it is morally unacceptable.”

To achieve his goal, Obama has called on the Federal Communications Commission to update its E-Rate program and leverage it to equip students with the technology they need. The FCC currently oversees this program, which provides eligible schools and libraries with telecommunications and Internet access at a discounted rate as high as 90 percent off the usual price. Such efforts are essential in a time when so many schools are grappling with budget cuts and the high cost of implementing the CCSS.

“We are living in a digital age, and to help our students get ahead, we must make sure they have access to cutting-edge technology,” said Obama in a June 2013 statement. “So today, I’m issuing a new challenge for America—one that families, businesses, school districts and the federal government can rally around together—to connect virtually every student in America’s classrooms to high-speed broadband Internet within five years, and equip them with the tools to make the most of it.”

EMBRACING CHANGE
Across the U.S., educators are finding new ways to integrate technology into their classrooms. Some are using mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablet computers, for educational purposes, while others have transformed social media into a teaching tool. Then, there are classrooms that have embraced blended learning, a mix of online and in-person instruction, and the 1:1 format, which sees every student receive his or her own computer.

“The introvert can communicate in my class,” McCusker said. “They can post to a blog post, their work is reviewed by their classmates. And though they may not feel comfortable raising their hand, that doesn’t deny them the chance to frame their ideas and let them get reviewed by people. That connection is so powerful!”

What this means is the move away from traditional instructional techniques gives voice to students who may have gotten lost in a classroom populated by more outgoing learners. Technology used in a 1:1 classroom allows the introverted pupil—and his or her work—to receive the proper attention. In some cases, educators may believe that just because they use technology means they will automatically be better teachers. This is not the case, according to McCusker.

“The thing that makes you a better teacher is the ability to employ the tools that you have effectively in ways that support student learning, and that doesn’t change,” McCusker said.

WITH CHANGE COMES PROGRESS
Introducing technology into academic settings is far from a problem-free process. While the potential benefits outweigh the struggles, which can be overcome, educators should know that their transition

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to more technological learning environments may not go as smoothly as they hope. This is where professional development focused on the proper use of technology is essential if educators are to use computers, the Internet and other modern resources to their fullest. Once educators know how to successfully use technology for instructional purposes, the benefits begin to appear.

Overall, it appears technology will remain in classrooms for some time to come. According to the August 2013 American Express Spending and Savings Tracker, 70 percent of all students are supporting their learning with technology such as tablets and smartphones. This type of wide adoption of technological tools is welcome news for many respondents to a poll conducted by the Leading Education by Advancing Digital Commission. According to the organization’s website, 95 percent of teachers and 90 percent of parents said that students gain an academic advantage at school when they have access to high-speed Internet at home.

The Los Angeles Unified School District famously made the decision to provide each of its students with Apple iPads, but it is not the only school system to increase the presence of technology in the classroom. Alabama’s Huntsville City Schools, for example, provided students with laptops to improve the quality of instruction delivered, according to The Huntsville Times.

**A NECESSARY MOVE**

Despite whatever challenges come with embracing technology for learning purposes, the alternative has the potential to harm students’ long-term development. Reliable Internet, updated computers and the widespread acceptance of technological approaches to instruction may be difficult to attain, but if they help students master the CCSS, they are worth serious consideration.

When students arrive at college with the skills necessary to research multiple topics online and assemble an effective paper, or walk into a boardroom feeling confident about the electronic presentation they created, they will no doubt draw on technological knowledge they began to acquire during their K–12 careers.

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