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Resisting the Urge to Resist Technology: Learning to Value Technology and Use It Authentically

by Shannon Prince



Shannon Prince

“Technology”—the word conjures up lots of images, from iPads, to robots that can open and walk through doors, to 4K televisions with a picture clearer than the human eye can detect. Oftentimes, teachers have love-hate relationships with technology—the potential is exciting, but they approach the implementation with trepidation. The fact of the matter is that technology is not new, and teachers have been using technology for as long as one human has taught another. Technology, thus, is any tool used to aid in the completion of a task for a specific goal (Reinking & Colwell, 2015). Recently, a colleague demonstrated this to me quite eloquently. Teachers need to point to things to get the students’ attention. To point, teachers can use their finger, a ruler, a funny cartoon hand on the end of a long stick, or a laser pointer. All of these are examples of teachers using available technology.

I say this in an attempt to alleviate some of the baggage that comes with using technology in the classroom. It is smart and in our nature, as humans, to use the most effective and efficient tools to complete tasks. Some are resistant to using new technology, particularly if they are attached to or proficient with older technology. In fact, it is sometimes not worth the time and effort to learn a new technology when the older technology works just fine. Teachers, however, do not have the luxury of resisting, or worse rejecting, new technology. Technology is not only changing the types of jobs children will encounter when they grow up, but it is also changing literacy practices.

Valuing Technology is Valuing Literacy

Literacy is changing, and technology is at the helm of this transformation. Relying on my own previously stated definition of technology, the fact that technology is changing literacy is *not* new. What *is* new is the rapid output, influx, and uptake of technology in our world. Computers, cell phones, and tablets become outdated seemingly the moment they hit the market. Though some of this can be attributed to smart marketing, it is undoubtedly true that technology is pushing us forward faster than it ever has in human history. When digital and other literacies intersect with the literacies of social practices, new ways to communicate our realities result (Street, 2003). The changing literacy practices that come about because of new technologies are referred to as *new literacies*. We, as educators, must find value in not just the new ways we communicate, but in the fact that the literacy practices of the future are beyond our most educated predictions.

While some may find this exciting, I find myself asking, “What can we do *today* to prepare our children for a future we cannot even envision?” I believe that it starts with valuing the new literacies of today. While parents and caregivers receive and transmit information from screens, children

typically receive books with words and pictures, bearing little resemblance to the literacy tools used by the adults around them. I see, more often than not, that the literacy practices *valued* in schools are different from those valued in every other area of a child's life. Parents or caregivers, as a result, may further enforce this emphasis on uni-modal texts, which are texts that contain a single mode such as printed books, in an effort to ensure their child's success in school. As soon as a child receives permission to access the Internet using an electronic device, that child has begun the journey of navigating through information and communicating as more and more members of our society do. Skilled teachers with the support of parents must be a crucial part of this journey.

Use Technology Authentically

For teachers, authentically using technology implies using it in pedagogically sound ways. Many are familiar with Shulman's (1987) work on pedagogical content knowledge. In this framework, teachers overlap their content (e.g., literacy, science, math, etc.) with their pedagogical knowledge to best teach that particular content. Koehler and Mishra (2009) added that the combination of technological knowledge with pedagogical and content knowledge is the key to effective teaching with technology. In other words, the use of technology tools in the classroom must be carefully considered in tandem with *what* is being taught (content) and *how* it is being taught (pedagogy). Technology tools are, therefore, not pedagogical techniques or content knowledge in and of themselves; rather, technology tools support instruction to make learning more efficient, effective, and engaging for children (Kilbane & Milman, 2014). Oftentimes, in an effort to use new and exciting tools, we can lose sight of what we know to be good teaching practice. Even worse, teachers can be forced into such a situation through the mandatory use of certain tools. Though it is ever important to value technology, for it mediates the literacy practices of our children, technology tools cannot and should not replace the teacher.

Valuing technology and using it authentically in the classroom are simple ways that teachers can sustain their practice into the future. Technology is not going away, and we can only assume that its rapid influx will continue. Mark Bauerlein (2015) wrote in a chapter resisting 21st century reading, "... the youth with a book and no other tool or medium close by, uni-tasking for 90 minutes without interruption, is an exemplary role model... one mind and one book" (p. 28). I agree with Bauerlein, and it is never smart to throw out all of the old in favor of the new. I only hope that if the 90 minutes with the book does not work for or connect to a child, a teacher will use *all* of the technologies available to reach that child.

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