

Tech with Teens: Transform Teaching up to Brim

Abstract:

Teaching is a dynamic process. Teaching is indeed to facilitate, to create interest and motivate learners to learn something new. Thus teaching is a challenging job especially in the case of teenagers. Teens are often the hardest age group for teachers to cope with. Educational psychology and recent teaching methodologies advocates making Teaching-Learning process a 'pleasant experience'. The answer to this lies in 'embracing technology'. Technology has power to empower education. Technology is inevitably a big part of teenage students' lives. This 'Net Generation' has grown up using technology. Technology helps teachers to expand beyond linear, text-based learning and to engage teens who learn best in other ways.

Nowadays when concepts like 'E-learning', 'M-Learning' and 'Social Learning' are gaining currency, this paper explores possibilities of blending technology with pedagogy for language teaching to teens. This paper defines the characteristics of Net Geners' learning styles and discusses how educators can address these teens learning need by 'embracing technology'. The 'Net generation' can be motivated, involved and imparted joyful learning experience by wise integration of technology in teaching.. Nevertheless it should be employed wisely considering Dos and Don'ts.

1. Introduction:

“If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children off tomorrow.”

John Dewey

Teaching is a dynamic process. Teaching is indeed to facilitate, to create interest and motivate learners to learn something new. The 21st Century education has undergone an evolution, dare I say, a revolution. The emergence of educational psychology and various theories by renown educationalists advocate learner-friendly approach of teaching, individualised attention, creating holistic learning environment and make teaching-learning a 'pleasant experience'. Teachers not only have to carry out instructional work, they are expected to be facilitator, counsellor, manager, guide and above all a good entertainer. This throws a greater challenge to 21st century educators who are teaching in the midst of an educational renaissance to reach pedagogic

objectives. In such scenario technology promises to provide innovative solutions in the nation's classrooms, just as it has transformed the way we communicate, socialize, and conduct business. Now it is time for us to harness the power of technology to revolutionize the way students learn and the way teachers teach. Especially for 'tech-savvy' who have grown up in digital world, technology provides innovative solutions to the teacher to address their learning needs.

2. Ed-Tech & Teens:

2.1 Technology is 'Good' and All Teens Like 'IT'

I begin this narrating two incident. I teach Communication Skills to Diploma Engineering students. Last year just an hour before the mid-semester exam, I found one of my students sitting in a classroom with earphones plugged into his ears. "Read, it's not the time for music!" I told him. "That's what I'm doing Sir", he replied, "I have recorded all my lessons on my ipad in order to avoid monotonous task of repeatedly reading the text". Surely, this was a teachable moment, of course for the Teacher. In another incident I was travelling by a local train and I saw a mother and her 11 year old daughter. I watched as the young girl held her cell phone and continued texting her friends as my conversation with her and her mom progressed. A few minutes later her mother asked her if she would please put the phone away. She nodded and continued texting. Finally her mother made the same request 5 or 6 times. The girl did not stop. The mother asked again and the girl said she just had to finish responding to her friend. Welcome to the world of 'teens cum techno-geeks'. Yes, technology is part and parcel of teenagers' daily life -- nobody can deny this. Teens (young and not-so-young) breathe it, eat with it, and sleep with it. Today's high school and middle school age students have grown up with personal computers in their homes as well as their schools. The Pew survey tells us that almost all teens have cell phones, they use the Internet daily, enjoy and prefer instant messaging over e-mail, and online games draw both teenage girls and boys. There are a total number of 19,71,000 people worldwide using internet connections (Wikipedia). Around 35% of internet users are teens. As highly interactive online activities such as blogging and social networking have grown in popularity, accessing the internet has become more and more a daily activity for teens - 63% of teenage internet users now go online daily, and 35% of online teens use the internet multiple times per day, & 73% active social networking site users are there according to Pew Internet Project, 2009.

2.2. Education 2.0 for Teens 2.0:

“Web 2.0” captures a combination of innovations on the Web in recent years. It is used to encompass various novel phenomena on the World Wide Web like introduction of highly popular sites like facebook, twitter etc. By the word ‘Teens 2.0’, I mean the teenagers who have acculturated to Web 2.0. Today’s teens have grown up with new generations of applications and social media tools popularly referred to as Web 2.0. They have grown up in an environment in which they are constantly exposed to computer-based technology. They have fascination for new technologies (*Howe & Strauss, 2000*). Many of today’s youth were not even born when the first pc’s hit the stores. The personal computer has been around more than 25 years. The Apple IIc was introduced in 1984. Teens use all kinds of technology driven gadgets with little or no hesitation. This generation is unique in that it is the first to grow up with digital and cyber technologies. Not only are Net Geners acculturated to the use of technology, they are saturated with it. Having been raised in an age of media saturation and convenient access to digital technologies, Gadgets, SNS (Social Networking Sites), IM (Instant Messaging), Computers are not technology for these new students. Technology is hard-wired in their psyche.

Net Geners have distinctive ways of thinking, communicating, and learning (Oblinger and Oblinger 2005; Prensky 2006; Tapscott 1998). It has been suggested that their methods of learning are different from those of previous generations. They seek for active participation, real world and relevant examples, independence and autonomy in learning. Traditional learning model is not relevant to this ‘digital natives’. Responding to the specific needs of these tech-savvy teens is becoming increasingly important. It’s a challenge for educators to evolve pedagogy to meet the needs of tech-savvy teens. By the word ‘evolving pedagogy’ I mean shifting from Education 1.0 to Education 2.0. In other words switching from traditional model of learning to technology empowered model of learning which is which is more learner friendly, process oriented and engaging. Technology can serve as a catalyst in this process of customizing education for techno-savvy teens. Today’s digital and computer technologies allow us to remedy this by giving us the tools to teach teens. The emerging technologies will not only be incorporated into the existing curriculum, but more significantly, they may indeed become the foundation of a new teaching and learning environment. Technology can be a ‘patient, non-

threatening tutor for basic skill acquisition ... offering students infinite opportunity to repeat problems until process or content is mastered' (Dwyer, 1996, p. 18). Technology is also able to make lectures more effective by providing visual examples of difficult concepts or unfamiliar terrain. It can also assist teachers in the management and administration of a variety of aspects of this style of teaching. Technology provides learners with access to information, expert communications, opportunities for collaboration, and a medium for creative thought, expression, and knowledge construction.

2.3. 'Idea Technologies' for teaching Techy-teens:

Let's explore some cost effective 'idea technologies' that can be employed enhance the learning experience of 'tech-native' teens:

Educational Softwares:

An educational software program is a tool for learning and teaching. It is a program that is installed into a computer in order to make use of its functions. Educational software usually makes use of vivid visuals and auditory effects. This is so because students typically are more willing to listen and perk up when the presentation in front of them are visual-oriented. This also helps in letting them comprehend a particular subject with more depth. Fortunately I have the institute I work with is equipped with language laboratory. I have observed that it works as a great motivating factor for teens to learn language. For example a student may not be paying attention to while the teacher is teaching grammar in the class, the same students works with great patience and interest while doing the language exercise on a language software.

Mobile devices:

'I actually use my iPhone for school purposes. I use it to check my mail for school, I use it look up words via a dictionary app. I have a Spanish app for translating. I Google for Chem AP problems and things I don't understand. I use the calculator for school. I can edit Microsoft word documents, I have a lot of my essays on my device, I can type out essays, and I have powerpoints on device. I also use it chill, go on myspace, and get directions to places.'

- Mike L (a teen Iphone user)

Today's teens are obsessed with use of cell phones. We find them stay glued to their cellphones for hours texting. The smart phones based on latest operating systems are treasure of thousands of mobile applications popularly known as mobile apps. These mobile apps consist of software that runs on a mobile device and performs certain tasks for user of the mobile phone. Their wide use is due to the many functions they perform. Downloading and using latest mobile application is being 'cool' for them. Teens are well versed with the use of mobile phones but they may not be aware with the educational implications of these handheld device. Mobile devices or smart phones can be used to enhance teaching-learning experience in the classroom. Basically, anything you can do with a computer, you can do with a phone. As cell phones have become more sophisticated and equipped with an ever-growing number of applications, their usefulness for educational purposes has increased. For Example, in order to teach vocabulary to my students I adopted novel idea of sending 'the word of the day' to my students. The students who used to be uninterested in learning new words in classroom, found it interesting to receive a new word everyday as a text message. A language teacher needs to develop innovative strategies to integrate handheld device in learning and teaching. Videotaping of students presentations, recording of their voice to polish their pronunciations and tone, language learning games, offline/online dictionaries and thesaurus, language learning applications are a few implications of the amazing world of M-learning. In case of teens known as 'texting-bees' M-learning guarantees to be fun!

Digital Games: In addition to their popularity in the entertainment sector, digital games are becoming important in a range of other sectors, from the military and medicine to business and education. According to WikiPedia (2006), educational games made for adults are called "serious games" whereas games made for children are called "educational games". The field of educational games and serious games has been growing significantly over the last few years Children and youth become engaged by digital games, and it is becoming increasingly accepted that playing games also includes learning. Educational games are particularly made for a learning purpose. The digital games are being provided as tools for the classroom and have a lot of positive feedback including higher motivation for students. For example, a digital role-playing game can be introduced to learn how to cope in different situations, and also to communicate.

Social Networking Sites:

“If you’re not on MySpace, you don’t exist” – Skyler, 18, to her mom

Online social network sites like MySpace and Facebook became common destinations for teens. Throughout the country, young people were logging in, creating elaborate profiles, and writing extensive comments back. Teens considered participation on the key social network site, MySpace, essential to being seen as *cool* at school. There are a variety of Web 2.0 tools that are currently being implemented in the classroom. Studies have shown how computer-mediated communication (CMC) can have pedagogical benefits for language learning. Language practice with native speakers and peers offers authentic interaction, and the ability to put learning into practice in a real context is a powerful motivational tool. The social networking sites provides platform to teen to realise the concept of ‘classroom 2.0’.

A Classroom Blog – Isn’t it Cool! :

A step forward in the collaborative learning will be a class blog! Blog is an easy way to display your student's work. Students can not only find their work published on the blog but can go through the work of other students and write comments and give opinions. Also, once a blog is created, teachers can post homework, assignments, student work, famous quotes, trivia games, and so much more. In today's society, children know how to use the computer and navigate their way through a website, so why not give them space where they can be a published author. Blogs allow for students to maintain a running dialogue, such as a journal, thoughts, ideas, and assignments that also provide for student comment and reflection. Research has shown that writing blogs encourages creative writing among students

Just imagine an essay by your student is published in a classroom Blog. Teens like to stay glued to SNS (Social Networking Sites) because they get a chance to express their individuality online. They feel that their views, opinions and ideas matters. Teacher can also publish reading material and other resources for students to avail even after the classroom hours are over.

Podcasts:

For our music-lover teens, podcasts is a cool language learning tool. Podcasting is a relatively new invention that allows anybody to publish files to the Internet where individuals can

subscribe and receive new files from people by a subscription. The primary benefit of podcasting for educators is quite simple. It enables teachers to reach students through a medium that is both "cool" and a part of their daily lives. For a technology that only requires a computer, microphone and internet connection, podcasting has the capacity of advancing a student's education beyond the classroom. When students listen to the podcasts of other students as well as their own this can be a great tool for learning and developing literacy inside and outside the classroom. Podcasting can help sharpen students' vocabulary, writing, editing, public speaking, and presentation skills. Students will also learn skills that will be valuable in the working world, such as communication, time management, and problem-solving. Although podcasts are a new phenomenon in classrooms, especially on college campuses, studies have shown the differences in effectiveness between a live lecture versus podcasts are minor in terms of the education of the student.

2.3. Advantages of Using Technology for teaching Teens:

Technology lures Teens to Learn:

Teenagers are notoriously hard to please and teachers are always looking for original activities that will both capture and hold students' interest. Technology is inevitably a big part of teenage students' lives. This 'Net Generation' has grown up using technology. The 'Net generation' can be motivated, involved and imparted joyful learning experience by wise integration of technology in teaching.

Reach to different level Learners:

Utilizing these technologies is the best way to reach out to students. Many students have different types of learning styles and using different types of technology is a great way to help all kinds of learners.

Connects the Classroom with the real world:

Technology brings exciting curricula into the classroom that is based on real-world problems and that involves students in finding their own problems, testing ideas, receiving feedback, and working collaboratively with other students or practitioners beyond the school classroom;

3. Principles of Using technology for Teaching Teens :

Pedagogy before Technology:

Using technology just because it's a trend does not lead the teacher to a successful and effective class. Whenever a new technology emerges (such as, say, podcasting), it is important to go beyond the 'wow' factor and think about the pedagogical reasons for using it.

Practice the task before you give it to students :

Ensure that the technology fits the task. Look, I love the iPads for all of the things that they can do, but there are certain things that they will simply not be able to accomplish in an effective way. While I am now fairly adept at adjusting the learning activities to meet the abilities of this technology, I also realize that there are times when bringing in a class set of laptops will just end up better for the students and the outcomes we are trying to reach, so I do. Likewise, there are days when the students do not need the iPads, as the smartphones and paper they already have will do the trick. Don't force technology where it clearly will not work, and don't force students to complete a task in an unnatural way simply to make use of technology.

Technology is not a Panacea :

“Technology is not about tools, it deals with how Man works.” -- **Peter Drucker**

Technology in and of itself does not directly change teaching or learning. Rather, the critical element is how technology is incorporated into instruction. While technology on its own may not improve student achievement, research is helping us understand how technology creates circumstances and opportunities under which there is a positive effect on student achievement (Honey et al, 1999). 'It's not what it is, it's what you do with it.' (Jones 1986.) So it is not the interactive whiteboard per se which could improve the learning experience, but how it is used.

Keep an Eye on the Teens:

Be present when the students are working with the technology. It makes me smile now when I hear teachers talk of how we are going to be replaced by technology, as I have yet to teach a lesson using technology where there wasn't some student support required. We cannot think for a moment that technology 'frees us up' as teachers, unless you do want to eventually give your job to a machine. The best technology teachers are constantly engaged with their classroom,

working through tech issues, dealing with higher level questioning and assignment concerns and generally engaging with students as they work, not supervising them as they work. Being engaged in the classroom environment is the single most important aspect of teaching, without it, there is no foundation for learning to occur. Classrooms that have major ‘discipline’ issues with technology often are relying on unsupervised technology use, where a teacher is relying on the technology to be the ‘connection’ students have to the learning. That is our job, and cannot be passed to technology, or anything else (movies, worksheets, etc.) as the students need and deserve our undivided attention while in our care.

Have a positive outlook on technology:

Students are no fools. If they know that you are ‘just hanging on’ with technology, and you would rather throw your computer out the window than use it, they will read it like a book. In order to effectively draw positive learning with technology from students, we must ensure we are not promoting an anti-technology sentiment in the classroom. That means not voicing frustration when things don’t turn out as expected and not abandoning work students are doing if a roadblock comes up. I believe that my students and I are better for bringing our learning to life using technology. This is a belief you must hold and stay true to if you are going to present to your students the value in educational technology.

Summary:

The world of education has moved on from where a single computer was the only piece of modern technology in the class. Nowadays we have to consider the world of e-learning, where learning is delivered online and the technology is not an enhancement or an extension but becomes a delivery system.

Okay, so this post risks becoming a bit of a rant but there are influential people in schools and in wider education who maintain that the role of technology is only to enhance, extend or support teaching and I sincerely believe that view is wrong and that it could hold back the future development of educational technology. To my mind, the future of educational technology lies not in regarding it as an add-on or enhancement but as being fundamental to education. us away from our current structure, where technology is an isolated program that isn’t part of students’ daily learning experiences.

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