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The Young Learners Issue #1 – Adam

By

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Leveraging Young Learners' Use of Technology

Young learners born between Generation Y and Z have grown up with technology that helps them engage with a constant flow of information and data. Yet the constant question from early 21st century teachers is, 'How can we adopt technology in our classes in a meaningful way that facilitates learning?' This is a good question we should ask whenever we use tech in our teaching, but it's easily answered if we leverage the ways our learners are already interacting daily with technology. Here are five ideas that might help.

Don't be afraid of technology

Although YLs are most commonly described as *tech savvy*, I have trouble with this term as I feel it poorly depicts their true interactions with technology. What I have come to understand is that our young learners are actually *tech comfy*, rather than *tech savvy*. Realizing this, we can overcome our own fears of technology and adopt the tools they already use to facilitate learning.



Teach proper search skills

By 2006 about 90% of young Westerners used Internet search engines. It's now virtually 100% with an *ease-of-use mentality* at the heart of this phenomenon. While *Gen Y-ers* still recognize the value of physical libraries, such facilities fail to live up to their expectations of speed and convenience. This high comfort level, however, fosters a false sense of ability: young learners often overestimate their skills in finding and – especially – in evaluating online information. So, one of the first things we must do as teachers is offer guidance in how to use search engines effectively. Fortunately, there are resources such as this [infographic](#) to help us achieve this.

Use visuals more effectively

In many cases, technology is enabling us to meet teaching aims in ways we could only imagine in the past. Whereas we used to search through our possessions for meaningful realia to elicit language in class, we can now use online visuals. Infographics like [Nik Peachey's Infographic Tools](#) (a great starting point) and YouTube video clips shouldn't be considered as *the new alternative to reading*, though, as they are not an adequate replacement for the development of reading skills. However, they are a great way of stimulating interest and activating schemata.

Leverage technology to give feedback

Those few lines of red scribbled notes on a learner's writing homework have never been adequate feedback; this is one aspect of teaching that has been greatly enhanced with tech tools. *Gen Y-ers* have grown up receiving instant feedback on their performance, so they can feel let down if we don't give them the same level of response to their learning. Using audio recording tool [Audacity](#) or something like [Class Dojo](#) allows us to record thousands of words of feedback in the time it used to take to write two or three sentences.



Handle multitasking with care

Recent research suggests that teenagers currently spend more than three hours a day connected to at least two tech gadgets — from a total of more than ten hours spent *plugged into* at least one. I've heard such statistics used to justify classroom multitasking, but I'm not convinced it's a great thing to encourage. The problem is — and Carnegie Mellon University research backs this up — that a young brain working on two tasks has much less overall brain activity than if they were focused on one task. It's doing less trying to do more. I'd suggest exercising great care dealing with multitasking in class, especially when doing something creative — which it's believed suffers the most from multitasking. If learners are looking up words in an online dictionary while doing another task, it's probably Ok. However, if creativity is your aim, keep multitasking to a minimum.

I hope you now feel it's a good thing to be using technology in class and that you don't have to go over the top. Indeed, you can be successful simply exploiting the ways learners already use technology on a day-to-day basis in their lives.



About Adam Simpson

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