

Going Native to Reach the Digital Natives: New Technologies for the Classroom

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Keywords: Technology, reflection, engagement

There is increasing pressure as educators to promote engagement in the classroom by being not just deliverers of content, but facilitators of the learning process. This is often accomplished through active learning strategies, the flipped classroom, or technology integration. While there are many approaches, technology integration tools are compelling as many of our students are part of the millennial generation. Digital natives or millennials are transitioning to a screen-based society and are bored with traditional methods of learning (Berg, 2010). In fact students do learn through exposure to multiple perspectives developing communication and critical thinking skills (Bennett, Bishop, Dalgarno, Waycott, & Kennedy, 2012). From this teaching approach, the implementation of relevant technological tools into the classroom was prepared utilizing two unique items – Plickers and Flipgrid. The teaching approach objectives of these tools were (a) to address the changing learning needs of students by enhancing the course engagement, (b) to increase student involvement during lectures, (c) to promote students verbal reflective development outside of class, and (d) to help instructor gauge student understanding of course concepts. The following describes the characteristics and implementation of Plickers and Flipgrid.

Plickers are a student response system that can be characterized as a low-technology tool. In contrast to other student response systems like clickers or smartphone applications, Plickers are a “picture-clicker”. Instructors can access the plicker cards for free to distribute to a class of up to 60 students and use an application (smartphone or tablet) to record the student responses. This tool is appropriate for non-assessed questions in the form of polls and as comprehension checks to gauge the level of understanding during a class session. Plickers also offer the chance to administer assessed questions, which would be appropriate for class participation points and to encourage reaching assignments outside of the class. Plickers provide immediate feedback for students without the hassle of managing a device, which may be susceptible to glitches, battery failure, or misplacement.

An example of the Plickers tool used in the classroom was during a teaching presentation on manufactured fibers for freshman and sophomores in fashion merchandising and design. After a short lecture on three common non-cellulosic manufactured fibers, students were asked to inspect a garment and work backwards to determine the type of fiber in the garment construction. The students were given four choices and asked to respond using their Plicker card. This offered an anonymous response and a chance for the instructor to gauge if the information about manufactured fibers was synthesized and applied to a majority of the class.

While Plickers are appropriate for immediate questions and feedback in class, Flipgrid, a video response tool, is best used for out of class assignments to reinforce what is occurring within class meetings. Students are given a prompt or question and asked for responses that are 90 seconds or

less. Flipgrid has been used for article critiques, reflections, and applications of course content. The instructor is the only individual to have an account while students can access through a unique hashtag or link. Students can use smartphones, tablets, or laptops to record their responses and are able to record multiple times until they are happy with the response. While not a substitute for written assignments Flipgrid acts as a compliment and an alternative avenue for reflections and synthesizing thoughts. In addition, it helps students begin to hone their public speaking skills without having to stand in front of the entire class. Flipgrid is low stakes, as students are able to practice with the technology and provides a platform for reserved students to have a voice in the overall conversation of the class.

For Flipgrid, fashion merchandising students in a junior and senior level apparel economics course were given a prompt about the product life cycle theory and asked to choose an innovative apparel product and describe its journey through the four stages. After reviewing the video responses it was clear that many students were not describing the products journey through the “product life cycle theory” but instead were discussing products coming into trend and fading out of trend. Because of this the instructor was able to revisit this topic in class and spend time clearing up the confusion. Without this Flipgrid assignment it would have been very difficult to identify that there was a breakdown between the course content and many student’s grasp of that topic.

Between the many ways these technology tools can be applied and the multiple benefits from each, there is room for increased use and application across courses and disciplines. Millennials are increasingly social and technologically savvy thus educators should use tools to promote learning as a social activity (Sela, 2013). Using technology in the classroom should serve a pedagogical purpose matched with the learning objectives of a course and needs to be used early and often throughout the semester (Light, 2011). Even simple technological tools take a learning curve and time to become familiar. Remaining patient and diligent while implementing technology in the classroom can have great payoffs.

References

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