

Running Head: STUDENT VIEW OF TECHNOLOGY

Student View of Technology In and Out of the Classroom

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According to Dr. David Thornburg (Laureate, 2004), characteristics of today's students in terms of technology appears to be dichotomous with the average adult. Yesterday's student processed information piece by piece, one step at a time, read text material and viewed images as support material, took a more or less passive stance in respect to education, exercised considerable patience in gathering information, and looked upon the introduction of technology with a jaundiced eye. Thornburg paints an almost entirely opposite portrait of today's student. The average young person sitting in our classrooms processes many bits of information at once from multiple sources, sees images as more important than text, takes a random, yet active approach to problem solving, seeks instant gratification for his or her efforts, and considers technology a tool for everyday living. Whereas the teen of the latter part of the 20th century used transistor radios to escape the real world, today teens are using myriad pocket-sized gadgets for communication and entertainment far beyond their parents' wildest dreams. Anyone can access almost anywhere in the world in a moment's time, live and in color.

Even the youngest educators find it difficult to comprehend the technological advancements within their lifetime. And, now the lifetime of the average gadget is probably less than the shelf-life expectancy of the batteries used to operate the thing. Casual observance and comparison of Sunday sales flyers over the past couple of years indicate that rapid obsolescence is not only expected but accepted. More innovative means of getting information and entertainment to people exist than ever before with more peripheral attachments or additions than ever imagined at affordable pricing. Sales and marketing gimmicks target every age group bringing everyone more in tune with future technology.

Middle school classrooms are full of students who were born into a world that already had computers and Internet access. As a 6th grade Inclusion teacher, I have to realize that every child I come in contact with thinks technology has been around “forever.” They question step-by-step pencil and paper operations because they know a few well-placed jabs of a finger on a cell phone or calculator can generate the same answers quicker and more efficiently. They do not always understand why this is, but know it works, quicker with a lot less fuss. Educators see the world through a different pair of eyes and insist upon students learning the steps to time honored procedures. Students just want to get the answer and press on to new, more interesting things. Technology allows them to access entertainment, communication, and education simultaneously – and educators cringe at such notions.

Of the eight characteristics, Dr. Thornburg attributes to today’s students, I could select any of them and find direct correlations to the students I work with every day. Four that stand out and were supported by the survey done for this week’s discussion are: parallel versus linear processing of information, random exploration versus methodical approaches, absence of patience for delayed gratification, and technology as friend versus foe. Everything Dr. Thornburg mentioned about his eight points is true of contemporary secondary students. These four attributes are particularly true. Levin and Arafah (2002) support Thornburg with the notion that “these students have been online for five or six years already; they are technologically literate (p.1).” As such, they are capable of multitasking in ways never before conceived possible. All three purport that between a third and a half of today’s students are Internet savvy and becoming technologically-elite. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills §126.1-3 outline technological applications to be taught to students in grades K-5. By the time students reach middle school, they are already comfortable with basic computer operations and Internet Web site applications.

Only a handful of students I see in 6th grade math classes, seem to have the patience to proceed step by step in carrying out their problem solving. Most jump head first into the murky depths of whatever task is given and attempt to derive an answer using the shortest path possible. This invariably drives their teachers totally bonkers as they repeatedly insist upon step-by-step order of operations solutions. The routine response to a teacher's interrogative, "Where is your work?" is the student's truthful reply, "I did it in my head."

We live in a drive-through window society bent on instant gratification. Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) testing do little to improve the situation, as the multiple-guess format provides the answer. All the student has to do is pick the right one. Groomed by a "looks good – feels good" environment, students in the habit of "doing it in their heads" develop an "oh, well, better luck next time" mentality. The world is changing so quickly around them, many have no idea what they intend to do for a livelihood. A hundred years ago, a young man would aim his sights on farming or industry; a young lady on homemaking or teaching or perhaps a secretarial position. Now a life like George Jetson at Spacely Sprockets appears to be a viable solution. While the average educator still does not view such a prospect as reality, students do. The sky is no longer the limit. New worlds are discovered all the time; science facts are being proved erroneous. The only constant is change, and change is changing faster than education can keep up in order to prepare students for success in life. In the midst of it all, technology advances at alarming rates and today's students are adapting to the changes alarming well. Note passing is done via text messaging and cell phones with alarms only kids and stray dogs can hear. Internet and e-mail are becoming passé. Blogs and vlogs and virtual study groups are popping up everywhere, and the average educator is not savvy enough to keep up with their clientele.

Laws and common sense tell us we need to differentiate, and technology suggests we need to do it differently – so differently we do not yet know how. Meanwhile, students fidget at their desks, multitasking beyond the scope or understanding of their teachers, communicating across the hall with virtual airplanes soaring through cyberspace at the speed of electrons and photons. Why is that kid smirking like that? Maybe it is a reflection of an inadvertent expulsion of gas resulting from last night's burritos. Most likely, it is in response to an instant message from a kid in another building – or another campus. Thanks to things like Google Translator, collaborative or disruptive communication can come and go on a global scale.

References

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- Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Title 19, Part II. Chapter 126. *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Technology Applications* (§126.1, 126.2, and 126.3). Elementary (K-5) TEKS for Technology Applications.