



The EdTechEnergy Podcast

Episode 8: How does technology empower student engagement?



Whether you are a teacher who uses a lot of technology in the classroom, or one who uses a small amount of technology in the classroom, I believe we can all agree, technology in our classrooms is here to stay, especially since the situation we all found ourselves in March 2020 when everything we did in our classroom had to turn digital to reach our students.

Let's go over today five of the main reasons why technology has the power to empower our students' learning and their education in ways no other elements give it any competition.

INTRO

To use technology in the classroom, takes A LOT from a teacher. It takes the teachers' time to review different Edtech tools and websites and consider how they'll work in alignment with our instructional styles, our content, the learning outcomes, and our, more importantly, students. And after we review these EdTech tools, then, we need to learn those tools. We read guides, watch tutorials on YouTube, search for cheat sheets, or take professional development sessions based on how to use a specific EdTech tool in the classroom. In addition to the time, we allot and invest, learning new EdTech tools also takes our patience, because I can say even for me, being a teacher who embraces technology fully since 2006 in my classroom, there are always obstacles, problems, glitches, and trial and error episodes until I find comfort and competence inside of any EdTech tool.

And why do we do all this? Easy. So, we can use the technology in ways that drive and empower student learning. We have in mind future positive outcomes for all our time, learning, and patience we put into the EdTech tool before we even introduce it to our students.

So why continue to invest time learning new EdTech to use in our classrooms? Well, the answer is pretty simple. Our students. It is safe to say, our society is media-laden. There are images everywhere. Videos on our phones and devices, 24/7. And the media is taking different forms, like infographics, stories, games, digital escape rooms, virtual field trips, video discussions, interactive lessons, reels, posts, tweets, and pins.



We, as people in this very “media-fied” state are becoming comfortable with communication in ways that are different from having a conversation with another human being or using tactile and static props and materials for learning such as textbooks, notebooks, blackboards, and chalk.

For example, let me describe to you what my education was like in the 70s. We walked into a classroom and sat down at individual desks. We had our textbooks, one for each class period. I usually had a paper notebook for each class, a folder to keep my papers, and plenty of pens, pencils, and highlighters. Yes, I carried a pencil case with me every year of my K-12 education. What did class look like? For the 45-minute period, no, we did not have block scheduling, there was the teacher standing in front of the class teaching us by talking to us, about what we were learning that day. We were reading out of our textbooks, writing in our notebooks or on worksheets the teacher passed out to the students. I loved the smell of the purple ink on mimeographed worksheets. I’m wondering how many teachers reading this blog post never heard of “mimeograph”? HA!

And on special days, the teacher wheeled into the classroom the film camera cart, and we got to watch a movie projects on a cloth screen at the front of the classroom. What else was in the classroom during class? The teacher wrote with chalk on the blackboard. That's all I can remember. I don't remember working in groups, I don't remember pair and shares, I don't remember interactive manipulatives, interaction with the content outside of turning pages in my textbook, and the movies which were a treat only once a month since teachers had to put in orders for the movies and then receive them in the mail to the school.

Can you imagine how bored our students would be in our classrooms if they learned the way I learned in the 70s”, almost 50 years ago for me? There were no computers or laptops in the classroom because they weren't available. There were no interactive whiteboards. And I really don't remember any different kind of learning activities outside of my teacher talking to us, writing down notes, going to the board to solve math problems, and completing worksheets. But I didn't know any better, so I was OK with it. And yes, I was a straight-A student, I would have probably made any learning environment work for me.

Today, teachers and students are in a position where our instruction, their learning, and the showcase of their learning really have exponential possibilities. It is almost overwhelming to know where to start when integrating technology since there are so many options, techniques, and many details we need to know to make the EdTech work the way we not only want it to work but need it to work. We are so lucky that the advances in education and what we can offer our students are literally at our fingertips. It’s so advanced, and that advancement could inundate our school planning, creation, and



delivery of instruction, student learning, and assessment. And these advances can tend to give us as teachers feeling of FOMO, fear of missing out and not being able to keep up. And what doesn't help is that these EdTech tools keep updating, adding new features and ways to use their technology.

We as teachers have many different ways to integrate technology in our classrooms to engage our students and empower our learning. I'm grateful for knowing how I learned so I can put today's classroom in the right appreciative perspective. I'm grateful because I appreciate all that we have in today's classroom, whether we teach in a physical, hybrid, hyflex, or virtual. Teachers have so many different EdTech tools and strategies when using those tools to bring our content to life. Back in the '70s, the only ways to give our content life was to talk about it, watch a movie, show a still picture or look at pictures and text in textbooks or handouts, read the writing on the blackboard, listening to a guest speaker or going on a field trip. Wow, how education has changed in the past 50 years makes our vocation extremely demanding in keeping up with all the digital options.

Let's go over today five of the main reasons why media has the power to empower our students' learning and their education in ways no other elements give it any competition.

If you are multitasking, I want you to come back to me. And I'll be mentioning a lot of EdTech tools in today's episode and know I'll include all the links to these tools in this episode's show notes were you can access at edtechenergy.org/listen8 or melanie.education/listen8

The first reason? You probably guessed it; **the media in the technology** brings an energy like no other in the classroom. Let's define everything that can be described and considered media: Still pictures, moving pictures like movies, infographics, charts, graphs, videos, animation, colors, font styles, music, narration, games, publications, blogs, podcasts, television content, radio content, internet content such as websites, and newspaper content.

Media is powerful because it appeals to our students. It grabs their attention and can deliver meaning, understanding, and content a lot quicker than reading the same content from text without visuals. The comfort students have with media can also ripple over in providing comfort to students when they are in our content if we use media in lessons, assignments, and assessments. Grabbing their attention, making concepts easier to digest and understand, and setting our students to feel comfortable with the content because of the media we deliver all help students to engage in the content almost organically.

I remember when I taught at the middle school level, I wanted to test the power of media out in a compare and contrast writing assessment I gave my seventh-grade students. One



class of students was given a textual prompt: Explain how the music your parents listened to at your age is different or similar to the music you listen to now. The writing from the students in this first class was OK, but nothing great. Then with my second class, I showed them a video clip of Elvis Presley singing and dancing to Jailhouse Rock before I read the prompt to the students. I explained to my seventh graders that when my mom was a teenager, she liked Elvis Presley and she thought he was a good dancer. Now you can only imagine the expressions on my students' faces after they watched Elvis gyrate in the video clip. It was literally one of the best memories of my 18 years in education. And then I went on to explain to the students what I thought about my mom's music compared to the music I listened to as a teenager. What was the result? The students' writing in the second class was more on-point, richer, more vivid, and super descriptive in word choice than the students who got the prompt in text form only. I learned back in 2007, if I didn't put media into everything I did in the classroom with students, I'm not going to have as much fun grading assignments as I did with that particular student writing. Media can inspire and ignite the best from our students.

The second reason why technology can be a powerful influencer for student engagement is the **access and curation** of the media. What do I mean by curation? Well, let's think about what we learned during spring 2020 virtual learning. The smaller number of clicks gave higher results in students attending our virtual classes and completing and submitting their work. We found out pretty quickly, having everything from the bellringer to the exit ticket on one online page created a dynamic where students were less confused, stressed, and overwhelmed. Everything was in one place so access to the instruction, student learning activities, and the assignments and assessments weren't a big deal. The same is true about the technology we integrate into our lessons. When we curate the technology, having everything in one place encourages engagement for our students since it makes the learning experience a "one-stop-shop". And when we consider access, if a student has a device and interconnectivity, he has access to our content 24/7, unlike my days in school when I had to be in the classroom with the teacher to have access to the content outside my textbook, notebook, and folder of worksheets.

For example, Flipgrid video discussions are an innovative example of how teachers can curate a lot of technology in one space inside a Flipgrid video discussion. Teachers can add a video, image, gif, emoji, a Microsoft 365 document, a Google document, a Nearpod interactive lesson, a Kahoot game, even a Flipgrid, and more. Teachers direct students with a link or code to the Flipgrid video discussion, and their students find an engaging lesson with all the moving technology parts in one place.

Additionally, a Nearpod Interactive lesson is also a great place where you can curate everything from websites to PDFs, to collaborate, boards, polls, questions, slides,



simulations, virtual field trips, narration, 3D experiences, and more. And when everything is at one spot, engagement happens effortlessly because students are not stressed because they know where to go to access the content, the learning, and the task at hand.

The third reason technology is a booster for student engagement is due to the interaction opportunities technology brings to student. Technology provides the opportunity for students to interact with the content, and in this way, the content has a life of its own. Students can click, choose, draw, narrate, manipulate, add text, hover, record, sort, answer, and more with digital content and the features of the digital content. In a way, the content becomes tactical in a streamlined way for students. And this interaction has a natural way for students to feel that they “own” the content because they can do with it what they choose to do. This interaction appeals to their senses, especially if they are kinesthetic learners. Trial and error happen readily when students can interact with the content, make choices, and see the results.

For example, when I taught computer science, students could write their code and test it out immediately in codecademy and Runestone interactive. This trial-and-error system makes learning real-time and engaging since the feedback was there for the student instantly. Students can experience the same type of immediate feedback of their actions when they are performing virtual simulations and science experiments. Or, when they are creating a video for their English Arts or an interactive infographic using Thinglink in their social studies classes. Or, using digital media software like Photoshop in art classes has transformed the type of art hanging in our school halls when we print them out for others to admire.

The fourth reason why technology makes our content much more engaging to students is that it gives our content the **FUN FACTOR**. Students can do a lot more with our content when we integrate technology than when I learned the content in the '70s. And there are so many ways we can interject fun into our instruction, student learning, and their assessments. For example, Kahoot games have been one of the EdTech raves during the pandemic. Many teachers who did not even know what Kahoot, started using Kahoot during virtual learning and now use it on a regular basis, mostly for test review.

Integrating instructional videos into lessons is another sure way students are engaging in the content way better than if we are talking the content to them. And, because of this, teachers across the world are creating their own instructional videos and using a lot of creativity in doing it. Learning Management Systems (LMSs) such as Canvas, D2L, and Moodle are offering students many different ways to hand in assignments. For example, in one assignment, students can submit it using text, a document file, an audio recording, or a webcam recording. 3D imagery is really taking visual media to a whole new level. As mentioned before, Nearpod allows us to ad 3D imagery into interactive lessons, and apps



such as Lifeliqe have made learning science concepts and virtual reality experience. Fluid Math makes handwriting turn into animation and works so well in Microsoft OneNote. Two awesome examples of how technology can make learning fun is Rosetta Stone and Duo Lingo in the world language classroom.

The fifth reason why technology is a nutrient to student engagement is the force technology has in building community. Whether we are inviting our students into online discussions in our LMS or Flipgrid, group projects using GoogleDocs, Trello, or other collaborative EdTech creation tools, or peer reviews on assignments that can be easily done inside of LMSs, or a class social media account, breakout rooms in Microsoft 365 Teams, Collaboration spaces in Microsoft OneNote, backchannels like Mentimeter, collaboration spaces like Padlet, global collaborations using Skype to bring classrooms located in different parts of the world, students can work, create, communicate, collaborate, and share together. Offering technology experiences where students can develop their communication, collaboration, and soft skills definitely benefits our students at all grade levels.

When our technology brings students together, again, it naturally feels good to the students since we as humans want to feel like we belong to an entity outside of ourselves, whether that be a family, community, class, team, club, or other organization.

Integrating technology into your instruction, student learning, and assessment is an instinctive way to stimulate students to become engaged in our content. The media, access, and curation of media, interaction, fun factor, and community-building that technology brings our students appeals to them, stimulates them, grabs their attention, humors them, and gives them a group to belong to in school.

Is there a single better way than technology to engage our students? I say not. Integrating technology with our students' engagement in mind can be the ultimate component to increase student participation, interest, attendance, and achievement in your classroom.

Please comment below—What technology integration victories do you have in your classroom?

Share your ideas in the comments below. Or share them on social media and tag @EdTechenergy. I would love to read all your technology integration magic!

Next week's podcast topic: What stops engagement in its tracks in our classroom after we put so much time into lesson planning?

And now, I want to let you know of a BIG DEAL I'm offering secondary teacher who teach grades 6-12.



From June 15-30, 2021, I am running a Founding Member sale to enroll in my new 6-week secondary teacher professional development online course, *Engagement is the Name of the Gain*, starting on August 2, 2021, and runs to September 12, 2021. We will be doing your school prep for the new 2021-2022 school year in my teacher PD online course. And as a bonus, enroll at the price of \$99 from June 15-30, 2021, and become a Founding Member in my first launch of the course. As a Founding Member, you'll receive a BONUS valued at \$228 for a FREE FULL-YEAR EdTech Group Coaching Membership to EdTechEnergy Momentum after you complete the course. Each month in the Momentum membership, you'll receive a masterclass training, an EdTech tutorial with an EdTech template, and a Q&A session after we put into practice what we learned the first half of the month. Plus, there will be a private teacher community where you can get support and lots of ideas! Look for the link in the show notes to learn more. Remember, enroll by June 30th to get a \$228 value for \$99! And, you'll have 20+ EdTech tools and since enrollment gives you unlimited access to the course contents for the lifetime of the course, you'll get all the future updates on those EdTech tools as well!

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