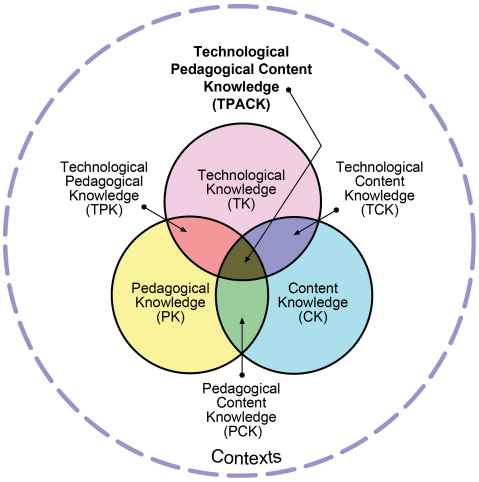
Technology: The Perfect Tool for Engaging Students(?)

I stumbled across the Michigan State Master of Educational Technology program thanks to a colleague who encouraged me to participate in the MSUrbanSTEM summer program in Chicago. I have always curious about how to use technology to help engage and teach my students better so I was excited to begin the program. I have learned and grown so much as an educator over my three year journey…and here I am finishing my master's degree!

It's safe to say that my initial goal of using more technology to improve student learning and engagement was too naïve and simplistic. However, there is still a place for technology with many potential benefits, even if it is not as easy as I originally believed. In short, I was thinking of incorporating technology in too strict of a manner. I have come to realize that technology is not limited to digital technology (such as iPads and laptops); any tools that are used to assist learning are considered technology and play an important role in student learning. (Mini whiteboards are still "in"!)

More importantly, your mindset as a teacher about how to incorporate technology matters tremendously. How the technology is used matters more than how much technology is used. Technology that essentially takes a worksheet and puts it online does not provide more meaningful educational experiences for students. However technology that lets students visualize a math concept in a new way, for example, is more useful. As a teacher, you should consider how the technology fits within your context, pedagogy and content that you're teaching. Adding technology for the sake of adding technology is not effective, but using technology to teach content in a way that otherwise wasn't possible is worthwhile. (For more info, read about the TPACK model by Mishra and Koehler).



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My use of technology in the classroom.
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The way I look at it now, technology should be used to increase the ways students can explore, create and share their mathematical learning and thoughts.
I look for ways to use technology to enhance my students' learning experiences. My goal is still to engage my students and help them better learn mathematics, using technology intentionally and purposefully to support the objective. A newer focus of mine is on helping my students become more self-sufficient learners, which technology can also support.

Overall, I hope I am able to help my students better persevere in problem solving, both now and in their lives ahead. Technology – in various forms – helps me teach my students more effectively, as long as I am purposeful about how it is used. Now, more than ever before, I feel called to share my knowledge about using technology in teaching with other teachers…we'll have to wait and see how that goes in the coming years!

My use of technology in the classroom.
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