

True technology integration starts with learning goals

By Tom Daccord March 19th, 2015

The real challenge is not integrating technology effectively. It's developing a vision for technology use...

The other day I was working with a group of elementary school teachers on lesson planning with technology. They were introducing some new vocabulary words to their fourth grade students and were looking for some ideas. As we began, they said very little and it was clear were expecting me to introduce some new tools and apps that they might adopt in their classrooms.

Instead, I asked them a question: How can you be sure that students **understand the vocabulary**? Over the next several minutes we discussed ways in which the teachers would be certain that students knew and understood the new vocabulary words. **One of the teachers** offered that if the students really understood a vocabulary word they would be able to find and identify a **relevant and appropriate picture** depicting the word. **Bloom: Simple Defn & Example**

Another mentioned that if the students understood the vocabulary word they **would be able to identify** a recorded description of the word amongst recordings of other words. So, we began our technology integration process by **envisioning learning activities** that would demonstrate student **mastery of curriculum content**.

We did not begin with an introduction of tools, but rather we identified learning goals appropriate to the curriculum content. With learning goals in mind, **we then started** to craft a lesson plan for learning the new vocabulary. **One suggestion** I offered was for the students to search online to find an **appropriate picture** depicting a particular vocabulary word and to place their picture up on the classroom wall. Students would also **record a description** of their particular word for other students to identify. **Bloom Taxonomy (Comprehension): Simple Definition & Concrete (Example) Image...**

Thus, the **lesson might involve** tacking up unidentified pictures of all the vocabulary words on the wall and having students attempt to identify them by listening to vocabulary descriptions recorded by classmates. Teachers could number the pictures on the wall and provide students with a document containing the numbers and a link to all the descriptions. The challenge for students would be to place the correct number beside the description of the word.

We then turned to a discussion of tools that could support us in creating an ideal learning environment for acquiring and understanding vocabulary. I brought them to **Vocaroo.com**, a **free and easy online recorder**, which allows computer users to record themselves and share the recording with others. (**An app equivalent for the iPad is Recorder HD.**) We discussed how we might accumulate and distribute all the recordings by putting links to them on a collaborative Google Doc. We discussed a few other logistical points & proceeded to finalize a lesson. (**Alternate: PC Sound Recorder**)

The process of identifying learning activities that would **prove** the students understood the vocabulary words was not an easy task for the teachers. But if we had not begun with a discussion of learning goals, we would have likely focused on tools and done so without a clear sense of purpose for using them.

The real challenge of integrating technology effectively is not the technology. It's developing a vision for technology use. In this case, the teachers were able to **create audio recordings with Vocaroo** in a matter of minutes. They were also able to **create and share** a collaborative Google Doc relatively quickly. But they struggled with envisioning ideal learning environments for demonstrating mastery of vocabulary. **But once they had a vision in mind they were able to use tools directly in the support of a clear learning goal.**

Not all tools are as easy as Vocaroo.com, and teachers certainly need to spend some time learning how particular web tools and apps function. **But in the world of EdTech today, far too much time is spent on discussing tools and their features and not enough on learning.** It's like the ship without a compass that meanders aimlessly across the sea. If you don't know where you're going how do you know you've arrived?

So let's spend time in discussion with teachers about their learning goals and how students will demonstrate their knowledge of curriculum content. Let's develop a vision of what students **should be able to do and how** we will help them get there. Let's use technology continually in ways that are thoughtful and directly in the service of learning.

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<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2015/03/19/learning-goals-665/>