**Education Best Practices in the Digital Age**

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In recent years, digital competency has been made a priority for teachers in the brick-and-mortar classroom, even before advances in online education.

As educational practices evolve, so must the classroom tools that we use as teachers. It is important to keep in mind that current
generations of students are more tech-savvy than ever before. It is not uncommon for most students to have computers, Internet access, and even fancier gadgets like the iPad.

Part of what we learn as students of education is that course content must be made relevant and accessible to those we teach. Because social media and other modes of technology are ubiquitous, it only makes sense for us to include these in our lessons, so students can effectively apply content to their electronic world.

The virtual educator

The emphasis on technology in the brick-and-mortar classroom opens up a wider discussion regarding how virtual instructors practice digital competency in their classrooms. The digital world will undoubtedly play a huge part in the future of our students, as well as in our own professional careers as educators. Below, is a list of three best practices that will help you succeed.

Best practices

1. Use a variety of digital methods to communicate with your students. You must create a mixture of asynchronous and synchronous communication. Because virtual educators may never meet their students face-to-face, varied and frequent communication builds strong teacher-student relationships. Below, are some communication methods to consider:
* E-mail
* Text message
* Create an educational blog
* Phone call
* Skype-like software

But through the digital transformation and the rise of educational technology, teachers have begun making drastic changes to their instruction, assessments, even the physical make-up of their classrooms, and at a much faster rate than expected. These current trends are making headlines in education because of the ways in which they are impacting student learning:

**Augmented Reality / Virtual Reality / Mixed Reality**

Gone are the days where students are expected to sit quietly at their desks. Educational technology is succeeding in making learning collaborative and interactive. Augmented, virtual, and mixed reality are examples of transformative technology that enhance teacher instruction while simultaneously creating immersive lessons that are fun and engaging for the student.  Virtual reality has the capability of bringing the outside world into the classroom and vice versa. Apps such as [Unimersiv](http://www.thetechedvocate.org/20-top-virtual-reality-apps-that-are-changing-education/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) can transport students to ancient Greece, while [Cospaces](http://www.thetechedvocate.org/20-top-virtual-reality-apps-that-are-changing-education/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) allows students to share their virtual creations with the world. Wilkes University online adjunct professor and independent educational technologist [Kathy Schrock](https://www.eschoolnews.com/2017/01/02/hot-edtech-trends-2017/) concludes virtual reality has the potential to increase visual literacy, technology literacy, and attention to audience. The idea of combining AR/VR/MR is highly anticipated. Take, for example, the privately owned company Magic Leap. Even though it has yet to really sell anything*,*[Magic Leap is already valued at four and a half billion dollars](https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2017/01/18/11-Ed-Tech-Trends-to-Watch-in-2017.aspx?Page=1)! This speaks to the projected endless possibilities of technology transforming classrooms.

**Classroom Set of Devices**

Schools are moving away from BYOD, or bring your own device, and students no longer have to go to the technology lab for access to a computer or laptop. Recent years have shown an increase in classroom sets of computers that was made possible in part by federal funding. Title I schools have received funds via [The Every Student Succeeds Act](http://www.nclr.org/issues/education/k-12/essa/federal-advocacy), and several grants and donations have outfitted classrooms all over the country with iPads and laptops for each student. [Google Chromebooks](http://www.cnbc.com/2015/12/03/googles-chromebooks-make-up-half-of-us-classroom-devices.html) account for over half of the devices in US classrooms. In 2014, [more than three million Chromebooks](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/marketplace-k-12/half_of_k-12_students_to_have_access_to_1-to-1_computing_by_2015-16_1/) were used in educational institutions. As that number continues to grow, so does the need for increased focus on programs that teach digital citizenship skills. Today’s pervasive online environment poses exciting possibilities, ones that necessitate students are properly educated on [cyber safety](https://www.iste.org/explore/articleDetail?articleid=627&category=ISTE-Connects-blog&article=)) and individual responsibility.

The Top 6 Trends For Digital Transformation In Education

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**Redesigned Learning Spaces**

Walk into most classrooms across the country and it’s unlikely you’ll find rows of desk all pointing toward the front of the room. Educators have since realized their classrooms must mimic the workforce, which has inspired them to create collaborative-friendly spaces to facilitate student learning. The onboarding of technology has supported their endeavor. 21st century classrooms are SMARTboards instead of chalkboards and pods of SMARTdesks instead of individual seating. Students are going on virtual field trips instead of merely reading from a text; they are creating media instead of just looking at it. The redesigned learning space is laden with integrated technology, which means students aren’t just using these things, but they are understanding *how* to use them in order to achieve a specific goal. Moreover, some of these learning spaces aren’t even in the classroom. Colleges and universities are creating more informal campus learning spaces because they understand the importance of creating and collaborating 24/7, not just when class is in session.

**Artificial Intelligence**

The use of AI in higher education has already proven useful. [Australia’s Deaken University](https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2017/01/18/11-Ed-Tech-Trends-to-Watch-in-2017.aspx?Page=2) used IBM Watson to create a virtual student advisory service that was available 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Watson’s virtual advisors fielded more than 30,000 questions in the first trimester, freeing up the actual advisors to handle more advanced issues. Another use for AI includes chatbots. Because chatbots are equipped with Natural Language Progression, as found in Siri, they have the human capability of answer questions about homework, helping students through a paperwork process like financial aid or paying bills, and easing the workload of the people who would normally serve these roles. Other applications of AI in education include personalizing learning (which is discussed in more detail below), evaluating the quality of curriculum and content, and facilitating one-on-one tutoring with the use of [Intelligent Tutoring Systems](https://www.aaai.org/ojs/index.php/aimagazine/article/view/2518/2401). Technology doesn’t aim to replace teachers, only to complement them.

**Personalized Learning**

We are able to personalize learning more now than ever. From school choice — public, private, charter, virtual — to the options available for *how* a student learns, education can be tailor-made to suit each individual. [Blended learning](https://www.eschoolnews.com/2017/01/02/hot-edtech-trends-2017/3/) gives more responsibility to the student, as it involves less direct instruction from the teacher and more discovery-based methods of learning. Blended learning is an example of how students can control certain elements of their learning by making decisions about things like where and at what pace they move through material. Adaptive learning is similar to blended in that it, too, allows students to make decisions about things like the timeframe and path of their learning. Adaptive learning technology collects information about student behavior as they’re answering questions, and then subsequently uses that information to provide instant feedback in order to adjust the learning experience accordingly. Educational tools with adaptive SEQUENCE continually analyze student data in real-time and make split second decisions based on that data. It automatically changes what comes next in a sequence, be it altered content or a different order of skills, in response to how student a student is performing. Another learning platform, [Osmosis](http://virtuallyinspired.org/portfolio/osmosis/), was created by doctors for doctors and has revolutionized the way medical students study: “Using evidence-based educational concepts such as questions, flashcards, and videos, images correlated with memory anchors, adaptive spaced repetition, collaborative learning and gamification, Osmosis maximizes learning and retention.” Such personalization is turning education into a “choose-your-own-adventure” method of learning, capitalizing on student interest and engagement.

**Gamification**

Playing and learning collide when classrooms utilize gaming as an instructional tool. [Gaming technology](https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2017/01/18/11-Ed-Tech-Trends-to-Watch-in-2017.aspx?Page=3) makes learning difficult subject matter more exciting and interactive. As the technology progresses, it is quickly being used to enhance educational games in every discipline. Drexel University’s Senior Vice President of Online Learning, Susan Aldridge, [credits these games](https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2017/01/18/11-Ed-Tech-Trends-to-Watch-in-2017.aspx?Page=3) with mirroring real life issues, requiring students to use a valuable skillset to solve them: “These virtual game worlds provide a unique opportunity to apply new knowledge and make mission-critical decisions, while identifying obstacles, considering multiple perspectives and rehearsing various responses.” Because these games are designed to provide immediate feedback, students are intrinsically motivated to keep playing them, honing skills throughout.

New technology and new learning models are exciting and offer previously unthinkable possibilities to students, but they require constant IT support. As educational institutions continue to jump on the bandwagon and adopt these digital transformation trends, we must consider the current paradigm for technology instruction and move toward a team-based approach. As student expectations increase, responsiveness to those needs must increase as well.