

TehnoSped on the Move

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Abstract

As educators, we recognize that a paradigm shift is taking place in American education: teachers are embracing models of instruction that are radically different from traditional educational approaches. Instructor-centered teaching methods that focus on the performance of instructors are giving way to active student-centered teaching and learning methods. Learning outcomes have become the measuring rod for quality instruction. More new media and technologies have become the tools facilitating this change (Howell et al, 2000).

As the coordinator of the special education program at Alcorn State University, the realization of integrating technology into instruction is not just something discussed in class and forgotten, but a goal for each pre-service teacher at Alcorn State University. Students majoring in special education recognize that the life of today's special educator is complex. To survive as teachers, they will need to be resourceful, reflective artist of learning, and provide enlightening and entertaining learning opportunities for students.

To this end, the learning circle model, developed by Margaret Riel (1990), was used to explore learning issues pertaining to special education and technology. This concept is based on the constructivist approach, where technology is seen as a tool with which learners think, and learn (Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999).

Students enrolled in (PH 326) Psychology of Exceptional Children and (PH 224) Adolescent Psychology at Alcorn State University, partnered with students in special education at Franklin County Middle School. The major purpose for the partnership was to explore how technology can best be used as a tool for facilitating learning of targeted skills and remediation of deficiencies in reading, mathematics, and life skills.

Pre-service teachers were required to establish e-mail Buddy Partnerships with the students, engaging them in online discussion of books read, providing corrective feedback on students' writing through e-mail messages and use the Internet to find lessons to reinforce skills taught by the special education teacher. The lessons were reviewed by the professor for the course and returned to the pre-service teacher to e-mail to their Buddy. The assignments were completed by the special education student and e-mailed to the pre-service teacher to be graded. The results were then e-mailed to the classroom teacher and to the special education students.

In addition to completing the e-mailed assignments, the middle grade students (grades 6-8th) were required to rotate in groups among learning centers containing different assignments and activities they could complete with the aid of technologies such as the computer, calculator, reading pens, the Internet and other curriculum software.

Establishing the learning circle served a two-fold purpose of enabling us to explore how technology can enhance learning in the classroom at both university and K-12 levels, and to provide environments in which pre-service teachers learn to become technology-using teachers. As a result of this project, faculty and teachers are rethinking their teaching strategies and exploring a model of teacher education that involve stronger university-K-12 collaboration and technology use in the classroom.