Teachnology 2020: My Journey from Tech-Savvy to Tech-Skilled

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"Build the plane while you're flying it"

The quote from Walker (2016) perfectly sums up my feeling from when I transitioned to online teaching in the middle of an ongoing semester and the beginning of a pandemic. The lesson plans seemed inadequate, technological tools were imposed, and the reality of Covid-19 infecting colleagues and undergraduate learners in Bangladesh pointed towards an uncertain future. Suddenly, a tech-savvy community of teachers and learners frequenting social media by making videos and sharing live events started transforming into a tech-skilled community where using learning management systems (LMS) and video conferencing tools became regular practice. Teachers like me, who occasionally used LMS and mostly adapted online materials, began training and watching software tutorials to develop their emerging e-teacher self. However, without spontaneous learner feedback in online classes, my journey started as a one-sided pursuit of teaching expertise. Days and nights were spent preparing student-centered lessons with audio-visual rich materials. Still, I missed crucial steps in the preparation stages. For example, while turning quizzes into online games, I overlooked either the contextual value of the content or the user-friendliness of technological tools. Naturally, lesson hurdles like forced responses became more frequent than spontaneous interaction. It became demotivating to the extent where I started to reevaluate my teaching approaches. Then, one day, a learner shared his frustrations of being quarantined during the pandemic and acknowledged my classes as a distraction as it comes with the challenge of learning new tools. The isolated recognition of tools made me think, "Have I focused more on the tools rather than the pedagogy?"

An attempt to assimilate technology took me to the seven domains of the TPACK framework (Herring et al., 2016), which include content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), technological knowledge (TK), pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), technological content knowledge (TCK), technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), and technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). This framework was devised to prioritize the content and teaching method in order to ensure the proper use of technology online. My pedagogical skills became structured by exploring these domains. While TCK helped to identify suitable websites and videos for content, PCK allowed me to contextualize, customize and reflect on the content. TK was applied by simplifying application usage, checking device compatibility, and identifying learner preferences. Gradually, a pursuit for excellence in online teaching turned into a quest for skillful online facilitating.

Objectives

Teachers can use this story to:

- Maintain a balance between technological and pedagogical practices;
- Help e-teacher selves to flourish;
- Make online learning and teaching experience more comfortable.

Practical Implications

By reflecting on classroom experiences through TPACK (Herring et al., 2016), I have provided some guidelines below. These guidelines can be used as a rubric by teachers.

1. Online classes may limit non-verbal cues and gestures from teachers to some extent. Therefore, content presentation can help to redirect learners' attention. Topic related podcasts, videos, and websites may increase their responsiveness. For example, Window-Swap (https://window-swap.com/) can be useful to teach descriptive composition as it allows viewing any part of the world from someone's window.
2. Besides content, interactive tools for giving tasks and instruction may increase learner motivation. For example, Kahoot and Quizizz can turn a regular test into a game where participants can compete in real time.
3. A crucial requirement for apps is getting to know their learner-friendliness. Teachers can request for a trial student account in their institution's LMS

which will help them see through learners' eyes. For example, when I discovered that the recording feature in Google Meet was unavailable for students, I suggested an external recorder like Apowersoft or AZ Screen Recorder.

4. Despite a learner-centered approach, virtual classrooms have unforeseen issues. For example, videos lagging and buffering can hinder tasks during live classes. Sometimes, the playback speed of the YouTube video can be reduced, or parts of the video skipped by pressing number keys. By anticipating possible obstacles, alternative steps can be planned by following websites like Practical Ed Tech (https://practicaledtech.com/), which are dedicated to sharing online teaching essentials.
5. Modern teaching approaches involve both instructions about content and related technology. Giving a task comes with additional responsibility of giving a small tutorial about the online submission process. The available tutorials are less effective for non-native learners sometimes, with generic contents for an international audience and English language instruction. Bite-size video tutorials prepared by the teacher may support specific and localized contexts. Since 2020, I have made tutorials about using Google Classroom and shared them with students through a YouTube channel.
6. Personalized instruction may be futile if it does not match the learners' context. We need to connect learners' current technological knowledge with the pedagogical technological knowledge. For example, Learners can use their skill of tagging someone on Facebook to tag a classmate in Google Classroom (https://youtu.be/VkSYS94TD_k) as the process is quite similar.
7. Along with context, learners' initial adjustment with apps is also required. Non-graded parts in the beginning of online forms, the use of familiar apps, and similar patterns of questions can reduce learners' fear of tools.
8. Learner discomfort may stem from device discrimination. Some learners use the latest laptop or iPhone models, whilst others opt for Android phones. Surveys about their access to devices and internet applications in the beginning of a course could be helpful.

Reflective Conclusion

Sustainability in online teaching comes from the teachers, not the tools. Therefore, I developed the e-teacher self through the support of the TPACK framework (Herring et al., 2016). Both experienced and novice teachers, who review and explore their teaching skills, may benefit from following this quest. For me, the next phase of this journey will be a collaborative one, whereby learners make video tutorials and conduct group discussions about their experiences too. Moreover, I will work on improving online pedagogy through sharing training sessions with colleagues and peers. Establishing a comfort-rich environment in the online classroom before employing a tech-rich environment should be the ultimate goal of my *teachnology*.

References

Herring, M. C., Koehler, M. J., & Mishra, P. (2016). Handbook of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) for educators (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Walker, R. (2016, March 24). 'Build the plane while you're flying it'. The Christian Science Monitor. https://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/The-Home-Forum/2016/0324/Build-the-plane-while-you-re-flying-it

About the Author

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Link to presentation on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKH7t0BOIhM