

Getting Students Fully Involved – Reverse Mentoring

by Nancy Knowlton

The comparison is often made today between students as digital natives and teachers as digital immigrants. This comparison recognizes that teachers are often new to technology. Most in-service teachers did not learn to use technology when they were in their teacher-training programs or their student-teaching placements. In fact, many teachers have only recently learned how to use e-mail and the Internet. For most, technology is not natural – it has to be learned from the ground up.



Students, on the other hand, have grown up in a world that is rich with technology. They have never known a time without computers and the multiple computing devices that are in most homes (even if these devices aren't recognized as computers). They are as familiar with using new technology tools as they are riding a bicycle – possibly more so. They don't need to be trained to use most technology – they simply dive in, use it and see what happens.

Tapping into the inherent strengths and interests of these digital natives can be good for both teachers and students as various technology products are introduced into everyday teaching and learning.

Start-Up and Shut-Down

Years ago, eager students used to stay behind and clean, draw lines on the chalkboard (to facilitate writing in a straight line) or do odd jobs for the teacher. Allowing students today to take responsibility for an important task such as starting up or shutting down the classroom technology components or systems is a great way to encourage responsibility and active participation in class. It can also be a great way for teachers to save their time for other important tasks that only they can do.

If a standard application is used at the start of each day, children can open that application, they can take attendance and they can undertake other routine tasks for the teacher.

Training Sessions

If you are holding an in-service or professional development day for teachers on technology, consider running a short session for students who might be eager to lend a hand in the classroom. These sessions can typically be shorter than a full teacher session. It often is enough to give students some general introduction to the features and functions of a tool or application, and then they will be able to explore and learn on their own.

Students may be able to count this training as community-service work or additional education. It's a nice extra that, besides being fun, can look good on a résumé.

Blurred Lines

As teaching in the 21st century moves from the sage-on-the-stage model to the guide-on-the-side, students can take on a greater leadership role in their learning. It takes a confident teacher to allow students to take more responsibility in the classroom. When the lines between teacher and student blur, learning can move to a new level.

SMART's Reverse Mentoring Approach

In early 2007, SMART started a reverse-mentoring trial program for students at schools using our products. We had seen first-hand how students were eager to not just learn more but actually contribute more in class. In some cases, students came from classes where teachers were proficient with technology generally and our products specifically. As they moved from one grade to the next, the students began supporting less knowledgeable teachers in their use of our products.

These development classes for students are available at www.smarttech.com at a variety of times. Once the training is complete, students are acknowledged as SMART trained. Schools and districts arrange for convenient times, most commonly after school but during the school day if this is more convenient. The one-hour sessions are conducted using Bridgit conferencing software, which supports voice, video and data conferencing.

For those schools and districts hosting on-site SMART training, a short session can be added to the end of the day for students.

Engaging. Fun. Trained. Capable. Included.

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