

# Communication Change in Education

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Technology has changed so much over time it now allows students to collaborate and learn from others outside the same classroom. According to Purdue University, “Traditionally, classrooms have been relatively isolated, and collaboration has been limited to other students in the same classroom or building. Today, technology enables forms of communication and collaboration undreamt of in the past.” This paper will show how communication has changed over time and the roll it is playing for students, staff, and parents, all thanks to technology.

Distance education has been around for a while, but what has changed is the way in which students can communicate when not bound to the classroom. Online education takes a shift away from traditional, classroom-based teaching activities typically associated with university education toward a technological realm where teaching requires the use of computers (Kaifi, 2009). Utilizing these distance education classes allows schools to enhance their offerings. The great thing about distance education is it makes learning accessible to students all day, every day, giving them immense control over their own learning schedules. Most college students today have grown up with the Internet, e-mail, and instant messaging, so it makes sense that the classroom settings would also utilize these resources. This allows for instant response using video chat and messaging tools allowing students to communicate no matter what part of the world they are located, instead of each student being in the same classroom at the same time.

Most schools are now well equipped with SmartBoards, online resources, and computers and can easily integrate online education in their existing programs (Kaifi, 2009). There is instructional value in using multiple tools in teaching to appeal to a variety of learners. Teachers have many different resources available to them and whether it is in the regular classroom setting or online, there is a learning curve. According to the article, there are some challenges related to course materials, organization, discipline, group dynamics, and the level of feedback. These

challenges however, seem to be ones that are not just for online classes, but also in the regular classroom. In order to prevent these problems, the instructor needs to have the class organized and ready before it even starts. They need to be able to set time aside to provide feedback and support, similar to what students would receive in a face-to-face classroom. Students taking online classes may need that personal connection with the instructor or other classmates to be beneficial.

Students are used to communicating through cell phones, Facebook, and Twitter and sometimes it is hard to tell if they even know how to talk in person. When it comes to learning however, students need to have human interaction of some sort. Having an effective online community with a solid curriculum structure and design is a key component of online courses. The goal is to create an online community that engages all levels of learning. Not being able to see facial expressions and other nonverbal cues can make it more challenging, but in having a strong, well-set up class curriculum, online classes can be every bit as beneficial as face-to-face classrooms. To provide students with a feeling of community, instructors provide a variety of tools.

Per the article, *Trends in Communication*, although online social media has now been around for more than a decade, many educators are still wary of adapting it into their programs. A survey in Spokane, Washington sums up the dilemma by saying, Social media is the proverbial blessing and curse: It can be a great tool for communication, but abuse is too easy. Sure, these new tools are useful; but managing and controlling content can be a headache, to say the least (Communication, 2013).” In the article, a few teachers gave their input as to how social media has changed education and the changes it will continue to make. Heather from the Bezier Middle School in Indianapolis, IN says it best, "Social media is the now as well as the future. If

we do not learn to adapt, we will lose our most necessary asset: our students. It is important that we continue to explore the different ways we can reach not only our current students/families but upcoming ones as well!” (Communication 2013).

There are many technology tools online that allow students to communicate and share ideas with each other and their teachers. Some teachers will set up their own website and share it with both students and parents. The website may consist of schedules, assignment due dates, and other important information. Class Dojo has become a popular website for teachers to hold students accountable for their behavior. This site allows teachers to keep track of any number of behaviors such as participation, teamwork, helping others, and many more. Students earn points when they show any of the various behaviors. Teachers and students can also add stories for only the student and their parent to see.

Another tool that is common, is an app called Seesaw that was developed by a professor at Dakota State University. Seesaw is a student-driven digital portfolio that allows students to document learning through photos, videos, drawings, text notes, links and PDFs. Students can upload their work and then it can be organized and available to teachers from any device or computer. Teachers are in full control; student work must be approved and then parents can see only their child’s work. With so many tools out there, the way teachers can communicate with both parents and students isn’t just limited to face-to-face.

A big change in communication however, is the increase in cell phone use. This is a topic that many schools are discussing because there are both pros and cons. With such a huge increase in technology and cell phone use, many teachers are looking for ways to use cell phones in the classroom in a beneficial and educational way. A Pilot Study was conducted in a pre-calculus course at Clarkstown High School South in West Nyack, NY. The student population

was eighteen junior and senior students and all but one student had a cell phone. According to the study, the phones were used in three different ways, as an audience response system, a research tool, and as a tool for collecting evidence of student work through pictures and video recording (Engel, 2011). By using it in various situations, teachers were allowing the students to see how cell phones can not only be a way to communicate with friends, but also a way to communicate with fellow students and teachers in the classroom.

Every teacher knows what professional development is and sometimes it can be incredibly beneficial and other times, not. With the increase in technology, teachers are pushing to make the best use. Many schools are opting to use professional development time to bring in guest speakers or trainers to show how to use technology to its fullest potential. Rather than just using technology, teachers are working to “be technology” and show students by modeling positive technology use in the classroom, applying technology across the curriculum, applying technology to problem-solving and decision-making in authentic learning environments, and applying technology to facilitate collaboration and cooperation among learners (Mills, 2003). This allows students to see how much more technology can do besides internet searches.

With so many schools now having some type of technology for students, teachers are finding a number of technology strategies that help communication not only between students, but also with parents. Parents who have access to information about their children's progress on a daily or weekly basis make better decisions about family activities to make time available for homework and special assistance (Davenport, 2004). Thanks to the change in technology, teachers can now be in constant contact with parents and are able to show what the students have been working on. Technology has opened the door not only to communication between classmates, but also between faculty and guardians.

Technology is all around schools today, and teachers are working to embrace and utilize these different systems. Communication has changed drastically not only in distance education, but also different tools in schools, along with parent contact. As technology continues to grow and change, our teachers will be at the forefront pushing students to change and adapt right alongside. The level of technology communication now seen in schools is only going to get better from here.

## Sources

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