ECI 546 Final Exam: TPCK, Goals, and Synthesis of Digital Literacies

Jessica Nelson

North Carolina State University

Punya Mishra and Matt Koehler (2008) said it best in their SITE Keynote on-line presentation, “teaching is messy.” As an 8th grade teacher I’m asked to design, instruct, and assess a curriculum comprised of six competency goals broken down into sixteen objectives, while creating a learning environment that is inclusive, safe, and nurturing, while incorporating and building upon student’s global citizenship skills, while promoting creativity, teaching of new Literacies, and reinforcing 21st century technology skills, while managing the day to day operations of teaching – parent communication, extra duty responsibilities, leadership responsibilities, maintenance of a classroom with 25 laptops, and let’s not forget grading student work and providing adequate, timely, and meaningful feedback. *Shewey*! Teaching is messy.

I appreciate the visual model of TPCK because with all the messiness of teaching, TPCK offers a reminder that there is a simplistic model for thinking about 21st century lesson design and instructional delivery within a 1:1 classroom setting. Mishra and Koehler state that there is no yellow brick road to teaching with technology; that with each new technological tool that I discover, I must take the time to play with the tool in order to determine its ability to be both effective and whole in the delivery of my content. Finding the time to play with new tools to determine educational value allows me to effectively plan a balanced lesson so that I can cater to the demanding Language Arts Curriculum while also finding ways to incorporate 21st century technology skills. Mishra and Koehler (2008) remind me to assess each technological tool I plan on using to determine its freshness, its ability to be unique, valuable, important, logical, and easily integrated in the content so that a learning experience that is both well crafted and whole can be created. I try to evaluate every new tool or technology I use with TPCK’s guidelines in mind. Nevertheless, sometimes, inevitably, I try a new tool with my students only to find out that I do have to take more time to fine tune, what Mishra and Koehler deem as the knob effect, in order to create a stronger TPCK balance. When the laptops were first delivered to Centennial Magnet Middle School (CCMMS), I felt as if I would have to reinvent every aspect of my pedagogy. Therefore, I really appreciate the confirmation from Mishra and Koehler that technology is not asking me to re-invent the pedagogical wheel. In fact, technological instruction is simply forcing me to tweak and rethink the methods behind content delivery and student assessment and therefore forcing me to retool the way I define student participation – and here so lies the very concept of my professional teaching goals.

I have three professional goals. First, reflect on traditional delivery and assessment methods and determine how to update these methods for a 1:1 setting. Second, understand, determine, and define the literacy skills students will need in order to learn within the modern 21st century methods of pedagogy I plan on using within the 1:1 setting. And finally my third goal is to create a learning environment that allows the digital native to explore, develop, and practice rudimentary literacies within new literacies.

I am very blessed at CCMMS to have a laptop for every student in my classroom because it is within this setting that I am able to develop my own talents and develop my own skills with technology, while also moving towards the accomplishment of each of my professional goals. For example, I currently have my students create final projects using Photo Story, Windows Movie Maker, or iMovie, so that they can present their final synthesis of research or their learning experience while also practicing new literacies like story boarding. This type of project based learning falls well within Jason Ohler’s guidelines for creative learning: the digital story. I also have assessments in which I ask my students to build websites, either from a Publisher template or from HTML code (this is student choice and surprisingly many students come into the classroom already equipped with the skills needed to write HTML code; I myself do not possess any knowledge of HTML) showcasing once again their learning experience. I strongly believe that project based learning such as the examples mentioned above must be incorporated into today’s classroom. However, I’m also aware of the need for my students to still practice EOG style assessments. So, for me, my greatest success over the past four years has been finding the magical balance between the formalized summative pencil and paper assessment and the project based technological assessment. Nevertheless, it is through PBL that technology is easiest to incorporate.

For my second and third professional goals, I have found my experience within the New Literacies in Global Learning at NCSU to be very valuable in my understanding of the need for new literacies in the classroom and in helping me to define and develop these new literacies. For example, in this class I greatly appreciated the exposure to Julie Coiro and Donald J. Leu, et al. I do believe that I need to move my Language Arts instruction in the direction of incorporating the National Institute of Literacy’s five facets or skills to literacy with the new literacy skills needed for reading non-linear text. Non-linear texts (websites) require a new set of facets or skills to literacy.

So far, through this course and my own professional experience, I can determine that there are new literacies I must focus on within teaching. For example, students need to know how to self assess when reading because students need to know when a hyperlink is worth the click that will move them away from the original reading. Furthermore, students need to know how to evaluate reliability, accountability, and relativity when researching on-line. As Coiro (2003) points out, today’s student-researcher has to move beyond the basic skills of research and evaluate within a glance the validity of online information, evaluate within a glance commercial propaganda and bias, fact versus opinion, and truth from fiction (Process section, para 1). For the non digital native, prior to on-line text and research, these literacy steps were nonexistent because such evaluation was completed by publishing houses and school media specialist. When I was in 8th grade my research sources were predetermined for me. The skills taught to me were card cataloging, indexing, skimming, and paraphrasing. With my students today I’m teaching on-line search engines, on-line directories, on-line evaluation and reliability before I can even touch on the basic literacy skills used in rudimentary research.

All in all, the class readings within ECI 546 New Literacies and Media taught by Dr. Hiller Spires were invaluable in my professional development towards my professional goals. On a professional level I am still struggling with the argument for social-networking in the classroom, however, I strongly agree with Daniel Pink and Thomas Friedman that we are moving away from an age of analytical, linear thinking and into an age of conceptualism that requires creative, right brain thinkers. And as I’ve already mentioned, I also agree with Laurie A. Henry that there is a critical need to define and establish the new literacies needed for on-line searching. I also agree with Rindi and Mark Baildon that “criteria for selecting sources of information [in on-line research] seem to be in short supply” (p. 636). I validate Spires’s and Zhang’s (2008) research in that I feel the pressure to “align assessments and standards with 21st century skills and teaching and learning expectations” (p. 15) and strongly feel that if the American education system is to compete on a global playing field that this theme of alignment must be placed at the forefront. If the American education system continues in its current trend to teach and learn in an environment where every child does not have access to a computer with the latest publishing programs and connected to the internet, then our system of education will continue to reinforce the socio-economic gap of have and have-nots, but more alarmingly a generation of citizens that not only lack basic literacy skills but also the skills needed to work and survive within industries that demand 21st century literacies. It is the responsibility of today’s educators to build a bridge between the skills students already have and the skills they need to be successful inside and outside of school (Spires, 2010, ECI 546 Lecture).

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