

Chapter 34

Fusing Culturally Responsive Teaching, Place Conscious Education, and Problem-Based Learning With Mobile Technologies: Sparking Change

Nykela H. Jackson

University of Central Arkansas, USA

ABSTRACT

Students must be provided meaningful learning opportunities to employ content through active learning opportunities that capitalize their interests (mobile technologies), fuse real life issues (problems that they face in school or local community), and sustain their curiosity (creative learning experiences). Using mobile technologies for culturally responsive, problem based learning is a powerful and unique way to prepare students for the four C's: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. This chapter provides theoretical and practical support of the innovative impact of using mobile technologies in student selected, problem focused learning.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, nations have experienced contentious and hostile social and/or cultural incidents (e.g., Holocaust, Apartheid, AIDS epidemic, slavery, genocide, Jim Crow law). Even today with all of the advancements in manufacturing, transportation, security, medicine, and technology, these social justice events continue to occur in the United States and around the world (e.g., racial intolerance; large populations without access to clean water, food, and medical care to cure preventable diseases; ISIS; poverty; deplorable living and working conditions).

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Fusing Culturally Responsive Teaching

News reports affirm that communities continually face “wicked problems,” formerly described by Rittel and Webber (1973) as the social or cultural problems that are challenging to solve due to inconsistent, conflicting, and changing factors. Challenges such as water cleanliness, air quality, climate control, agricultural issues, population migration, unemployment, poverty, violence, industries moving overseas, health concerns (e.g., Zika virus, obesity, cancer, new illnesses), and economic crisis are just a few issues that have impacted students’ communities in some way. Murgatroyd (2010) stressed that it is crucial for students to realize that change is not other people’s responsibility but an obligation for everyone. To experience this notion of accountability, students need chances to respond to both culturally relevant and place-based problems using technology resources for innovation and design to solve real problems in their local contexts.

The power of technology has made information about social justice incidents accessible and readily available. Through social media and news, society has firsthand access to dig deeper, to critically analyze issues, and to create platforms for people to voice their opinions and/or raise awareness. There are numerous apps and social media options that support communication, advocacy, means for financial assistance, and activism. This technology has assisted with transforming our roles in society from one of bystander to one where we can take a more visible presence in recognizing and supporting talk around issues. Technology has made a huge impact providing learners with immediate access to information and sharing of ideas. The next step is to find more ways to use technology to solve problems and make a social impact.

Integrating technology to affect social change in students’ communities and local society structures is the perfect venue to show students how to directly address social and cultural issues on a small-scale level and that can be used as a platform to tackle bigger issues. Cultivating students’ dispositions from a young age with the gift of empathy, the power of understanding, and the promotion of social action has the potential to empower positive change on a large scale.

Teachers are accountable to nurture and prepare the next generation to have the necessary skills to live and work successfully in a multicultural society (Roehrig, Moore, Wang, & Park, 2012). Although academic content is extremely important, many problems that students will encounter once they graduate high school center on injustices some groups may face and will not be related to a specific content area (Duch, Groh, & Allen, 2001) or tied to scores on standardized tests. Instead, the problem-solving strategies and cross-disciplinary knowledge that students apply to real life contexts can serve as a baseline for creating innovative solutions to issues and problems.

This is the work teachers now must engage in. Memorizing and regurgitating facts out of a textbook removed from the world as it exists outside of school is not an effective method of deep learning (Towler, 2014). Teachers’ goals should not be simply to encourage learners to access and understand content, but to apply what they learned by building authentic experiences encouraging them to share information with peers and community stakeholders, to investigate multiple perspectives, and to execute social action (Sharples, Kloos, Dimitriadis, Garlatti, & Specht, 2015).

Students must be provided meaningful learning opportunities to use their content knowledge and to develop higher order thinking skills through active learning opportunities that capitalize on their interests -- issues around them and in their local communities. Active engagement occurs when students work on issues that they personally care about and that are relevant to what is going in their lives. In these learning situations, mobile technologies can be used as a tool for exploration and communication and as a method to approach these problems through creative learning experiences. These hands-on experiences provide students with the opportunity to be actively engaged to create and to create change. Potential solutions to issues come from a collective group of engaged activists and/or a fervent individual.

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