

Faith and Culture: Values and Trends “Technology Usage in Class” – (not social media)

When I started writing this, it wasn't posted yet. Teaching today is not like teaching 20 years ago. And teaching Catholic education is another hurdle to overcome. For this post I will refer to the plain job of teaching at the secondary level based on my limited experiences teaching science for 8 years. Over that time my role as teacher has evolved into entertainer. On a daily basis teachers are confronted with the challenge of competing for students attention during in-class “instructional time”. A teacher's failure to win the battle to generate enough stimuli to initiate a response from the student may result in student disengagement or misbehavior. It's my job to be more interesting than the possible distractions offered by technology in the classroom including gaming, media, social media, and multitasking of other interests. I currently hold a no device usage policy in the classroom unless I directed by the teacher. This provides students with the privilege to use technology for learning and does not put the onus on the student to make the ambiguous decision whether or not to use their device. On Friday our school is participating in a vow of silence which asks students to refrain for all forms of communication for an entire school day in order to bring awareness to the oppressed in our community and around the world. This should be interesting...can't wait ☺

When I started setting my no technology device usage in the classroom policy in my 3rd year of teaching, my intentions were to increase student attention and engagement in class by minimizing distractions. And over the years, I have observed just that. When I do have a specific reason to ask everyone to set aside their devices it injects fresh vibrancy and energy into the room. The collaboration brightens, and more recently, there seemed to be more ease and flow expressed by both students and self.

After class one day I was confronted by a group of students from my advanced placement science class questioning why I am banning use of laptops when they were only being used for notetaking purposes. At this point I realized that I as not making the most effective use of my in class “instructional time” for these students. These students were scrambling to jot down information from my keynote presentations and this multi-tasking was cognitively exhausting.

In order to have students change their behaviour I had to make a commitment, growing my professional knowledge and change my teaching practice. This was not an overnight process. It took months of reflection followed by months of planning and professional development to address areas of need in my student population and then how to intervene to meet the needs. I slowly started to incorporate more cooperative collaborative, inquiry based activities, I created online portals “websites, prior to D2L” to upload all multimedia lessons so students would have access prior to class and after for review. Simply I decreased their need to multitask and increased their accountability to the classroom community.

Over the past few years I have lead 21st century learning strategies for teachers in our school, I only wish I had used CGEs as my foundation years ago as it would have lead to more building of classroom community and increased student ownership of their education.