

Technology

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While visiting one of our schools last week, I couldn't help but reflect on the changing landscape of today's classroom as compared to classrooms as recently as 10 to 20 years ago. These changes are due to the new emerging technologies.

Many if not all of us remember the days when every classroom had a chalkboard. As an elementary student, one of my favorite ways to get a break from class was to offer to dust the chalkboard erasers. Two of the hardest things for me to learn as a new teacher were how to write on the chalkboard without my sentences going uphill and how to keep the chalk dust from getting all over me (including up my nose). The chalkboard was a necessary fixture in classrooms from the 1800s until the late 1990s, yet it is practically impossible to find a chalkboard in one of our classrooms today.

Another necessary fixture in classrooms of old was the filmstrip projector used to show still pictures on a piece of film. You were really high tech if you had an accompanying record or tape to provide audio that made a bell sound when it was time to advance the picture. In the 1970s through the 1990s, classrooms also had an overhead projector enabling teachers to share information on transparencies or write on them with a pen and reflect it on the chalkboard.

Several innovations have helped to bring about change in public school classrooms. One of the biggest advances was the establishment of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in 1970. This was an era when there were virtually no prekindergarten and few full-day kindergarten programs. Children got their first formal exposure to letters and numbers from educational programs like Sesame Street and Mister Rogers' Neighborhood.

When the Georgia Lottery was established in 1992 with funds designated for technology in schools, many teachers began to see desktop computers being placed in their classrooms. Unfortunately, teachers received computers without training on how to use them in their instruction. Most were used solely to engage students in learning curriculum through computer games such as "Oregon Trail" and "Where in the World is Carmen Santiago".

The interactive white board was introduced in 1999 and began to replace the chalkboard, film projector, and overheads. Thanks to ESPLOST funding approved by local voters, classrooms in Whitfield County now have whiteboards. This amazing piece of technology allows teachers to engage their students in interactive learning. Whiteboards have spurred students' interest and renewed their enthusiasm for learning. Students are eager to go to the front of the room so they can use these incredible interactive tools. Many of our teachers say that it would be difficult to teach without a whiteboard because it brings such a positive contribution to the creative and imaginative delivery of their curriculum.

When the Internet was introduced into homes and schools during the late 1990s followed by YouTube in 2005, teachers were able to share educational videos and take students on virtual field trips to places they were only able to read about before. Student response devices were the next piece of technology to be seen in our classrooms. Teachers share multiple choice questions with students who can respond with what they believe to be the correct answer. This technology provides teachers with immediate feedback about how well students are learning the lesson being taught.

Those who visit a classroom today may see students using smart phones and other mobile devices to conduct research and compose reports. Some have said the smart phones students use today give students more technology in their hands than astronauts took to the moon in the early 1960s. Our students use laptops and graphing calculators to manipulate variables to solve problems. If there is a hearing-impaired student in the classroom, visitors may see the teacher using a personal voice amplification system to deliver instruction to ensure all students can clearly hear the teacher. Guests may see document cameras, interactive tables, and 3D projectors in use. Most textbooks have been replaced with digital content to provide our students with the most current information.

Yes, a lot has changed in classrooms over the last few years. As the amount of knowledge in the world continues to increase, so does the responsibility placed on teachers. With all of the improvements to classroom technology, one thing remains the same. Dedicated teachers still use every available resource to engage their students in the learning. These devoted professionals are constantly sharpening their instructional skills and giving their time and talents to provide their students with a quality education.