

# The Internet and the Media in the Classroom, Another Facet of Active Learning

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**Abstract.** Nowadays the Internet and the “New Media” have become every-day tools for everyone who has a computer at home and a subscription with an Internet provider. Things that would have been impossible some twenty years ago are commonalities today. While the average user exploits the advantages of the new media however they see fit, in a formal environment, that is school, the teacher will teach the students to benefit as much as possible from the using of the Internet. The teacher becomes a guide that will show the children the correct way of extracting, selecting and using the information available on the Internet.

**Key words:** Internet, New media, Proper, Possibilities, Advantages, Shortcomings.

## 1. Teaching in A Changing World

The learning process has been seen to have better results when an educator involves pluralism of methods. The primary goal in achieving an optimum learning process is motivation, which leads to an enhancement of this process.

Educators have now a vast array of tools that they can use in order to keep the students interested and focused on the task at hand. Here we can talk about graphics, animation, the Internet, etc.

Information today is more about quality than quantity, the teacher, thus, avoiding suffocating the students. Too much information at one time will lead to the exact opposite of an enhancement of learning that is to a deprecating of it.

There are many class activities where the professor alters his/her role of information sender and becomes a director that is a person who gives small pieces of advice on how certain actions should unfold. The professor director presents the students with a situation briefs them and supervises them but the hard work is eventually done by the students. The idea is that the textbook is just a support for the teacher and that the teacher should be prepared to make up for whatever shortcomings the textbook has. Nevertheless as a guide the textbook should represent the basis for all class activities. Unfortunately in Romania the <sup>+</sup>English teacher who has to choose between various textbooks sometimes does this knowing the textbook only by title (at least in the rural areas). There is no wonder that frustration is a common feeling.

The science of teaching, that is the ways the methods and the approaches, has changed greatly in the last decades. The teacher no longer goes to class to simply present a piece of information but has to find new and better ways to motivate the students. The stress is no longer on offering information but on having the children discover it.

Heraclitus's stated that “The only constant force in the universe is change” [1], people should use their utmost ability, adaptation, to cope with this change. This very force is nowadays the motor of the transformations that had taken place in Europe. Years ago computers were rather primitive and scarce. They were used only for basic operations, and there were few people who could use them. This is not the case of this decade. The Internet, which was a means of communication mainly for scientists, who wanted to exchange and share information with one another, now became a “boom”, an incredible development and expansion in the last twenty years. Today, this technology has become available to a lot of people, and there is almost no school that doesn't have computers and Internet connection. One can easily find on the Internet whatever material, being able to access, read, buy or download all this knowledge. Younger generations, that

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have grown up together with this technology, find it more easily to use it than their parents, for whom, at least at first, using a computer was rather, if not very difficult to use a computer.

## **2. New Ways of Learning and New Technologies**

Bringing this discussion closer to what the title expresses, the “new media” offers clear advantages in class, both for teachers and for their students. Using the media follows the same process as reading a book. Most pupils start their learning process in the first grade, while some even earlier. The principle that must be taken into account when learning how to read is the one of decoding the information. Each piece of information must be broken down into an amount that can be comprehended by the child’s mind, into such a way that this information makes sense for him/her. If this process works for books, it should very well work for new media.

As we said, we must adapt to the new technology and learn how to put it to good use, so that it serves our interest. The information we can get from using the Internet is extremely vast, deriving from all sorts of fields of activity and from various people that express their opinions about different things, starting with literature and writers an ending with politics, politicians, movies, and God knows what. This is the reason why teachers must take their time and teach the students how to differentiate this vast amount of information they are being bombarded with when using the Internet. Consequently, not all that comes through the Internet is good or even moral. The children must select the necessary information, the information that is useful to them, from the rest.

Bearing this in mind, teachers will use the Internet, the new media, to make the lessons in class more interesting, more appealing for the children and for themselves. The Internet provides teachers with the possibility of showing their students far-away places and meeting people hundreds and thousands of kilometers away without even leaving their classroom. The Internet allows teacher and students to go beyond the borders of the class and those of a simple book. Using the Internet and the new media, a teacher can make countless connections and parallels to the main subject, enlarging the horizon of knowledge of the students. Regarded from the point of view of what has been said, the use of the new media is positive and should be encouraged and upheld. But, as it happens with all shiny things, there is more than meets the eye to this matter, as well.

It is generally accepted by all the “professional” users of the new media that the issue that is the most important is not whether we should use this new form of information, but in what manner we should use it. Going down this path, it is only logical to say that there are advantages as well as disadvantages to using a source of information so vast, which offers both good and bad information.

## **3. Advantages of Using the New Media**

This paper does not refer to all sorts of Internet users, but, in particular, to teachers and their students who use the Internet in class. It is the teacher who has to stimulate the students to learn new things, to acquire new and useful information, which they can learn in class and outside it. All this stream of information is more quickly absorbed by the students according to the method the teacher uses to convey it. We know that our brains can process the information faster if the number of stimuli used by the teacher to transmit this information is greater. Therefore, the more stimuli we use in teaching, the more easily the information we convey is processed. There are a lot of studies about the use of the new media in teaching in class. What they all have in common, when coming to advantages, is that the richer the information the easier is for the students to make up their minds about the topic. In a book, one usually finds the presentation of a theme, the reasons the author proceeded with writing about that theme and, maybe, some points of view. With the Internet, the world of information is a lot more substantial. We can not only read the book, we can read about the book, see arguments praising it and arguments criticizing it, we can read comments made by experts and comments made by simple readers, we can read about the history of the approached issue, and the possibilities go on. All these corroborated will make readers come to a clear conclusion, an objective one, since the points of view don’t come from only one side.

Another positive aspect about the new media is that it is very accessible and relatively cheap to use. In most cases, the price of a single book is bigger than a one month subscription to any internet provider. This aspect is positive since it helps those with poorer resources to gain access to the information they need. More children get the possibility to learn, to improve on their knowledge with the use of technology. But, when using a computer to gather information, one doesn’t just read a text, but performs a variety of actions, from seeking that information, filtering it, comparing it, extracting only what’s useful for them at that moment, etc.

In other words, any PC user doesn't just collect data, but learns how to use a computer by reading the data, extracting it, sharing it with others, talking about it, writing about it, and coming up with possible new information of their own.

There have been many school projects that focused exactly on the use of the internet and the new media when exchanging information about different topics. Schools that are equipped with computers and are linked to the internet have taken part to projects that involved discussions among students from schools that are not even on the same continent. A topic was chosen, both sides had time to investigate and document it, and then, with all the information at hand, the students going to those schools entered a debate, using computers and cameras, so that they could see and hear each other. The teacher was not the leader of these debates, but rather a mediator that would help with a normal unfolding of such an event. All the students were involved, all their opinions counted and no one was left aside. No doubt that such a class was far more interesting than a normal one would have been.

Another positive aspect is that the teacher can involve the student to a greater extent in teaching a lesson, when using the new media. Thus, the information is no longer offered to the children by the teacher. The teacher can ask the students to look for it on the Internet, providing them with certain indicators and clues, so that the children may extract only the information that is useful to them. The new media has the advantage of being more attractive especially for the young generations, since it provides the users with a new and more captivating way of conveying information, being "more in tune with the way our students learn today... Technology is so much a part of the real world that to limit its use in the classroom is to limit our students 'ability to compete in the world.'" This side of using the new media can be achieved by giving children the opportunity to solve real-life situations, where their mental capacity, their skills, their sense of noticing details, their ability to react to real-life events are used to a higher degree. There have been such examples of activities where teachers try to encompass several key features in order to make the classes more attractive for the students. Thus, a trip to different interesting parts of the world, using the Internet for a geography lesson, will be more appealing to children, since they get not only to hear about these places and maybe see them in pictures but they can see real images, real itineraries, real people. This feature applies to many school subjects, as long as the teachers use their imagination in order to stimulate that of the student. As we know, the more senses the students use when being in the learning process the easier it will be for them to assimilate the necessary information. Since the stress today is not so much on abstract knowledge, that will later become unused, but on concrete knowledge, the one that serves us every day, teachers prepare their students to cope with real possibilities, to find solutions for them, in a word, to be prepared for life. This is a continuous process which requires dedication and interest from both sides if genuine progress is to be made. The main goal is that of stimulating intelligence, in those who are gifted, and developing and improving it for the common students.

The new media is not only for students. It can be also used, in a professional manner and in a supervised environment, by the parents and all those interested, as well. There are many courses that can be attended on the Internet, which will provide the users with interesting and useful knowledge to be used within their field of activity. There are many exams that can be taken on the Internet in order to obtain licenses. Technology is used to help with children's schooling in those places where distance is a problem. Students can learn at home, become interactive participating in classes, being assessed for their work, taking and passing exams.

New media proves to be a powerful force which can offer great advantages but, if the grip is not tight, it may lead to unfortunate situations.

#### **4. Disadvantages of Using the Media**

As we stated before, the main shortcoming of the new media is not "if we should use it but how we should use it"[3]. The extensive and sometimes unjustified use of all the resources that one can find on the internet can uneven the balance between new media and the old fashion way of book reading. "Study after study has shown that using new media is not a horrible tool to assist in teaching, but that using these medium as a primary resource takes away from students the ability to develop their imagination and creative thinking"[4]. We can see that replacing a method that works altogether is not always a good idea. The starting point should be for children to read a book, to master the letters and then to pass to something as complex as the new media. We have mentioned that using as many senses as possible will help learners retain more easily the information that is given to them. However, using only some senses will lead to the diminishing of the others. Thus, if students tend to use more their visual abilities they will neglect their abilities to read, write, spell when it comes to texts in books.

The Internet has proven to be such a vast source of information that is sometimes hard not stray from the intended path. While being supervised and guided by the teacher, the students will have no problems staying on the right path. The teacher will permanently monitor their activity, show them ways of reaching their goal, right the unintended wrongs, answer questions about different issues, giving them guidelines, and, in other words, keep things under control. But the situation will be under control as long as there is an authority to watch over so that things follow a proper course. When on their own, even if driven by the best motivation, children feel inclined to give in to more “flashy” information. Whenever one opens a web page, there are certain bits of unwanted information that simply “pops up” even if the computer is programmed to prevent them from harming the files. These “pop-ups”[5]capture attention even if for just a second. If the phenomenon repeats itself, or if this information is captivating enough, the student might feel inclined to verify it. One thing leads to another and one can find himself/herself looking at a totally different material than originally intended. Focus is thrown out of balance, time is wasted and good intentions are left side.

Even if engaged in harmless activities, students may very well use their time inappropriately, by using chatting programs, sites that allow for online movie watching, online games and many other “time eating monsters”. There is only a hand full of those who don’t let themselves drawn by such “technological temptations” [6] and go about their business. Studies have shown that new media is a very valuable tool to use in order to gain information as long as those (students respectively) who use such resources have a very powerful motivation or if they have a vigilant eye watching them.

## 5. Conclusions

Like any new “stage”, the new media must be used with respect and mindfulness, people should try to understand its potential for construction or for corruption before taking things for granted. In school, for teachers, the highest goal is that of achieving and completing the educational process. Teachers try to counteract the negative effects of the new media and achieve balance between the newly established ways of getting information and the old rooted ways that have been used so far. In an experienced hand everything can be put to good use, while in an unsecure, inexperienced hand things can take a turn for the worst. That is why we must try to make the most of using the internet, augmenting the benefits and diminishing the shortcomings.

Even if the Internet has capture massive attention in the last twenty years, we should look at it with a critical eye, grant it what it deserves but not let ourselves be seduced by it.

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