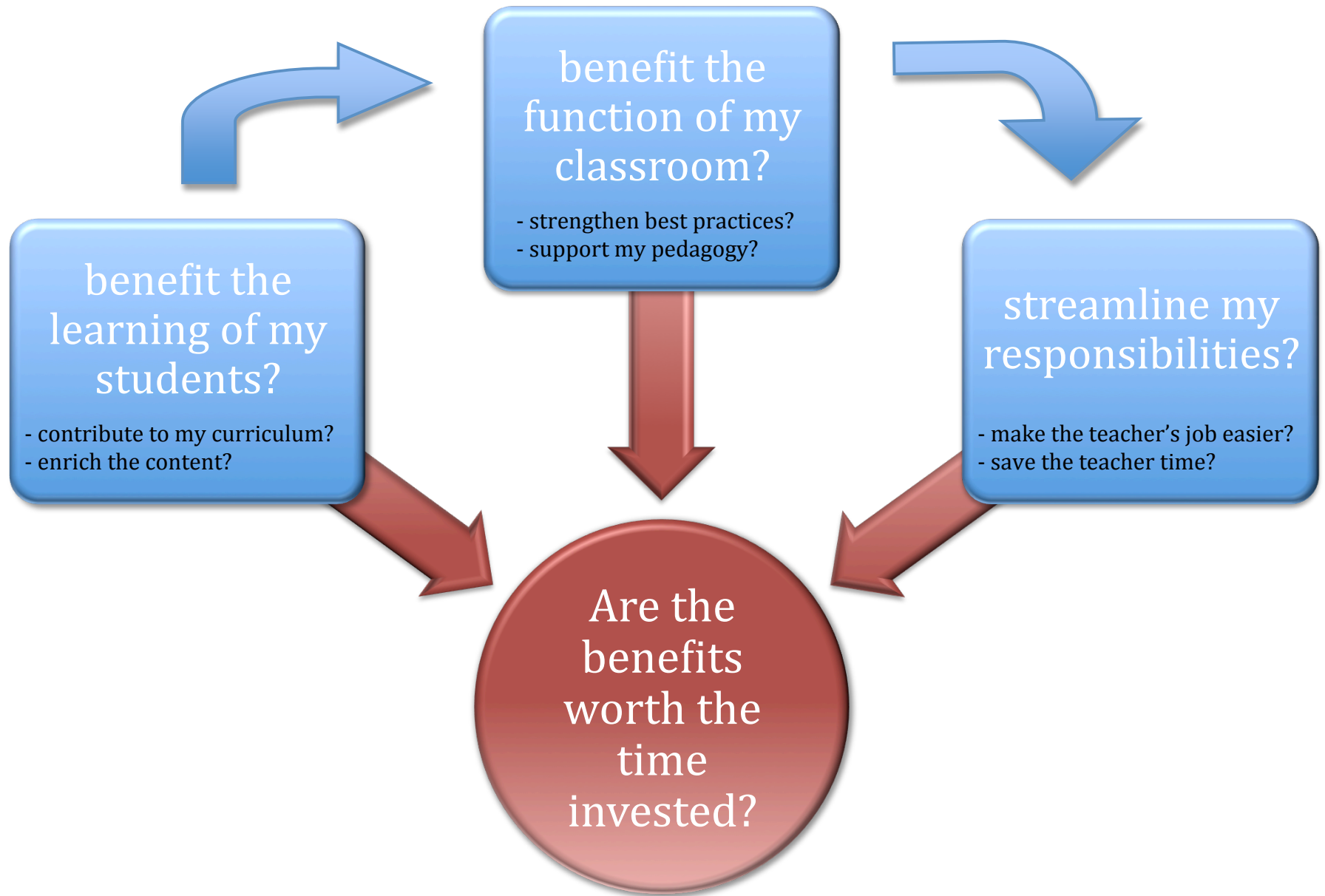


Does this tool...



Prior to implementing a tool into the classroom a teacher should always reflect upon the reasons for doing so. If the tool choose does not show value in expanding the learning of students, adding to a smoother function of their classroom, or assist the teacher with simplifying their responsibilities, then the tool should not be integrated into the classroom. Ask yourself these questions as you consider new tools to integrate into your classroom.

Does this tool benefit the learning of my students?

Curriculum and content should always be your focus. Sure you found a cool tech tool, but is it really important to educating your students? There are so many tools that enrich the educational experience and support the content of the classroom, that there is no reason to try and push a cool gadget that doesn't benefit the curriculum of the classroom. The example below represents how tech tools can benefit student learning.

Example: The curriculum focus is ecology of a watershed. Using Skype for a videoconference, the teacher contacts an expert ecologist who works with watersheds. Students can ask their individual questions about the habitat of a watershed and are exposed to a primary resource for learning. Then using E-Pals, the teacher connects with a classroom on another continent that is also studying watersheds. The classes document data of their local watershed using digital cameras, thermometers, Pasco Probeware, sketches, etc. and post their findings on Wikispaces.com or present to the other class using Scribblar.com to share what they learned. The classes then debate the similarities and differences and produce a Venn diagram in Word on the SMART Board to represent the two different watersheds. This teacher was able to take the learning beyond the walls of their classroom while also teaching skills of observation, data collection, presenting, research, compare and contrast, etc.

Does this tool benefit the function of my classroom?

To create the best learning environment for students, educators must constantly analyze the pedagogy of their classroom to ensure that they are implementing best practices for student learning. When considering technology tools for integration, the tool should always support the function of the classroom environment and in the ultimate situation the tools integrated should in fact improve the practices of the classroom.

Example: A math class is learning about the different types of measurement. Groups are sent on a scavenger hunt around the school to take various measurements: temperature outside of Door 2, the length of the Grade 5 hall, etc. Each group uses an iPod Touch to access the Google Doc Form the teacher created, which not only outlines the measurements to take, but also provides a spot to input the data collected. Upon returning to the classroom, the groups click submit on the iPod Touch and watch their data appear on the Google Doc Spreadsheet along with all the other group submitted data that is being projected at the front of the classroom. The students have a seat and the class spends the remainder of the period comparing the information collected and discussing reasons for different results. Before having access to the mentioned technologies, this teacher would have wasted the remainder of the period having groups shout out their data as she wrote them on the board or one student from each group up at the board fighting over space and markers to write down their data. The use of technology saved valuable class time, avoided chaos in the classroom, kept student learning focused on the content, and allowed students to learn from other students' successes and failures as they looked at the data collected by the class.

Does this tool streamline my responsibilities?

The work of a teacher is never done. There always seems to be more that can be done. Integrating technology into the classroom should not add to that ever-growing list of things to do. A lot of the tech tools that are useful in the classroom also make the job of the teacher easier, by streamlining tasks that would normally be time-consuming tasks for the teacher. The key to streamlining your tasks with technology is to not sacrifice the learning or engagement of students, so it must be a balance. The use of integrating technology is not taking the easy way out, but instead becoming more efficient as a teacher allowing you to enrich the learning of your students.

Example: Give students quick feedback on their learning and provide yourself with insight on class understanding by using a clicker, online polling, or a quiz system. By opening class with one or two multiple choice questions about the content from the class before hand you can get a quick glimpse of what students did or did not absorb from the prior lesson. These systems also provide students with instant feedback on where they stand in the class. The teacher doesn't have to wait until after class to go through one-by-one each student's answer and determine after the fact that the class was not prepared to move on with the content.

Are the benefits worth the time invested?

You will find that many tech tools have several benefits for being integrated into the classroom, but what a teacher has to be aware of is the amount of time it takes to prepare that tool for use in the classroom. The benefits for the classroom should always be worth the time invested in preparing that tool for use in the classroom. You will also want to be cognizant of the class time.

Example: For younger students it may take a teacher the better part of an evening to setup a blog for each individual student, which is a significant investment of time, but consider that the students are able to use this tool for the entire school year. The two hours that is spent with the initial setup will come back to the teacher as they are able to quickly access student work online for feedback and students are able to collaborate and learn from one another via their blogging networks. There is also less working/learning downtime, because the teacher no longer has to collect "Writer's Notebooks" to assess progress. The teacher and parents can have constant access to the child's work to provide feedback and positive reinforcement, while the child still has access to create and write. But the nicest perk of all is that you don't have to lug around 25 student notebooks or worry about losing papers. It is all hosted on the web for you to access anywhere in the world.

Apply what you know to the following scenarios:

Scenario 1:

A teacher hears about a cool tech tool called Wordle.net and wants to use it in the class. Her idea is to take the twenty feedback papers that she got from her student on the first day of school and type in one by one the adjectives that her students used to describe their summer. She will then show the image that Wordle.net generates based on the words entered to share what the class had to say about their summer.

Let's ask the questions:

Does this benefit student learning?

Not really, there is no mention of content connection. It does provide feedback on an earlier activity, but the activity was for the teacher to get to know the students. It wasn't important to the content. It could possibly represent a discussion of adjectives used by the class, but is that the focus of the activity?

Does this benefit the function of the classroom?

One could argue it assists with building community of the classroom by visually representing the common word choice between the classmates, which is important for students to see in order to feel connected to the classroom community. Is common word choice a bonding point though?

Does this tool streamline teacher responsibilities?

Not really, a teacher sitting down to type in all of the words submitted by the class is going to take a bit of time and for it only to be used for a moment in class does not seem like an effective use of time.

Are the benefits worth the time invested?

Well we kind of already answered this above. If a teacher spent 30 minutes prepping every 2 minutes of class, they would never have time to teach. Sure we get the benefit of the visual help build community within our classroom, but could there be faster and easier way to do this without sacrificing the time of the teacher? Absolutely! In class call out a few of the common adjectives used and have students stand up when their adjective is announced. The kids are involved and they still get the visual representation of their common thoughts about summer. They will probably even enjoy this activity more than just looking at a graphic.

Scenario 2:

A teacher wants to teach a lesson on Word Choice in writing. She asks her students to copy a typed piece of writing from their Writer's Notebook and paste it into the Wordle.net site. Wordle.net then generates a visual of their writing piece. It shows the words they use most in the largest font and the words they used less in smaller font. She then has students use an online thesaurus to find synonyms to improve their Word Choice in their writing and the find tool in Word to locate and replace the over-used words.

Ask the questions. Is this an example of good integration?