Increasing Student Engagement Through the Use of Technology

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The vast majority of our students today are connected through technological devices. They are focused and engaged in interacting with their peers, and not necessarily enthralled with our teaching. This sobering reality causes us to make drastic changes in our presentation of the material we want our students to learn. We want 100% engagement, but yet captivating so many individuals at one time can be overwhelming and daunting. We want content to be as fun to teach as well as learned, and we want our enthusiasm to be contagious. Fortunately, we have choices, an abundance of them! Fellow educators and web developers create web-based platforms that we can utilize to assess, engage, and excite our students. We can captivate our learners through these interactive forums and obtain valuable formative and summative data. It is an intriguing time to be a teacher, because we are learning along with our students, and we get to "play" too!

The following examples give a brief overview of digital platforms that increase student engagement and provide essential assessment data. Just like any toolkit, there are many tools that get the job done, but start small and build your toolkit over time. You will learn what platforms best address and assess your objectives, and since it is a competitive forum, improvements are continual. Companies want your feedback, and they most often listen.

The first highly engaging, educator-designed platform is **Peardeck**.com. The free version works well, but the Premium Account helps teachers collect more data and offers valuable options with a Teacher Dashboard. The instructor designs a slideshow in either Google or Microsoft, installs the Peardeck app, and then launches the lesson through Peardeck. Peardeck generates a code for learners to join by visiting joinpd.com, which enables them to see and interact with the instructor's presentation on their device. Instructors have the ability to lock student screens to prevent students from getting distracted with the diverse technology during crucial listening times. This platform engages 100% of the learners who joined the presentation and provides reluctant participants the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas confidentially with the instructor. The instructor can project student screens to share their anonymous answers. Students smile when their work is projected, and others see first-hand what high expectations look like. Instructors can see on their private devices when students are struggling or excelling. Responses are real-time, so the instructor knows what is, or is not, happening on the student devices. There is also a built-in social emotional component, which asks the students how they are feeling before the lesson. This interpersonal connection is helpful for private discussions and understanding student reactions. There is a Student Paced option in the Premium Account which allows students to progress through the slideshow at their own pace. This is particularly useful for fast learners and also days when the instructor is absent and wants students to complete a lesson. The instructor can see student responses from any location on his/her own private device. Peardeck also has a feature called

Flashcard Factory, which allows students to collaborate while making unique written illustrations of essential vocabulary. Flashcards can be printed and/or exported into Gimkit.

Gimkit is another highly engaging web-based learning game for students. Teachers create "Kits", or live learning games to create quizzes. Teachers can make their own Kits or import an existing quiz from Quizlet, a CSV file, or copy quizzes from the Gimkit library. Students can complete quizzes at their own pace within the assignment due date. Students earn points/money to purchase Power-ups and use strategies to increase scoring potential. Teachers use a Gimkit Dashboard to view student progress and gather formative assessment data. Gimkit has a collaborative feature that selects student teams and they compete to answer questions and earn points in the leaderboard. Students learn to strategize when buying power-ups to improve their teams standing. This game-like platform engages 100% of the students and makes gathering assessment data fun.

Another highly engaging internet-based platform is **Flipgrid**. [1]Flipgrid is a social learning platform that allows educators to ask a question, then the students respond in a video. A "Grid" is the term used for the question that is asked by the teacher. The teacher creates a Grid and provides students with a predetermined join code. Students respond using choices, such as video and audio. There is an annotation option that emulates writing on a blackboard or whiteboard and does not show the student's face, but records his/her voice while he/she tells about their response to the question. The teacher receives an email after a student submits an answer, and the teacher can provide feedback to the student right in Flipgrid. A QR code can also be generated to allow others to view student videos, which is particularly engaging with parents. Another charismatic activity in Flipgrid is called Fliphunt, which is a video-based scavenger hunt. The teacher focuses on what he/she wants his/her students to learn (objectives) and makes it more game-like. Students respond and show what they know using their creativity in Flipgrid. Fliphunts can be collaborative or independent. Flipgrid is easily differentiated across the subject areas, provides an engaging learning experience, includes opportunities to showcase multiple intelligences, and helps make planning and learning fun. As a result, student engagement increases and assessment data is collected.

Seesaw is a very popular platform for parent engagement, as well as student engagement. Many of the same features in Flipgrid are also included in Seesaw, such as a library of lessons, video and audio responses, and active student engagement with the built-in annotation tools. However, Seesaw has a parent feature which allows teachers to view and approve student responses and seamlessly forward student work to parents who joined. Parents are connected to their child's education in Seesaw and can also respond to their child's prompt. Teachers also use Seesaw to send reminders and notes to parents, which helps the student feel the connection between home and school. Seesaw performed an efficacy study which indicated that 92% of the polled teachers said that their students have a better understanding of where students are academically because of Seesaw, and 97% said Seesaw helps develop a better

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[1] https://www.thetechieteacher.net/2018/07/flipgrid-social-learning-platform.html

relationship between home and school.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0RGKdJLym9SMFhyMVRXaEdSWkk/view

As simple as it may seem, **Google Slides** has loads of potential to gather assessment data and engage students. A convenience in Google Slides is that you can make one slide and share it with all students, they can respond, and the instructor can provide feedback right on the slide.Teachers can create interactive slides for response and sharing, where student engagement is high. One suggestion is creating a "Choose Your Own Adventure" within Google slides which involves inserting hyperlinks as students choose their own direction during a sequence of events. There are also templates for Jeopardy games (https://www.controlaltachieve.com/2016/01/jeopardy-templates-google-slides.html), which is always a favorite. Students can use all of the features in Google slides to respond, including audio. There are many templates available for educators to use in Wakelet.com if you search using Google Slides. This link provides an overview of creative ways to use Google Slides in the classroom: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jcDnnoFYx-NP1abfAmDZXq84fpuMdDPRBZ4GAabkywM/edit#slide=id.g1b1c90bf26_0_0.

Bookcreator.com is another free amazing web-based resource. Book Creator allows students to create digital books in the teacher's library. Like Google Slides and Peardeck, it uses a live forum so the teacher can see real-time student feedback. The most obvious use for Book Creator is to make books, but it is also great for student notebooks, where each page of the notebook responds to a teacher prompt or exit ticket. To help make it more engaging for all those involved, images and photos can be uploaded to a page, video and audio can be attached, there is a pen tool to draw or annotate, and three different page layouts and fifty different fonts from which to choose. The free version allows a teacher to have up to 40 books in his/her library. Book Creator lends itself to creative ways to compile evidence of learning in one place, and it can be easily shared.

Finally, **Padlet.com** is a virtual Post-it board that allows students to share ideas digitally using a link. It is excellent for introducing new topics, bell ringers, exit tickets, and brainstorming ideas. Teachers can post questions for formative assessment. The teacher can view student responses before allowing the post to appear on the wall. Students can include audio or video, links, pictures, and other forms of display. Students can create their own Padlet to organize their ideas and the teacher can follow student thinking. Padlet includes social features, like ratings from classmates, if the moderating teacher chooses this option. Of course, with all social forums, a lesson on internet social etiquette is suggested.

If your classroom is not equipped with devices for all students, these platforms could be used in a station or learning center. It is suggested that a teacher becomes comfortable with one or two platforms at a time, because it can be overwhelming to learn several at once. All platforms engage students and provide a teacher with formative and summative assessment, so discover all your choices and have fun!