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5 Tech Tools Every Professor Should Use Now

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5 Tech Tools Every Professor Should Use NOW

By Norman Eng, Ed.D.



What better way to start off the semester with new technology software that 10X student engagement?

As someone not attuned to technology, I turned to good friend James Sturtevant—the tech expert, high school social studies teacher, host of the immensely popular [Hacking Engagement](#) podcast, and author of the new hot-selling book, [Hacking Engagement Again: 50 Teacher Tools That Will Make Students Love Your Class](#).

“Jim, if you could recommend 5 tech tools that professors should use right now, what would they be?” I asked.

He didn't disappoint. Not only does Jim describe each one, he includes links to his [podcast](#) for more details about each tool.

So let's get beyond PowerPoint, shall we? Take it away, Jim.

#1: PEAR DECK

Slides that display questions AND group responses

Modern educators are discouraged from being the sage on stage. As the overused cliché goes...*Instead of being the sage on stage, be the guide on the side.*

I'm not a huge fan of this mantra. I understand the need for presentation styles to evolve, but sometimes you need to jump up in front of your kids and inspire them! Even though much of my instruction is flipped, it's still important to present in front of students. While my kids enjoy my recordings, periodically I treat them to a live performance.

A few years ago, my wife and I watched *Jersey Boys* on the big screen and then we saw it live on stage. There was no comparison. Sometimes, you have to go all Broadway on your kids. Sometimes, you need to be the sage on stage.

And here is where [Pear Deck](#) makes its dramatic appearance.

Infuse your presentation with highly interactive engaging prompts by utilizing this amazing tool. Morph your static sit and listenfests into intense student collaborationfests. Transform your lectures into twenty-five separate and simultaneous student-teacher conversations. Pear Deck allows you to:

- Upload an existing presentation in Google Slides or PowerPoint
- Permits students to follow your presentations on their devices, while you control the pace
- Empowers instructors to insert engaging prompts before and during your performance
- Hides student responses till the teacher decides to display them and student names remain a mystery

Pear Deck creates a collaborative and engaging presentation environment. Embrace this new way to present and enthrall your kids.

Follow [this link](#) to hear me discuss Pear Deck on my podcast [Hacking Engagement](#).

[Norman Eng's note: I love that Pear Deck allows students to make use of their smartphones, tablet or laptop FOR CLASS PURPOSES. We need to leverage their digital dependence for learning, rather than stifle it.]

TECH TOOL #2: EDpuzzle

Making Videos Interactive

Teachers need to go where the kids are. *When in Rome...do like the Romans*. When it comes to reaching contemporary youth, please understand that they love video. Whenever there's downtime, kids immediately start watching video on their devices. Educators need to embrace this tendency.

Unfortunately, in many classrooms, video is handled in much the same way as it was in the 1950s. The entire class watches on a big screen at the same time. I loved "Movie Day" in high school. It was a great opportunity to zone out for 50 minutes!

Update the way you deliver video with an amazing free tool. [EDpuzzle](#) allows you to embed questions inside a video.

Kids watch and then interact with you while they answer your questions. It's an awesome way to introduce collaboration and participation, engaging kids in the process. It's also an amazing accountability factor. You can see just how much a student has watched and their responses to your prompts (see screenshot pics below). Also...kids cannot fast-forward. They can pause and rewind, but not skip ahead. It's similar to on-demand programming. Another huge selling point to EDpuzzle is how it works in concert with Google Classroom.

It's time to revamp the way students watch video. EDpuzzle will make "Movie Day" collaborative and engaging!

Follow [this link](#) to hear me discuss EDpuzzle on my podcast.

TECH TOOL #3: HYPERDOCS

Interactive digital documents you create for students

Kelly Hilton, Lisa Highfill, and Sarah Landis are the co-creators of HyperDocs and authors of the [HyperDocs Handbook](#). These ladies have designed a remarkable [website](#) providing teachers with digital lesson templates and plenty of sample HyperDocs.

Aside from outstanding organization, the [templates](#) are beautiful, which should never be underestimated. To begin creating, simply FILE > MAKE A COPY and complete the stages of the lesson cycle by adding instructions and resources.

I became aware of HyperDocs because of my mentor Kristen Kovak. My mentor is a grand total of 24-years-old. Older teachers like me, need to get over ourselves and learn from the youngins. Not long ago, Kristen waltzed into my room and challenged your humble narrator to start utilizing HyperDocs.

My initial reactions was, *Oh great! Here's another thing I'm going to have to figure out.*

The good news is that mastering HyperDocs was easy. You create them by making a copy in Google Docs and then morphing the HD Girls' templates and then BAM...you upload your creation to Google Classroom. Below is an example I created for the Korean conflict (and here's the [link](#)).

[Norman Eng's note: You can insert links, videos, and any other resources related to your topic for students. This self-paced learning allows students to work on their own or in groups while you move around and work 1-on-1. You can even differentiate a Hyperdoc for an individual. No one will even have to know.]

HyperDocs is a tool you'll use weekly, if not daily!

Follow [this link](#) to hear me discuss HyperDocs on my podcast.

TOOL #4: TWEETDECK

Turning class discussions into chats

Okay...here's the situation. The semester is winding down and you need to include one more Socratic Seminar on an important topic. But...you look at the calendar and there's no time.

Sound familiar? It's a classic necessity is the mother of invention situation.

Plus, I was sensing that the enthusiasm for class discussion had waned as the semester dwindled. The idea of conduct a class Twitter chat dawned on me as I moderated a Twitter chat pertaining to my first book. Individuals from around the world were chiming in with their thoughts and ideas.

Granted, these tweets were meager expressions, but they were often accompanied by links and compelling images. I could explore the tweets deeper implications by clicking on a link during, or after, the chat. I also concluded that in a classroom setting, an extensive debriefing session could be conducted the next day.

I became determined to reignite conversational passion using this modern medium.

What materialized was awesome and will become a standard activity at the conclusion of every semester. I decided to take my final Socratic Seminar virtual and make it a class Twitter chat. But none of this would have transpired if it weren't for the guidance of a friend and her insistence that I learn how to use [Tweetdeck](#).

Tweetdeck allows you and your students to schedule your tweets. I exposed my students to Tweetdeck and let them play around with it a bit. Remarkably, few were aware of this powerful tool.

Then, I unveiled the class hashtag. Be creative and concoct a unique one. Finally, I previewed the questions and the times they would appear. Students then dove into Tweetdeck and started scheduling their responses. I challenged them to include links and images in their tweets. They were also reminded to include the class hashtag and the time in which they wanted their tweets to appear.

When the chat commenced (I conducted mine on the following Sunday evening) Tweetdeck freed all concerned to like, retweet, and respond as the chat unfolded.

My class Twitter chat was epic. The hashtag was [#heywcl](#) (Hey World Civilization 1"). Feel free to check out the [kid's posts](#).

The next day, we had an extensive debriefing where students collaborated in small groups about the interesting ideas that surfaced during the chat. I found that students were quite comfortable expressing themselves with Twitter and that many of their 140 character tweets were merely doorways to more extensive messages.

Follow [this link](#) to hear one of my students talk about his experience during the Twitter chat and his thoughts on Tweetdeck.

Twitter is a fact of modern life. Embrace it and all its potential to engage your students.

TECH TOOL #5: KAIZENA

Voice recording your feedback to student assignments (Time-saver alert!)

How would you like to grade papers...with your voice?[/caption]

Okay...here's the way this went down! I was a college freshman and I had a long way to go in the writing department. I needed to cite more, I needed more supportive evidence, and my sources were meager and of low quality. Sound familiar? When I got my paper back, I noticed the grade...which was a C, shoved the paper in my book bag, and went on with my existence. The next class, our professor urged us to read the comments she'd wrote on our papers. I read a few, but then I got discouraged and quit. It seemed like she was yelling at me. I missed some great directives and advice.

Now, I teach 18-year-olds how to write research papers. I totally get the struggle of students not embracing advice on how to evolve as writers. Karma is a beautiful thing. I was frustrated because I knew my students needed help. And then...I met a lovely little app called [Kaizena](#). It detonated my paradigm on providing students with feedback. It transformed grading papers into a collaborative process.

Kaizena is voice grading. You highlight a portion of kid's paper, hit record, and start enlightening.

There are a bevy of benefits to utilizing your voice as opposed to your default red pen:

- Your voice is far more emotive than a simple written comment
- Your voice can be far more encouraging
- Your voice can better communicate tone and emphasis
- It's easier to listen than it is to read, hence kids are more inclined to listen to your comments
- Most educators can speak a lot faster than they can type or write
- This method invites collaboration because students respond to comments

With Kaizena, students are far more likely to listen and then apply important directives they may have previously ignored. Student writing could become a collaborative process.

Follow [this link](#) to hear me discuss Kaizena on my podcast.

Thanks Jim for your recos! **So, which of these tech tools will you use?** Share any other tech tools you found have 10X'd student engagement!

Want more ed tech tools and other teaching hacks? Read James' new book, [Hacking Engagement Again: 50 Teacher Tools That Will Make Students Love Your Class](#). You can also follow him on Twitter @jamessturtevant and his podcast [Hacking Engagement](#).

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