

William MAGRATH
The Delphic Dilemma

Do educational uses of technology improve teaching and learning in Classics? In addressing this question I feel more like Croesus than Socrates, after consulting the Delphic oracle; I think we must pay more attention to the questions we ask than to the answers we get from assessment data so far.

I have used various forms of technology in the instruction of Classics over the past decade and I have formally assessed most of these uses and their impact. There are several reasons why I still find it difficult to answer the question posed. Some of these reasons are related to the technology but most concern our understanding of teaching and learning in the Classics.

What is clear from the data is that information technology and the web are not just new "tools", that they do increase student motivation, and that they are playing an essential role in the changes taking place at all levels of formal education.

What assessment results do not make unequivocally clear is whether use of the technology actually improves student learning or faculty teaching. I am near to concluding that the lack of certainty on this point has more to do with the question we have posed rather than with answers derivable from current data.

Over the past decade three vital forces of change have come together to challenge the didactic model of teaching-learning. First, there has been a shift in educational philosophy toward constructivism. This change entails altered roles for teachers and learners, altered methods of instruction, and altered expectations of assessment. Second, a business model of accountability has been adopted in education. This has led to major shifts in funding, such as those favoring technology support services over teaching personnel. Third, an increase in the availability and sophistication of educational applications of information technology has deepened and expanded their use. In the presence of the convergence of these forces it is improvident to attempt to isolate the role of technology.

We can however engage in productive assessment of specific cases. We will want to frame questions like the following: how has the use of certain technologies contributed to the stated learning goals of a particular subject for a particular group of learners with specific characteristics guided by an instructor with a certain level of technical and pedagogical expertise supported by the institution.

I intend to contribute to the collection of a body of such evidence by discussing technology's role in the improvement of learning in a particular class over a period of five years. I plan to demonstrate the gains in transparency, authenticity, selectivity, collaboration, and communication, few of which register during any standard assessment process.

It is my conviction that we can guarantee wise applications of information technology only as we clarify our educational goals in Classics. In the interim we will be recording the transition.