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My post:

A discussion on the ability to address diversity using the Internet will naturally include ideas for using the Internet to increase cultural understanding and global awareness. After all, one of the hallmark characteristics of the Internet is its ability to make our big world much smaller. Lyn Hilt, an elementary school principal, describes how her teachers have leveraged the power of the Internet to increase students' global awareness. Skype, a tool for face-to-face communication, was used to connect her Pennsylvanian second graders with sixth graders in Illinois, who taught the younger students about important figures in American history. Twitter, Skype, and blogging were also used to connect students with peers in Alabama and Canada, who shared information about their regions and local cultural customs. A Spanish teacher at my own school recently used Skype to connect with a partner school in Costa Rica; these modern day pen pals communicated regularly and in the process improved their understanding of the Spanish language and broadened their horizons to include geographical regions to which many will never have the opportunity to travel. Even if students are unable to directly communicate with students in other parts of the world, the Internet still makes it possible to develop an appreciation for diverse cultures through pictures and videos of these regions, which users regularly upload to the Internet. In many ways, students can be world travelers without ever stepping foot on an airplane.

While Skype or other forms of face-to-face communications can present some challenges in terms of timing, blogs eliminate the need for synchronous communication, while still allowing students to connect with people from various parts of the world. I love the idea of students in the United States working on service projects to benefit students in other parts of the country and then allowing students to communicate with some of the students who benefit from those acts of service. Students may collect money, or school supplies, or hygiene products to help schools destroyed by recent natural disasters in Haiti, or Thailand, or even Oklahoma, where tornadoes ravaged schools only months ago. Students can follow the blogs of family members and friends who travel to different parts of the world; for example, I am currently following the blog of a young lady at my church who is currently in Guatemala, and through her writings I have been exposed to the cultural landscape of that country. Yet, blogging need not only connect students with those on the other side of the world; rather, students can post blogs that are read by neighboring schools or even their own parents and other family members. What is important is that students write for a larger audience, an audience that goes beyond the four walls of the classroom into the local community, the region, or even various parts of the world. When students realize that their writings can have a greater impact on a global society, they become more aware of the various cultures that comprise not only their classroom, but also the world.

Still, within the classroom, technology helps students to understand that diversity goes beyond skin color or cultural background. Instead, students of the same cultural heritage may themselves be different because of diverse learning needs and styles. Today's classrooms are

heterogeneous not only in terms of culture, but also learning abilities. Dave Edyburn (2006) suggests that assistive technology provides a positive method for addressing the needs of those learners who may have disabilities. Just as technology has made more simple the jobs of millions of Americans, so too can technology improve the learning of many students who need an alternative means of learning difficult material or of expressing their answers. My background is in the English classroom where computers have completely transformed the ways in which students express their writing. Not only can students type, format, and publish papers using computers, other students have used dictation software, to help type their papers for them. Likewise, many computer extensions make reading a simpler task for students; SpeakIt, available in the Chrome Webstore, transforms text on any webpage into read-aloud text, and other resources, like Simple English Wikipedia, transform text that may be at too difficult a reading level, to text that is more appropriate for students' diverse learning needs.

Moreover, technology not only addresses the needs of students with disabilities, but also recognizes the diverse learning interests and styles possessed by students within a single classroom. Smith and Throne (2009) write, "Technology facilitates modification of instruction in several areas to meet the needs of diverse students by making changes to subject matter (content), channels of throughput (process), means of output (product), and the learning environment" (p. 39). Teachers can easily find reading materials for all different levels of students on the Internet, and use various Web 2.0 productivity tools, such as Animoto, Prezi, or Powtoon, to give students varied methods of demonstrating their mastery of a specific subject. Though proponents of differentiated instruction like to use the metaphor of using the Internet to tailor a student's learning environment to his or her individual needs, I prefer instead to see the Internet as a one-size-fits-all garment, since within this one powerful technology, all students can find learning materials and tools for their individual needs.

Edyburn, D.L. (2006). Failure is not an option: Collecting, reviewing, and acting on evidence for using technology to enhance academic performance. *Learning and leading with technology*, 20-23.

Smith, G.E. & Throne, S. (2009). Differentiated instruction and middle school learners. *Differentiating instruction with technology in middle school classrooms*, (29-39).

My response to Amber:

I too was intrigued by Edyburn's (2009) advocacy for assistive technology to help students meet learning standards. I appreciated his analogy that many jobs now employ technology to make tasks simpler; for example, a mortgage underwriter uses a spreadsheet and a mechanic uses an engine diagnostic system. Outside of the classroom, adults have many ways of completing the tasks they are asked to do; yet in the classroom, we too often only give students one means of completing a task. He does, of course, bring up a problem—standardized tests that only allow students to demonstrate mastery in a single manner, often without the assistance of technology. Do you think this is a fair practice? Should students with disabilities be allowed the opportunities to demonstrate mastery in ways that are alternative to standardized tests or to use assistive technology on these standardized tests or is that somehow unfair to those students who are not allowed to use technology during testing?