

NEXTcast 2.15: Gian Pileri on Educational Apps

In this episode of NEXTcast, we talk to Gian Pileri, an educational technology specialist at Humber's Centre for Teaching & Learning, about using apps to augment the classroom experience.

Nathan Whitlock: Welcome to *NEXTcast*, a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. I'm Nathan Whitlock, an Editor at Humber Press. On *NEXTcast* we talk to some of the faculty and staff who are leading innovation at Humber, both inside and outside the classroom. In this episode, we talk to the CTL's own Gian Pileri, an Educational Technology Specialist, about online tools that can support learning in the 21st century classroom.

Nathan Whitlock: Welcome to the podcast Gian. Thanks for doing this.

Gian Pileri: Thank you.

Nathan Whitlock: So we recently ran a story in *NEXT* magazine that was all about online tools for educators that they can use in their classrooms. And you helped us with this, so thank you very much for that as well. I was wondering if we could sort of step back from that in terms of what those actual apps are, and if you could kind of let us know what are some of the benefits that educators will find using those online tools in classrooms.

Gian Pileri: Some of the tools that I refer in to that article and others that you can actually download online allow you to explore, allow you to analyze, allow you to even collect data. So the phone itself is actually a data collector. So even if you have physics experiments, you can have them throw them up in the air and collect data on what's happening, like velocity and gravitation and rotation and all that really is actually-

Nathan Whitlock: Like literally throw the phones up in the air.

Gian Pileri: Yes. So you can do that. Some people hang them down or you can drop them of course on a pillow or something, not on the floor. But you can do that as well. And it's really collecting information, then plotting graphs. You can use the phone also to read literature or

read articles. You can write on them as well. And the advantage is that you can do that wherever you are, so it doesn't always have to be just the classroom. School can be even on transit. You can have just like Microsoft Word, you can have Google Docs, you can have bulletin boards, you can have polling applications for example. Probably the most two successful now and the ones I promote the most, one is Kahoot! and one is Mentimeter.

Gian Pileri: So Mentimeter allows really teachers to tell the students, "Okay you can take out the phone," and now the phone itself becomes the channel for the information between the student and the rest of the class. So I can use that to actually participate. So I can bring in also students that usually don't participate, they are a bit shy maybe. They're not as engaged.

Nathan Whitlock: If you want to convince a teacher who is a little bit, let's say technophobic, what's the sort of most user-friendly thing that you would suggest they try, just as a baby step. Maybe what's the easiest thing that they could try in a classroom?

Gian Pileri: So maybe two ways that they can start. First of all actually check what your students are doing. When you go into the classroom and you always see students just hiding and you don't know what they're doing. So I think that not knowing what's on their screen is a big roadblock. And it probably bothers a lot of people saying, "What are you doing, you're not paying attention." Maybe they are. It's just that you don't know.

Gian Pileri: So actually starting an activity where I know that this is what I want you guys to do, can really break down that barrier, it can really create a connection. So again, going back to an application like Mentimeter, so Mentimeter... As a teacher, it really takes a few minutes to create a poll, to create a quiz. It can only be one. It can only be the one slide, one question. So don't start with anything huge, big project, can only be an activity that's like five minutes long. And that's where you can read and start a conversation in the classroom connected with the material of the class and really expand it after. And then you can have these kind of small activities, small burst of interaction with your students like that.

Gian Pileri: If you're not feeling comfortable we do have here the CTL, we do have. So I'm here myself, so you can contact me and we can chat about this and we can find maybe a way to really cater to your specific situation. This is just a tool, just like any other tool. So we need to find its use and again it doesn't have to be used if there is

no use to it. So just shoehorning it, try to make it fit. I don't think it works either.

Nathan Whitlock: Using it for the sake of using it.

Gian Pileri: Yes. So it's just really a new skill set that you, just like everything else, is something new. Maybe you are not feeling as comfortable with it, but what we can do is really check what the problem is, or how you would like to engage your students. So maybe you've seen something from your colleagues, maybe you've heard about something, even your students maybe they've said, "Oh you know there's another class we're doing this." So you can bring really any of that and, well, let's see what we can do with your class, with your material.

Gian Pileri: I don't think there is any rush into all the features that maybe you've heard of or the tool is capable of. It's more about really building that confidence. I'm all about that, building a confidence into using the digital tool, the technology.

Nathan Whitlock: And I have to ask you, I mean this is your field of expertise, do you have a personal favorite or is there an online tool or app that's new, that's exciting you right now?

Gian Pileri: So there are many, many exciting apps and I would-

Nathan Whitlock: Well you have to pick one. You have to pick one.

Gian Pileri: I have to pick one. That's hard. I actually have to rethink about it.

Nathan Whitlock: Is it Angry Birds?

Gian Pileri: No it's not. Angry Birds is...

Gian Pileri: So yeah, there are many of this kind of field now, we probably heard about augmented reality and virtual reality, so it's on everybody's mind and mouth. But again, we need to find good applications that make sense that are not again just another flashy new app because it's using a new technology.

Gian Pileri: So one of the great ones that I found is... Well there are two of them, so you have...4G Medical has an amazing anatomy app. So it's an augmented reality app and what you can do, you can take a human anatomy model and just project it in the real world. So basically it's like you having a real person, in your room, and then you can start really sectioning or seeing structures as if they were

in the room with you. So the difference here with augmented reality is that you don't have a 3D model that you just rotate with your finger, but you actually have to move with your body. You have to move around it, as if it was actually real.

Nathan Whitlock: I see, it's almost as if it's taking up physical space and you have to...

Gian Pileri: Yes exactly. So you have to move and explore really with your body as well. It's not just a matter of watching. So it's not a passive way of just watching, but it's a more of an active way of observing. This is a human anatomy model, so you can really remove and add structures, you can section, you can really do all of this and even stuff that I haven't thought about. It's really, it's so much that you can do about it. And a similar one it's, again the [inaudible] that I was referring to before, they do have different editions and there's one that allows you to create 3D projections of functions.

Gian Pileri: So again, they usually pretty complicated and you don't know exactly how to look at them and they seem to be always... They always look the same basically. So here, again, you can take these projections and project them in the real space and get a sense of the proportions, of the dimensions, where lines cross, surfaces meet or curve and so on. So there's really this extra part of that is not available on a piece of paper. It's unavailable on a 2D screen. So any kind of app that allows that, I think is amazing.

Nathan Whitlock: Well, for any faculty, there you run workshops all the time, you do consultations all the time, to the CTL?

Gian Pileri: So yes. I do run workshops. So we have workshops at the Lake and at the North campus, so on both campuses. Usually they run twice each semester. So again it's always not only the tool itself, but also how to adapt maybe even to existing content to the new tool. And it's usually just a starter. So again, it's the start of your journey, and then I'm always available for consultations face-to-face, if you wanted to drop me an email. But we can really start a journey together with these apps and I think it's usually quite exciting. And it's good to see... actually it's great to see the evolution that the journey and where... You'll find yourself maybe starting again with those baby steps that we were talking about before. You are the content experts and I'm the one who bring the technology, and then we can bridge really the two and merge them together and have I think great and exciting tools for yourselves and for your students.

Nathan Whitlock: Well that's how a faculty can start their journey, but we have to end our journey today. So thank you so much for coming on *NEXT*cast.

Gian Pileri: Thank you for having me.

Nathan Whitlock: *NEXT*cast is produced by Kristin Valois for Humber Press with the assistance of the creative productions team at The Centre for Teaching and Learning. Special thanks to Santino Pannozzo. To listen to previous episodes of *NEXT*cast and to read issues of *NEXT* magazine, go to humberpress.com. You can also find free downloadable transcripts of every *NEXT*cast episode at humberpress.com. To suggest stories for future episodes of *NEXT*cast or to just let us know what you think, email [humberpress](mailto:humberpress@humber.ca), all one word, @humber.ca. That's humberpress@humber.ca. Thanks, and see you next time. That's still not a pun.