Adobe Macromedia Flash in the Classroom

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Abstract

The technology that I chose to summarize research about is Macromedia Flash. Flash is an Adobe program that has a near infinite number of uses. I am interested in learning more about the different uses of Macromedia Flash in the classroom. It is clear that Flash can do some very interesting, detailed, and interactive things. What I am interested in summarizing is its uses for education and the classroom. Macromedia Flash can be used for more than just the “drag and drop” technique that has previously been used in education programs. I am interested in research about using Flash to create new, up-to-date, interactive educational material that will keep students interested and teach them in a way that will make them think and use application instead of just knowledge.

Adobe Macromedia Flash is a program that is perhaps most widely known for its ability to create animations and short movies. Flash is that program (the Macromedia Flash viewer/reader) that is always required in order to view different Internet videos and in order to visit certain [interactive] websites. Many people are not familiar with Flash outside of these basic uses and the common knowledge about it having the ability to create animations and videos. Adobe Flash is in fact one of the most advanced programs for developing interactive websites, games, video, graphics, and overall digital experiences. The uses of Flash are very extensive and far more advanced than most people know or realize. As an educator, my main interest in summarizing research for Adobe Macromedia Flash is its use for educators in teaching. Much research has been done regarding useful ways to use Flash and how educators, for the benefit of their students, can best use the program.

In the past, those who knew hard coding and whom were extremely savvy with the intensely detailed and complex programming and functioning of the program were the only ones who really used Flash. Users typically had to know how to do coding, knew the ins and outs of the program, and who had much training in the use of Flash. Flash was not a typical program to be used by educators in their classroom. Today, Adobe Flash has made many changes that enable it to be used by those who have not necessarily had such extensive training and users do not necessarily need to know hard coding and such. There have been many new features added to Flash that make it easier to use and navigate through on top of the simultaneous rise of e-learning and training that goes along with that. The addition of templates, for example, have made Flash a more useable program to those who have not had detailed training on how to use it. Another reason that Flash has become much more useable to the common person is the development of simplistic training websites and mini lessons available both online and through books and other resources on how to use Flash and on the different aspects that are available in the program. Much of the problem is that people have no idea all of the different things that Adobe Flash can actually do. It is my hope that this research summary will provide information for teachers so that they have at least a basic understanding of what Flash is, does, and how it can be used in the classroom for their [and their students’] benefit.

Flash is a program that was originally owned/operated by Macromedia. Adobe then bought out Flash Macromedia and now owns rights to the program. When it comes to using this program, Adobe Flash is really a blank slate for teachers. Teachers can use Adobe Flash to create a plethora of educational tools for their students. Much of what Flash can do is truly limited by the imagination. Flash truly has somewhat of a “lock” on the tools necessary to create engaging e-Learning content. Because Flash is so extensive, although it is enticing to some people, it can be very overwhelming for others. Flash uses something called ActionScript. ActionScript is a scripting language [developed by Adobe] used mainly in websites and for software using the Flash player [SWF files]. ActionScript was originally used for controlling 2D vector animations with later versions allowing for web-based games, streaming media, and more.

Flash saves files as SWF files, which stands for “Shock Wave Flash.” The flash movies and games have the extension, “.swf” and are often used on websites. The advantage of using Flash and its SWF files is its small size. Often times videos and games take up a lot of space, but Flash tends to save things as small files. Because of its smaller size, or rather, due to the way Flash saves its files, it uses less bandwidth. Bandwidth is a measure of data communication, meaning how data is downloaded or streamed. In most instances, Flash audio is encoded in MP3 or AAC.

Despite how amazing Adobe Flash can be, it does have some criticisms. Flash does have somewhat of an infamous security record. Wikipedia tells us that Flash has 77 CVE entries as of May 17, 2010. Many people have recommended not installing the Flash Reader or allowing it to run on their computers over the years. Adobe did finally apologize for not addressing this issue and has begun to do so. Flash “cookies” have also been somewhat of a minor issue over the years. About half of the websites using Flash also were using Flash cookies, yet this was not disclosed to users. Perhaps its biggest downfall is that consumers truly do not comprehend the extent of what Flash can truly do, be used for, and accomplish. Adobe Flash has begun to address the criticisms and issues that have surfaced and is dealing with them accordingly.

Today’s students are looking for education that is relevant and useful. Much of today’s education struggles when it comes to these two pieces. Adobe Flash can be used to truly create education that is not only meaningful, but an education that today’s students feel is relevant and useful. Students these days expect to be entertained constantly. Through television and media and today’s general society, students (and people in genera) have an expectation of entertainment. Learning used to be drill and practice and lecture; this simply will not work for the current students of this day and age. Adobe Flash allows educators to create meaningful education that pushes the student into knowledge, comprehension, and application. Flash has the ability to allow educators to create content in the form of interactivity, games, and much more. It also allows educators to stay parallel to the rise of technology in the media and today’s culture. This important and valuable of a tool should not quickly be overlooked!

I plan to use Flash in a number of ways. First of all, Adobe Flash is unsurpassed in creating interactive programs and websites for students. There are so many features I cannot even begin to go into them all here. I have personally used Adobe Flash to create custom animations, quizzes, videos, and more. Flash allows me to take the content that I want to teach my students and manipulate it in the ways that I think are best applicable. Flash allows me to have the creativity that I need to make my content interesting and “current” enough for my students. I can develop my content in ways that will engage and challenge my students to help them learn best.

Adobe Flash has an unmatched potential use in the classroom. I do not think I even have the ability to go into all of the different potential uses because they are so vast and dependent upon the needs and creativity of the teacher. Adobe Flash has potential for teachers to customize their lessons and what they want to teach in order to make their lesson the best that it can be and teach it in the best way for their students. Teachers can use the program to take their material and make interactive games, websites, online quizzes/tests, programs, and more. Teachers could make supplemental material (workbooks etc.) to go along with the computer-based instruction for added reinforcement. Adobe Flash also has the potential to make distance learning and e-Learning much more effective. The different educational tools that can be created with Adobe Flash are amazing and vast in number. Its potential is magnificent! It is going to take teachers learning how to use the software in the ways that they desire and getting the training and guidance that they need and it will also take Adobe stepping up and making known to educators all of the different uses that Flash has. Once teachers have a better understanding of all of the different abilities and functions of Flash, I think they will be much more excited to learn how to use the program in the ways they want to.

I still have a few questions myself. I am wondering how difficult it would be to get a teacher training program implemented in schools for Adobe Flash. How in depth would the training have to be in order to give teachers basic knowledge to be able to use the program? How can Adobe get out word better to teachers and educators about all of its abilities? Can Flash have a simple explanation of its uses so that a common person can read and understand it? Although there are questions left, the excitement and eagerness Adobe Flash instills regarding the potential for learning and education outweighs them all. Flash is an amazing program with so many uses. It is my hope that educators would realize the amazing tool available to them.

References

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