

Quikitech.com: Equipping Students with 21st Century Technology Skills

Before this semester began my wife and I discussed having her take more professional development courses in order to get a pay increase. We discovered that she only needed 5 units in order step up to the next pay grade. As luck would have it the UTLA Teacher Newspaper arrived at our home and one of the advertisements in this paper was a site called Quikitech.com. The site is approved by LAUSD and the units are accepted as qualifying towards salary points. This site offers several courses and after agreeing to assist my wife with picking courses I also got to select courses that would tie into my studies in education and technology. One course that caught my eye was titled “Equipping Students with 21st Century Technology Skills.”

Aside from reviewing the content of this course, I was also interested in analyzing the structure of how this material is presented. I paid close attention to the workflow of the site, the navigation elements, the consistency and the controls in place to keep the user focused.

This course was comprised of 15 lessons. The first lesson began with an inspirational video from Ken Robinson, titled “[How to escape education’s death valley](#).” I have only recently learned about Sir Ken Robinson and I had already watched this video but I agreed with the message and I felt it was a great catalyst to include as a way to begin the learning process. The next component that I appreciated was another video that was included. It was produced by the Quikitech staff and was entitled, “Getting the Best Out of Quikitech.” In this video, the CEO and instructor for all videos in this series, Donny Wise introduces users to the site and has tips for how to use the site in order to get the best use of the course. The layout was simple and consistent which made it simple to navigate (see figure below)

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Navigation

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Lesson 1

In this lesson you will learn a framework for working with technologies in the classroom - in a way that enables students to become critical thinkers.

In 2015 we are starting a brief QuikiTech Inspirational Series to encourage teachers on the work they do every day. This means that at the beginning of all of our classes there will be a short video to inspire you.

You do not need to worry about taking notes or be concerned that anything of this video is on a homework assignment. Just sit back and relax and enjoy this first video. QuikiTech would like to thank Ted.com for posting this video for public viewing.



How to get the most out of this course:

This introductory video is at the beginning of all of our courses. You only need to watch this once. If you have seen this video from a previous course you do not need to view it a second time.

You can click on the bottom right square of the YouTube video to enlarge the screen so you can see the text more clearly.



Note: Each lesson may take 2 to 3 hours to complete. Please give special effort to the homework assignments to give

Figure 1 Introductory Page

The content was not earth shattering but I appreciated the fact that it was well organized. The instructor presented a learning objective and outlined the course. He introduced us to something he defined as the “technology staircase” see figure 2.

Learning Objective

Learn the technology staircase and understand where technology is embedded for your grade level.

I. Learn The Technology Staircase

In the PowerPoint presentation that you just watched, you learned that there is something called the technology staircase. The technology staircase is built upon 7 key terms. Being familiar with these terms, and even memorizing these terms, will help give you a conceptual model for how to teach technology effectively.

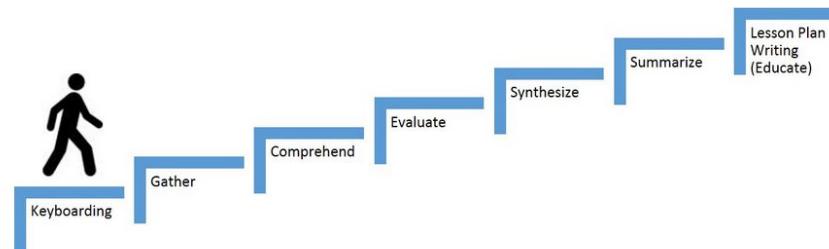


Figure 2Technology Staircase

From this point on the structure remained the same. Each lesson began with an introductory page that previewed the content that would be used in the lesson and each lesson had a short video (between 5 and 20 minutes on average). The instructor would feed us information in bite sized portions which I also appreciated. In reviewing the learning objective for this course I realized that the course included this idea of a "Technology Staircase." I have an interest in building a similar site for educators and this idea of coming up with a catch phrase or a visual representation to help users remember concepts was intriguing. As the lessons continued the instructor would recap what was covered and often refer to this technology staircase and I felt it was an effective tool for getting users to remember the important aspects of the course.

The true value of this course came by way of the homework assignments. After reviewing the video content, my wife and I, would have to come up with lesson plans and activities based on the content of each part of this technology staircase. As many studies have proven, learning actually occurs when the content is actually applied to real experiences and relatable learning strategies.

After completing the course I went back to review the site and as a programmer I was interested in the controls for keeping a user honest and focused on the content. I noticed that each lesson would only appear once the previous lesson was completed. Each lesson had a quiz and a homework assignment to test the user's understanding. Once completed, the user could advance to the next session. This protects from the user trying to circumvent the process and cheat the system. Beyond the technical aspects of the site I liked the collaboration component that was also available to users. Forums were available for fellow educators to share their lesson plans that resulted from taking this course. There was also the opportunity for discussions about relevant issues for educators on this web site. The final aspect that I looked at was the assessment and feedback elements. As mentioned earlier, each section had a small quiz to test the knowledge received for each lesson and once the homework assignments were uploaded to the site, we received confirmation and feedback from the Quikitech staff about the homework assignments we turned in. We were given advice about different approaches to take with respect to the related topic and it doesn't hurt to get an online "pat on the back" for completing each stage in this course.

My overall experience with this site was that Quikitech.com made the learning process easy. I was not distracted by an overly coded website that tries to include too much in terms of the visual layout and complexity. In fact, this site is just the opposite. Its color palette is mostly gray tones with black elements that serve as a good contrast. The courses are straight forward and the assignments are manageable for professionals with fulltime jobs and family commitments. The content is always available to accommodate the user. We were able to go at our own pace and I was not confused by how the course was organized. I felt that this was the most important feature that would make me a repeat customer. I did come across an issue with one assignment and I wrote to the support staff for clarification. I was pleasantly surprised to receive a quick response and a professional demeanor from

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Web Evaluation

the technical support team. This is a huge plus for me. I have interacted with other technical support teams and I know that this area could be a bone of contention for many. I am happy to report that this site was a great experience and I highly recommend it to others looking to complete salary points or taking additional professional development classes.