Tech-aways of pirouetting like a pirate

Miller, Matt. *Tech Like a PIRATE: Using Classroom Technology to Create an Experience and Make Learning Memorable*. San Diego, David Burgess Consulting Inc., 2020

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"Joke exchanges are carried on in deadly earnest, like a verbal duel – mouth-to-mouth combat. Bang, bang: you're (linguistically) dead." – David Crystal (*Language Play,* 1998)

Matt Miller misses out on one aspect – jokes – in his entertaining, inspired handbook-of-sorts, *Tech Like a PIRATE.* He draws on methods of emulation (of students' interests); simulation (of the fantasy worlds and games students build); collaboration, but doesn't harp on how jokes are loved by all folks and blokes and can be integrated into various emulation-simulation-collaboration models that are there. Fletcher Maynard of Chapel Hill told me once, sitting down at a café, that the best stand-up comedians are the wittiest people; therefore the most serious people; thereby the most serious and entertaining educators of the society. That may be Mr. Maynard just fletching his cerebral arrow, but he's in the narrow zone of pinpointing the matter – of boredom.

Boredom is the point of departure that Miller also takes in his book – that educators need to break free from the shackle of conventional boredom of the classroom. He takes his cue from Dave Burgess's book *Teach Like a PIRATE* (2012) and works the "Teach" to the matter of "Tech." PIRATE in both the books is an acronym for Passion, Immersion, Rapport, Ask-Analyze, Transformation and Enthusiasm. That is regular acronymization of a seed word (that India also has become so efficient at) – with a bunch of abstract nouns thrown in, each of which is rough synonyms of each other. This acronymization is an old bane, masquerading as a boon, in self-help books that have boomed since massive industrialization in the USA in the 1950s. They have spread to the world with the spread of industrial and industrious loneliness. The other usuals of self-help literature also exist in this book – changing "impossible" to "I'm possible"; transforming "I'll never do that again" to "I'll never do it that way again" (p15) et cetera.

That rider aside, Miller's attempt is at a decent compendium of technology tools that can be integrated into the classroom space in a fun way. The premise of Miller is – "don't teach, create an experience" – which any interesting and interested teacher of course understands – but a reinforcement of positive clichés can be a constructive force. Miller encourages educators to be risk-takers, to push against the limits of existing methods – which again is the hallmark of any positive systemic transformation.

The book is divided into various tech compartments. In terms of using applications (apps henceforth), Miller points out that there would be metonymic displacements – that is the platforms and the trending apps would keep changing. However, that doesn't make the book dated, for the author is hankering after recreating the experience of using an app in the classroom rather than using a particular

app. The "buzz app" could be used as a springboard; what hooks students to it is what the teacher needs to figure out, and work with the tools available to them. For example, using Google slides instead of Instagram stories; phone videos instead of Vine videos (Vine is already outdated) – in short, mimicking social media, to generate interest in students. Miller advocates tools like seesaw.me, classdojo.com, Google classroom instead of Snapchat and TikTok. Twitter's brevity could be a springboard to teach precise writing.

Miller spends a considerable amount of space exploring the space of videos – which is so pertinent in the post-pandemic scene. He mentions a 2017 study which predicted that by 2021, 82 per cent of all consumed internet content would be videos. He also mentions the psychosomatic effect of videos. This of course is a major area of concern with so much audio-visual content at fingertips – the research that is needed to evaluate the psychosomatic effect on posterity, and how to navigate this matter with responsibility. Miller advocates making videos and podcasts in classroom, and role play with roles like news anchoring, game shows etc while integrating subject content. An interesting interactive audio tool is gosynth.com, to use in the classrooms to create the podcast experience. Miller rightly points out the power of social media in terms of youngsters voicing their concerns on a global platform – be it Malala Yousafzai blogging about the Taliban's oppression in 2009; or students in Florida raising their concerns about gun laws after a mass shooting in 2017.

The section on games is interesting; it's an area that educators are struggling to co-opt from the zone of addiction to education. Jane McGonigal, who suffered a concussion, started playing games, got better; and built gaming platforms for healing people with problems similar to hers – her website is superbetter.com. Miller quotes Zomorodi who contends that games can fight depression. That of course can go the exact another way too, and would require more qualification – but the optimism is interesting, and a step forward to understand the intrinsic human nature to like games. Miller advocates "stealing like an artist" – that is picking up the features of games available on the market. This is his consistent idea, as we have seen with the matter of apps as well – that classrooms work best with innovation and copyleft rather than copyright. There are games for repetition (Kahoot, Quizlet); games that interact with data; games for problem-solving etc.

The eight sections of the book are high on both egging on and pegging – a provocation to try new methods, and then suggesting methods. It's generally Google tools that Miller expositions; but as he says – the matter is about creating an experience and innovating with whatever tools are in currency in a time and space. Overall, this is a useful compendium for classroom teachers transitioning to a tech experience, both in terms of motivation and information.