‹

Dyn Says Cyberattack Has Ended, Investigation Continues

Visa Taps Blockchain for Cross-Border Payment Plan

Airbnb Revises New York Rules Amid Possible Legislation

Russian Hacker Suspected of LinkedIn Attack Indicted in U.S.

FCC Re Settlem Mobile Unlimit

›

DIGITS

Virtual Reality Learns How to Get Into the Classroom

By **GEORGIA WELLS**

Feb 11, 2016 12:00 pm ET

💬 **0 COMMENTS**

Virtual-reality proponents argue students engage more with a lesson when it is interactive, such as virtual field trips to far places. *NEARPOD*

Virtual-reality technology is ready for the classroom. Whether teachers are ready for virtual reality is less clear.

Nearpod Inc., a startup that makes education software used in 10,000 schools across the U.S., is launching virtual-reality lessons on Thursday. Here's their pitch: instead of requiring schools to invest heavily in headsets and other hardware, Nearpod's approach relies on students using their own devices or district-supplied electronics.

Guido Kovalskys, Nearpod's chief executive, acknowledges many teachers are apprehensive about incorporating virtual reality, and technology in general, into their classrooms, because they view it as expensive and complicated.

"Our biggest hurdle is to become relevant to teachers that are not fully ready to adopt technology," says Mr. Kovalskys.

Students already use tablets and netbooks in the classroom, to share text, record and watch videos, and conduct research. Virtual reality – the technology that lets people experience immersive, 360-degree images – would take technology in the classroom to the next level. Google parent Alphabet experimented with virtual reality in the classroom last September, a temporary project using its cardboard viewer.

Virtual-reality proponents argue students engage more with a lesson when it is interactive, such as virtual "field trips" to far places.

First and second-grade students in Berkeley, Calif. explore Mars with Nearpod VR. *NEARPOD*

"I think once teachers have tried virtual reality with their classes, they will realize it opens up their students' imaginations to the world beyond their textbooks, Chromebooks and tablets," says one of Nearpod's investors, Brandon Farwell, partner with Rothenberg Ventures. Rothenberg has invested in close to 40 virtual-reality companies. Another of Nearpod's investors is the Emerson Collective, an organization founded by Laurene Powell Jobs, the philanthropist and widow of Steve Jobs.

Nearpod launched in 2012 as an app that allowed teachers and students to share content. When Mr. Kovalskys first saw virtual reality, he knew it was something he wanted to incorporate because it would make Nearpod's software more interactive.

His technology consists of lessons that teachers and students view on their devices that include images, text, questions, and yes, virtual reality. Much of the content is free; teachers can pay $2.99 and up for certain lessons, and schools that buy bulk software licenses pay around $2,000 a year. Along with the software, Nearpod distributes free cardboard viewers for their smartphone virtual-reality software.

One tactic Mr. Kovalskys uses to make it easier for teachers to start using virtual reality in their classrooms is to create multimedia that doesn't replace a teacher's traditional lesson plan, and instead adds visual elements.

Kenneth Mendribil, a French teacher at the Galileo Academy of Science and Technology in San Francisco, recently got to test a beta version of Nearpod's virtual reality with his 11th-grade students.

On a field trip to the Legion of Honor, an art museum in San Francisco, Mr. Mendribil's class used Nearpod's virtual reality lesson to complete a scavenger hunt of French impressionist art, on loan from Paris museums. At each stop on the scavenger hunt, they used the app's virtual-reality function to see the piece of art in its home location in Paris. For homework, in a section on the app, they wrote–en français–about their favorite item in the collection.

Ever since he started using Nearpod with his classes, Mr. Mendribil has noticed his students are more likely to turn in their assigned homework on the app. "They never say they forgot their smartphone," Mr. Mendribil says.