

Expanding the Toolkit: A Guide to Canva for Learner-Centered Educators

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Introduction/Need

In a world where technology overload becomes increasingly burdensome for the modern professional (Grandhi et al., 2005; Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010; Rasool et al., 2022), sifting through digital platforms to find resources can feel overwhelming. Within educational settings, the educator is not just a user of technology, but a professional developing transferrable career skills (visual literacy, digital communication, and instructional design) that can be modeled and passed down to their students (Bertrand & Namukasa, 2020). The authors position Canva as a resource for educators to integrate into their classrooms through examples provided by the authors' own experiences using the platform.

A synthesis of research demonstrates that integrating Canva into educational settings delivers a statistically significant positive effect on students' academic achievement, motivation, and 21st century skills (Astaño, 2025; Sugiarni et al., 2024). Grounded in active learning and multimedia frameworks, the platform's visual resources and design templates offer modern competencies in communication, creativity, and critical thinking (Astaño, 2025; Risnawaty, 2026; Warda, 2025). Students experience the greatest cognitive gains when they shift from viewing teacher-made materials to actively co-creating digital content (Astaño, 2025; Risnawaty, 2026). Aimed at equipping educators with digital competencies to utilize the Canva platform within the classroom, this presentation plans to provide attendees with actionable strategies for designing learner-centered experiences within their classroom.

How It Works

Canva is an online software that can be used to create a variety of visual displays, ranging from presentations to posters and to social media posts. Canva offers a variety of customizable templates and blank documents of any size to create visuals with additional tools. Tools available include elements, texts, uploads, draw, shapes, lines, and add-on apps. All Canva projects can be downloaded in a variety of formats (PDF, JPEG, PPT, PPTX, PNG). Another feature of Canva is the ability to create a brand within the application to create marketing materials (posters, email templates, business cards) and manage these documents, colors, and attributes in a central area.

The possibilities are endless with what is available. Below we have provided five examples of how each of the authors have utilized Canva within their professional lives.

1. Engaging Presentations: As a student and researcher, Sidney has used Canva to create presentations with previously designed presentation templates. These templates often come with preset slide designs within the template theme that can be further customized. Not only are the preset slides in the template helpful, but they also provide a structured, uniform aesthetic throughout the presentation. Using the preset template slides, Sidney was able to create presentations that fit the theme of the content presented in class and of research presentations at conferences.
2. Conceptual Modeling: As a graduate student, Kaley found Canva to be the perfect platform for visualizing concepts. She enjoys taking potentially overcomplex verbalizations from coursework and personal research projects to create visual imagery to

explain her ideas. This is particularly useful when attempting to explain conceptual/theoretical frameworks, research findings, and challenging concepts within coursework. Additionally, Kaley found the creation of these conceptual models to be impactful in her own learning and growth as an educator and scholar.

3. **Student Run Newspaper:** In her 5th grade classroom, Erin used Canva as a place for her students to communicate with others about their classroom activities. Each month, students would interview each other or write columns on the subjects covered in mathematics, writing, social science, and science. For example, a student might write about how they learned long division with accompanying descriptions of the steps. Alternatively, another student might write about their trip to the local history museum where they learned about beekeeping and candle making. At the end of each month, the newspaper is shared with the students' family and guardians so they may stay up to date on the happenings within the classroom.
4. **Interactive Websites:** In her undergraduate programming, Alisa created an interactive website fully using Canva to embed links into the website. Upon finishing a design for her website, Alisa could click 'Share' and Canva provides the option to create a link to be embedded within another platform. While this process may seem intimidating, the ability for Canva to create the code for the user takes the need to understand computer coding out of the equation, simplifying the process with a few clicks.
5. **YouTube Videos & Branding:** As a student teacher in a kindergarten classroom, Ali recorded herself reading children's books for not only her kindergarteners, but for other elementary school teachers. Canva provides her platform for displaying the scanned images of the book while allowing for the audio of her reading to be overlaid on top. To further immerse listeners into the story, Canva allowed her to add sound effects such as birds, rustling leaves, or city sounds. In addition to the creation of YouTube videos, Canva provided a platform for creating a brand (logos, introduction sequence to videos, and a consistent color scheme) to accompany her videos (Mumma & Mumma, n.d.).

Future Plans/Advice to Others

We intend to have a toolkit available at the Learner Centered Teaching Conference that will not only provide examples of our own work but also links to additional resources on how to implement Canva in the classroom. Canva can be used as a tool to promote creativity and flexibility in the classroom, as there are many ways to use it from both the educator and student perspectives.

Costs/Resources Needed

Implementing Canva in the classroom can be done at no cost, as there is a freemium option for a basic membership called "Canva Free." Canva Free comes with basic design tools, 5GB of cloud storage, thousands of free templates, and limited AI and extension usage. Upgrading to Canva Pro costs \$15/month or \$120/year. It includes 1TB of cloud storage, 100+ million premium assets (photos, videos, fonts), access to premium templates, Background Remover, and access to AI tools. Other subscription options include K-12 teachers and schools, and some college campuses for free, with Canva Business and Canva Enterprise being paid.

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