

Technology & the Fundamentals of Learning

What if a good education doesn't require everything we've made it today? Could the bells-and-whistles we've attached to learning be a part of why real learning is so rare? For instance, our electronic and digital age has changed education in a big way through computers, the internet, television, video games, etc. Yet, the overuse of technology in education is stifling the flow and freedom of learning through group dialogue and public debate, as well as modeling and mentoring, which have been essential to true education for thousands of years.

Of course, technology has many benefits, saving us time, hassle, and money. As Jeff Olson, vice president of research for Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions claims, "...The technological advances 'represent very real potential to remake education for the better... The potential for the textbook to come alive with interactivity... will make the next several years of e-book innovation fascinating to watch'" (Marklein). However, while Olson and others promote technology in education, there are questions about whether technology is really beneficial to learning.

To begin with, in 1931, Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in which he foretold a time when "people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think" (Postman xix). Contrary to George Orwell's *1984* prophecy that books would one day be banned,

Huxley feared... that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information.

Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance... As Huxley remarked in *Brave New*

World Revisited, the libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny, 'failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.' In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us (Postman xix).

Nevertheless, school administrators and politicians all over America are pushing to add new technology to schools as if it is the key to aiding education in America. But, consider this:

1. "...Some educational psychologists suggest the dizzying array of options and choices offered by the ever-evolving technology may be making it harder to learn rather than easier" (Marklein).
2. As one Santa Clara University student stated, "I feel that I comprehend material better in regular textbooks' ... it's more difficult to look at a computer screen when you're tired, he says, and harder to concentrate when Facebook, YouTube and e-mail are just a click away..."; when Kaplan's Olson asked students why they didn't use their laptops to do research, he heard some form of, "because that's my distraction" (Marklein).
3. Research has found that including optional, clickable links in online resources that relate to similar material can "create confusion and weaken understanding"; in fact, "One study found reading comprehension declined as the number of clickable links increased" (Marklein).
4. According to Nicholas Carr, author of *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brain*, "The online environment 'promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning... The danger is you don't encourage people to think critically and, ultimately, you don't encourage them to think creatively'" (Marklein).

5. “Whereas e-readers have taken off in the leisure-reading market, publishers have been slower to jump into the education market. Reasons vary, but one challenge for publishers is that reading for the purpose of gaining knowledge is a more complex process than reading for pleasure” (Marklein)

In addition, our over-reliance on media has played a major part in damaging literacy in America and the World. Our addiction to technology has made us less intellectual and more simplistic. Tech-talk has made us lazy in how we think, talk, write, and behave. In fact, technology has interrupted and competed with key ingredients to sound education such as,

1. Group dialogue and debate – Having a serious, rational, free exchange in the arena of ideas, where critical thinking skills are strengthened and opposing views confront one another is essential to learning; this is also known as the Socratic method.
2. Modeling and mentoring – Learning through experience, relationship, observation, and personal instruction with older people, with the intention of not only learning what and when to think but, more importantly, how to think, epistemologically is indispensable to true education. Another benefit of relational-learning is the influence it can have upon the student’s character. As Martin Luther King once said, “Intelligence plus character is the goal of true education” (King).

Moreover, we are too busy, too stimulated, too entertained to pick up a book and enjoy the power of the imagination. As Mark Bauerlein states in *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupifies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*, “...Nearly half of the student body regards books by choice and disposition...uninterested in reading and unworried about the consequences, kids reject books as they do their vegetables, and exhortations of their teachers [and parents] fall flat” (Bauerlein 53). As most youth and adults fail to understand, “Books

afford young readers a place to slow down and reflect, to find role models, to observe their own turbulent feelings well expressed, or to discover moral convictions missing from their situation. Habitual readers acquire a better sense of plot and character, an eye for the structure of arguments, and an ear for style, over time recognizing the aesthetic vision of adolescent fare as, precisely, adolescent” (Bauerlein 58).

In conclusion, the overuse of technology in education is retarding learning since group dialogue, public debate, modeling, and mentoring are taking the backburner more and more every day. Of course, there is nothing wrong with using technology to save time, hassle, and money, but the timeless fundamentals of education should never be replaced. Therefore, it is time for us to get back to the basics of learning. Only then will we be able to use technology the right way.

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