

Is Technology in the Primary Classroom Really Helping Students to Grow as Learners?

By Theresa O'Grady

As I'm entering the final years of my teaching career, I struggle with the use of technology in my classroom. The most common struggle is keeping up with the latest and greatest; Kahoot, Google classroom, Dojo, and the list goes on.... You can teach an old dog a new trick but it's time consuming and not easy because it doesn't come naturally. I also feel a sense of loss for the fine art of writing using pencil and paper - plus the beautiful flowing handwriting, manuscript or cursive. Kids today in third and fourth grades exclaim, "I can't read this!" because it's written in cursive AND people's signatures now are a scribbled mess on a line for writing a check or signing an important document like the purchase of their first house. Which to me is just Bizarre!! The signatures on our Constitution are readable to this day.

But I'm mostly concerned about the real value in using computers in the lower elementary classroom where the computer tends to be used more as a babysitter in a center for learning to read or playing a game by themselves to learn math facts. The addictiveness of these highly stimulating applications or games, which are excellent at grabbing the child's attention by making the game so engaging and exciting to play, it's leading to a more serious problem, computer addiction. Students have a hard time turning the device off or moving to a new center, when direct instruction is next on the schedule. I have had and know of students who absolutely lose all sense of right and wrong with the simple direction or action of turning off their computer and putting the device away. Students become extremely enraged when told time is up, put it away. This child in our school destroyed the classroom, knocking over tables and desks throwing books because his anger took over. The adrenaline rush that this little brain can't get enough of from the stimulating game, it's like "A Plug in Drug" caused all reason to

disappear. These young children slam their desk, kick chairs and have become violent when they can't get enough technology gaming or when their 15 minute turn is over.

While researching this topic of computer addiction I found, much to my surprise, that many children from California's Silicon Valley Tech CEO's have opted for schools that have NO technology. AND these same parents have not allowed their children to use these devices in their homes. Bill Gates and Steve Jobs were low tech parents. Chris Anderson's children, the former editor of Wired and now chief executive of 3D Robotics, a drone maker, has strict time limits over using devices in his home. These parents, who are tech professionals, see the dangers of devices: bullying, pornography, addiction and don't want these situations to happen in their homes. Studies show that children under the age of 10 are more prone to becoming addicted. A common consensus with all tech parents is the rule, no screen time in the child's bedroom away from a parent's view.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder has increased dramatically over the last 10 years. Many researchers and neuroscientist are saying that there is a direct connection to the hyper-stimulation of gaming. Designers were hired to build educational games that would grabbed a child's attention and keep it. The designers have created a vicious cycle by making the games so stimulating, hypnotic and addictive that the child/student has a hard time stopping and putting the device away.

A tech only classroom has not shown the results of what many expected - the scores did not increase but went down. The best use of computers is to create vs. to consume and many of our classrooms are consumer only, not creators. AND to be truthful, it's a lot harder and time

consuming at the elementary level to create on a device. You have to be knowledgeable and an expert yourself to help your students with the process of making slides or stories or videos.

I'm not finished but have a real interest in this topic.

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Educate them in a more stimulating and “engaging” manner.

But let's look more closely at that claim. ADHD rates have indeed [exploded by 50 percent over the past 10 years](#) with the CDC indicating that rates continue to rise

by five percent per year. Yet many researchers and neuroscientists believe that this ADHD epidemic is [a direct result of children being hyper-stimulated](#). Using hyper-stimulating digital content to “engage” otherwise distracted students exacerbates the problem that it endeavors to solve. It creates a vicious and addictive ADHD cycle: The more a child is stimulated, the more that child needs to keep getting stimulated in order to hold their attention.

Consuming vs creating.

Tech in the classroom not only leads to worse educational outcomes for kids, which I will explain shortly, it can also clinically hurt them. I’ve worked with over a thousand teens in the past 15 years and have observed that students who have been raised on a high-tech diet not only appear to struggle more with attention and focus, but also seem to suffer from an adolescent malaise that appears to be a direct byproduct of their digital immersion. Indeed, over two hundred peer-reviewed studies point to screen time correlating to increased [ADHD](#), [screen addiction](#), [increased aggression](#), [depression](#), [anxiety](#) and even [psychosis](#).

We could look to Finland, whose school system routinely [ranks toward the top globally](#) and has chosen to skip the tech and standardized testing. Instead,

Finnish students are given as many as [four outdoor free-play breaks per day](#), regardless of the weather—while here, a sedentary American child sitting in front of a glowing screen playing edu-games while over-scheduled and stressed by standardized testing is seen as the Holy Grail.