**The Effectiveness of Internet Usage and Technology in the Classroom: Is It Enhancing or Hindering Students’ Learning?**

Allie Modica

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the growing use of the Internet and technology within classrooms today as a method of enhancing learning and enriching curricula for students. It will examine both the benefits and the problems that are associated with making use of the Internet in classrooms. Finally, this paper will suggest a course of action that can be taken to use the Internet and technology most effectively. By following this plan of action, the benefits of Internet use in classrooms will be maximized while negative effects will be minimized.

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**Introduction:**

Since the introduction of the World Wide Web in 1991, the ways in which humans interact with one another have changed drastically. The Internet has shaped several aspects of our society, from creating instantaneous access to information to increasing our ability to communicate with others on a global scale (“The Invention of the Internet”). As a result of the massive expansion in the market for personal devices that support Internet access, the amount of people who rely on the Internet daily has grown significantly. And, few demographic groups rely on the Internet as much as children. Technology has begun to play a large role in the lives of children, which has translated into the utilization of technology as more than a means for entertainment.In the past decade, the Internet has begun to infiltrate its way into classrooms for many different purposes. While there are many advocates for technology integration in today’s classrooms, there are also several who argue that the educational value of the Internet has not yet been proven. Most districts that have the funding to supply their schools with technological devices such as Smart Boards, Chromebooks, and Elmo’s are fully “on board” with the increasing employment of these tools. However, few have stopped to truly evaluate the effectiveness of these technologies and whether or not they are being used in an appropriate manner.

**Benefits of Internet Usage:**

The infinite amount of information students have at their fingertips as a result of the Internet is undeniable. With effective Internet access, the possibilities are simply endless. The potential benefits that are associated with the use of the Internet and technology are numerous and significant. One of the major benefits to using technology in the classroom is that it has the potential to keep students on task for a longer period of time (Huneycutt, 2013). Using computers and online databases can save students time when they are carrying out research, and the use of technology can often help to maintain their focus more than using books and paper materials (Huneycutt, 2013). The excitement of using the computer for research can spark students’ interest in a topic that may otherwise be somewhat dry. In addition to research, there are many resources via the Internet that can make dull lessons much more interactive through virtual programs and video streaming (Huneycutt, 2013). There is always an abundance of online content that teachers can utilize to make their mundane lessons much more engaging.

Another undeniable benefit of integrating technology and the Internet into the classroom environment is the individualized nature of the learning pace. As opposed to whole-class instruction, students have the ability to take in information at their own pace and can be more independent and self-directed through the use of technology (Ankenman, 2008). Additionally, teachers have the ability, with some computer programs, to track student progress and can then adjust the curriculum accordingly. Another great benefit that goes along with this is the potential for parental involvement in their students’ success (Ankenman, 2008). Through the use of computers, parents can monitor and assist with homework and can help hold their children accountable for their work. At the middle and high school levels, a parent “portal” can help create more open communication between teachers and parents, which can hopefully translate to increased student success (Ankenman, 2008).

One of the biggest benefits to using the Internet and technology in education today reaches outside just the walls of the classroom. By becoming accustomed to different applications in technology, students are developing fundamental skills that are indispensable in today’s workplace (Huneycutt, 2013). Twenty-first century education is moving farther away from memorizing and compartmentalizing facts and numbers. In turn, the ways in which we learn material must adapt to fit the ever-changing world of education. Using technology and the Internet in classrooms can contribute to elements that are important in education today such as: developing communication skills, collaborating with other individuals, productivity and efficiency, and complex problem solving (Huneycutt, 2013). By giving students more opportunities to interact with technology and utilize what the Internet has to offer, they will be far more prepared in the future. The potential benefits that accompany the use of technology and the Internet are undeniably advantageous and valuable.

**Problems with Internet Usage:**

Although there are many illustrious examples to support the use of the Internet and technology devices in the classroom, there are also many critical arguments about why their uses should be minimized. One man who is a strong advocate against the use of technology is Todd Oppenheimer, the author of the book *The Flickering Mind: The False Promise of Technology in the Classroom* *and How Learning Can be Saved.* Throughout his work, Oppenheimer argues that the generation of children today is wavering between two possible routes (Oppenheimer, 2003). If they take one route, young students will have the ability to be confident experts on the technology tools of their day; as a result, they will be able to use these skills to better attend to the problems they face. On the other hand, students can fall victim to the narrow measures of ability that technology implies; they will lose sight of the “ability to reason, to listen, to feel empathy, among many other things” (Oppenheimer, 2003). Oppenheimer also argues that when districts choose to computerize a science class or even shut down programs such as music or art in order to pay for new technology, they begin to lose sight of “the fundamentals of learning” (Oppenheimer, 2003). While technology can be used in beneficial ways, it should not take the place of other important aspects of a well-rounded education.

 There are several other critical perspectives offered in regards to the detriments of technology and Internet use in education. It is a valid concern that in schools’ efforts to increase their amount of technology integration, that they divert money in their budget away from potentially more valuable purposes, like textbooks or classroom supplies for example. It is has not truly yet been proven that the educational value of the Internet is so great that it should be taking the place of more typical teaching styles (“Why The Net?”, 2004).

 With regards to Internet usage in schools, some critics complain that there is a possibility of students accessing inappropriate or off-topic information via the Internet, such as online gaming or pornography (“Why The Net?”, 2004). Although most districts have some sort of filtering system installed on school computers to restrict inappropriate web pages, they are not necessarily flawless; some may even block sites that are useful while others allow sites that are potentially destructive. The use of the Internet in classrooms where students have individual access to computers may prove to be distracting for students if they are not fully on-task.

 Lastly, one major reason that the increased use of the Internet and technology in education could be detrimental to students is the increase of cheating and plagiarism. In the book *Student Cheating and Plagiarism in the Internet Era: A Wake-up Call*, by Ann Lathrop and Kathleen Foss, the authors analyze and discuss how the increased access to the Internet has been accompanied by a boost in the amount of plagiarism among students. Their book goes on to suggest ways to combat this issue and how to make it more difficult for students to cheat (Lathrop, 2000). When teachers make assignments computerized, which allows students to collaborate when they should be working independently, it makes it much more difficult to monitor their work and determine whose products are original thoughts. These are just a few of the reasons that critics have cited regarding why districts should take a closer look at how much money they put into their budgets to increase technology integration.

**Plan of Action:**

It is simply not sensible to think that any schools that have the ability to provide technology to their students will cut it out completely any time soon. With technology growing more and more advanced every year, it would be unreasonable to expect schools to bring the use of the Internet and technology integration to an end. However, while technology can be a supplement to make lessons more engaging and attractive to students, it should not be used instead of regular instruction. In other words, students should still be learning how to research using books and paper resources; they should still understand how to find books using a call number, instead of always relying on Wikipedia and Google searches.

 Acquiring the skills associated with technological devices and Internet research are certainly essential skills for today’s generations. These lessons can be intertwined with other lessons so that they are still being used for educational reasons and these privileges are not taken advantage of. If teachers strike the proper balance with the use of technology, then it can be used effectively to increase students’ computer skills and can also help with efficiency of tasks. Additionally, the use of computers in schools can help students who need to work at different paces and helps to instill a sense of accountability in each student; students won’t be able to rely on the students in their group to help them out on everything. Overall, the use of technology should not overwhelm the school day to the point where it is distracting and takes away from the actual education of the students.

**Conclusion:**

 The ways in which the Internet and technology have shaped our society today are immense and cannot be ignored. There are clear benefits to the use of technology integration that are evident and indisputable. While not everyone agrees that there should be a focus on technology in schools, the advantages are typically irrefutable. If the Internet and technology is used effectively, it can have immeasurably positive effects on students and their education. With the amount of interaction that kids have with technology today, it is a helpful connection to use technology in classrooms as well. As long as the technology is monitored and is used in moderation, it can be used in endless, creative and newly innovative ways to help students grow as curious learners!

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