

Chapter 12

Student's Reliance on the Use of Technology for Classroom Assignment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ms. Turner, an eighth grade History teacher, assigns students a research paper on Cuba and communism. She asks the students to use only paper media for their research materials. Her students argue, "Why should we waste time using books to find information, when we can just look it up on the Web quickly?" Angry parents also question why the students should have to use only books for research when they have been given laptops by the school.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Today's students cannot conceive of a time that technology was not readily available to them. For them, the use of the Internet plays a major role in their relationships with friends, family, and school. Many young people do not understand arguments that schools should limit their use of personal technology in the classroom. They view education as an extension of their social networking experience. And the parents of teens think the use of technology enhances the social life and academic work of their teenage children. They see technology as the answer to every question, accessible instantly. Therefore, they do not comprehend restricting the use of the limitless

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capabilities of technology. Proponents of the use of technology in the classroom argue that students complete their schoolwork more quickly; they are less likely to get stymied by material they don't understand; their papers and projects are more likely to draw upon up-to-date sources and state-of-the-art knowledge; and, they are better at juggling their school assignments and extracurricular activities when they use technology gadgets.

During the early 1980s, there was little if any use of technology in everyday life. The use of technology in the classroom at that time was typically limited to the use a typewriter and occasionally a television. Teachers did not have computers on their desks, and student computers were unheard of. The only way to have access to information was through books and newspaper articles. Students were expected to find written documentation for information included in their school work. Students were provided the tools to complete research by using the school or public library as their main source of information. High schools in the 1980s still offered courses in typewriter usage. The tasks afforded by technology were limited to typing papers. When students needed to research information, hard-back books were the only medium available to students.

Today's students have grown up with the use of technology readily available to them. Since the 1990s the use of technology has become a necessity few could live without. With the advent of home computers and the Internet, students have had more access to information than ever before. Some researchers believe that readily accessed information from the Internet has diminished the use of books, high-level critical thinking, and learner ability to discern valid information. Other critics have written and spoken extensively of their beliefs that schools should not use technology. These critics offer a variety of reasons ranging from how the use of technology can create social isolation, to technology preventing students from learning critical basic skills. In other words, current students are not developing higher order thinking skills. They lack the cognitive skills of investigation, research, and comprehension of text. Students copy and paste information and do not verify validity through any other media outlet. The subsequent question is the accuracy of websites and blogs. With so few safeguards or policing of web information, how can students ascertain the correctness of information obtained there? If education is the great equalizer and technology is the future instrument of education, are we certain that all students have equal access? While technology is increasingly available, some schools enjoy more opportunities than others. In larger, more affluent school districts, the use of laptops is becoming common place.

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