Pros and Cons of Allowing Digital Devices in the Classroom

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While many parents allow children free reign of the Internet at home, there is a debate on the pros and cons of digital devices at school. Let’s take a look at some of the positives and negatives of electronic devices in the classroom for teacher and students.

**Pros of digital devices in the classroom**

Here are some benefits of allowing digital technologies in school.

* **Peace of mind**: Cellphones and smartphones can offer parents a little more peace of mind when their children are at school. Parents know that in an emergency the student can contact them and vice versa. In addition, more and more cellphones and smartphones contain GPS devices that can be tracked if necessary.
* **Instant answers**: Access to the Internet provides for instant answers for the curious. This is the search-and-learn environment kids are involved in today. Now, when they want to know “Why do leaves change color,” they are only a “search” away from learning. This also gives students the ability to get an answer to a question they may feel uncomfortable asking in class. If a teacher uses a term they don’t understand, they can find the answer discretely, and without interrupting the class.
* **Wider access to information**: Many children will mainly be exposed to the interests of their parents. If mom has an interest in dance, the child might get exposure. With Internet access, children can be exposed to a world of creative ideas outside of their bubble. They can learn another language, or teach themselves how to draw, knit, or play chess. They have access to an endless array of options available, not just to help them learn, but to gain skills they might not otherwise have access to.
* **Access to video**: Electronic devices in the classroom can enhance the learning experience by providing instant video access**.**Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is not just something to read about. Man’s first step on the moon, early flight, presidential speeches, bridges being built … they all are made more real and easier to digest in the form of instant video availability.
* **Wide range of music available**: Sure, we tend to think of kids listening to their pop, hip hop and rap music on digital devices, but we should remember that all music is available. This can give students access to classical, jazz, big band and early rock ‘n’ roll. Students can have the opportunity to compare and discuss the differences in these styles in a way that is familiar to them.
* **Social learning**: We tend to look at the negative sides of social media. However, there can also be an educational aspect. Social learning is a great way for students to share information, thoughts and ideas on a subject. Properly focused, some students, who may be quiet or shy in a classroom, may blossom in a social learning situation made possible by digital devices.

**Cons of digital devices in the classroom**

Here are some potential negative impacts of using devices.

* **Harmful effects of digital devices**: There are concerns from the EPA about long-term exposure to wireless devices and computer screens. While there is no direct evidence of harmful effects, the EPA would discourage too much exposure for students who have video screens in front of their faces or computers in their laps. If students frequently use these devices at home, additional exposure at school could be viewed as harmful.
* **Inappropriate materials**: While schools can limit the availability of websites that can be viewed on their network, students may find links that slipped through the system. There will also be times that students will not be accessing the Internet through a monitored network.
* **Distraction from schoolwork**: With the temptation of social media and texting in their hands, students may focus solely on their social life instead of the lesson plan.
* **Child predators and cyberbullying**: Child predators are a problem everywhere. Using digital devices at school creates just that much more exposure and potential danger for students. In addition, cyber bullying is also an increasing issue. Permitting use of digital devices in the classroom could potentially lead to more of it.
* **Provide a ‘dis-connect’**: While some believe digital devices make for greater connections for students, there are those who believe too much time with digital devices provide a disconnect of students from face-to-face social activities, family communications and nature. Digital devices in the classroom would probably lead to an even greater such disconnection.

**Should schools permit digital devices?**

There are school districts that have seen great improvements by allowing the use of digital devices in the classroom. What is clear is that if such use is permitted, there should be guidelines and rules in place. Students should be taught online safety, the use of judgment in determining good quality sources of information, and restraint from personal use in the classroom.