

Technology & the Internet

Throughout college I got my first real taste of what technology could really do. I grew up in a small farm community where I used dial up Internet the entirety of my middle and high school career. Therefore the extent of my technological development was having an MSN messenger account and creating images on Paint. When I began my courses at MSU I realized I had much to learn. On the surface technology was great as I upgraded from a Nextel beeper phone to an iPhone. This new phone brought me into the reality of using the Internet on my phone, no longer needing to wait until I got home to connect through my laptop. I also had to learn how to use video recorders and download my teaching units onto my computer as well as onto YouTube for my education courses. Learning the different capacities of the videos that I would embed became a whole new learning process. I was and still am one of the few in my generation who has continually battled with the use of technology. Siva Vaidhyanathan speaks to the expectation that is laid on the younger generation to be technologically savvy in his article, *Generational Myth*, stating, "Once we assume that all young people love certain forms of interaction and hate others, we forge policies and design systems and devices that match those presumptions. By doing so, we either pander to some marketing cliché or force an otherwise diverse group of potential users into a one-size-fits-all system that might not meet their needs." (Vaidhyanathan, p. 2) In this same article Leslie Johnston brings to light a similar concept about "my generation" stating, "I have worked with students at three different research universities who could not care less about being digital." (Johnston, p. 2) I am one of those students.

I believe technology, in general, is a wonderful development and there are so many opportunities when using technology but, since I am not technologically savvy, I find myself overwhelmed by the amount of information there is in technology. With my lack of ability it is an overwhelming feat for someone of authority to expect me to easily adjust to technological advances because of my age. Prensky speaks to the reality of technology being vital within all careers in this day in age. He states, "Digital cognitive enhancement, provided by laptop computers, online databases, three-dimensional virtual simulations, online collaboration tools, PDAs, and a range of other, context-specific tools, is a reality in every profession, even in nontechnical fields such as law and the humanities." (Prensky, p. 1) I can't avoid the fact that technology is all around me in the educational field. I realize that there are many benefits to technology and the programs that there are to offer; I just wish that there were more supports to help launch these programs so that I could be more efficient and effective. Recently I was talking with a coworker, who is a 30-year veteran teacher, and he was talking with me about my current method of assessment. He brought to light an online program that I could be using to make my life easier when creating and grading my assessments. Rather than just leaving the conversation with the program that was presented to me, he offered to help teach me how to use it. What I appreciated was that he did not make the assumption that because of my age I would know how to use the technology. He offered to aid in my learning as I learned a new technological advance.

While I am not an expert in technology I do appreciate it and I am willing to adapt and grow as it evolves and changes but I need guidance to help me through this. These days I have to think about what my students are reading, seeing, and searching for on the Internet. I have to be aware of new sites and modes of online communication. There are so many new benefits to the Internet tied in with education that at times it is hard to keep up and decipher between authentic aids and empty distractions. As Carr puts it, it's hard to deny that the Internet is a universal tool. He states, "...the Net is becoming a universal medium, the conduit for most of the information that flows through my eyes and ears and into my mind. The advantages of having immediate

access to such an incredibly rich store of information are many, and they've been widely described and duly applauded." (Carr, p. 1) While the internet is a universal tool and is currently being integrated into education more heavily each year, we must make sure not to integrate technology because it is a trend but because it actually is helping in the betterment of our students in the future. Teaching our students to use the Internet appropriately and with purpose will help them to find information quicker and be able to recognize authentic information from false information. We must be the informers as to how to use technology as an aid and not a hindrance.

Another battle that is coming to the forefront of society, because of the increase in technology and its accessibility, is the concept of multi-tasking. In the film *Digital Nation*, it introduces the idea of multi-tasking and the affects it is having primarily on today's youth. The film presents studies where they create simulations where students are taken through tasks to measure their actual ability to multi-task. The data that was found at the end of the studies presented the student with the fact that they are not as great of a multi-tasker as they would like to think. In the film they raise the point that the younger generation thinks of themselves as expert multi-taskers, capable of managing many different tasks at once, while studies are proving they are not nearly as proficient as they would like to think. This testing is proving that students who are multi-tasking in classes (ie: going between chatting online, emailing, and social media) are distracted and not nearly as focused as they once were. This is creating a difficulty for professors as they try to engage their students with lessons that will catch their attention and keep them focused. Even at the level I teach, middle school, I face the same challenges. The expectation of entertainment to keep students occupied on the material at hand is exhausting. I feel as though I often have to put on a show in order to engage them rather than relying on them to focus and collect the information.

Another topic of Internet influence that was brought to light was our ability to read. Not just read but to read deeply and with intent. In many of the articles it reviews personal descriptions in the inability to read long passages anymore. Many of the writers speak to their own experience of reading a small amount of the article, book, or website before wanting to move on to the next topic. Carr brings this behavior to light in his article stating, "They found that people using the sites exhibited "a form of skimming activity," hopping from one source to another and rarely returning to any source they'd already visited. They typically read no more than one or two pages of an article or book before they would "bounce" out to another site." (Carr, p. 2) It is becoming more apparent that people who are reading online are not actually reading with an in-depth mind, but rather they are skimming to get to the "important information." "We are how we read." Wolf worries that the style of reading promoted by the Net, a style that puts "efficiency" and "immediacy" above all else, may be weakening our capacity for the kind of deep reading that emerged when an earlier technology, the printing press, made long and complex works of prose commonplace. When we read online, she says, we tend to become "mere decoders of information." Our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged." (Carr, p. 2) The style of reading that Wolf brings to light reflects in my own life. In the midst of even my own education, I find myself apt to skim passages looking for the perfect quote, or to get the general idea. Taking the time to read a full article or passage causes an internal struggle where I so desperately just want to find the "answer" or "get to the point". My mind is switching constantly between what is informational and what is entertaining. I fall into the category of a generational multi-tasker who struggles to keep her mind on one thing at a time.

In general I believe that technology and the Internet raise many great questions as to whether it is a good thing or a bad thing. While I do not believe that it is all bad or all good, I believe there needs to be a happy medium. From my experience of minimal technology growing up and being integrated into a vast amount of technology later in life, I have seen both ends of the pendulum. While I have clearly shared my struggle in the use of technology I am not opposed to it. I want to utilize technology often and appropriately within my classroom but, I feel there needs to be a better method of support and teaching. By assuming that because I am young, I will have an easier time adapting to the technology is a false assumption that can hinder my ability to work successfully with technology. Once I am supported through the process of learning the new technology then I can be more effective for my students, and aid them through their learning of the technology. On some level it is a good thing that I understand the struggle of learning new technology because I can empathize with my students who are struggling similarly. Technology has a large influence on my students and myself and I hope to be better equipped throughout time to better meet the needs of my students as the world evolves and change.

In each of the methods of inquiry that we have looked over in the past five modules, and now this current method through an autobiographical standpoint, I have been able to appreciate the different approaches. I find it easiest to speak through my own lenses as I have in this current essay, finding it easy to relate to the articles through my own experiences. While I value using my own experience, I am aware that I am not able to approach every topic from experience. Therefore, I also love to glean from the wisdom of others. Learning from the experience of Vivian Paley and her accounts written in her book *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* and other articles she has written on, allowed me to feel as though I experienced the same scenarios that she presents and adjust my teaching based on her findings. I am able to empathize with the emotions she shares being a fellow teacher myself. Learning from a cultural perspective, as in the movie *Whale Ride* I was able to see the importance of cultural practices from an outside perspective. Owning the rituals as a value to community and understand the importance of the rules but also empathize with the strength in a girl who had no right, from the communities perspective, to stand for what she believed. With each of these methods I found the most commonality with them in my own teaching and learning methods. While I have learned from each view of inquiry, I seem to resonate with the three presented.