

# Technology in the Classroom: Helpful or Harmful?

Kids gravitate towards technology—if your child heads straight for the video games or Facebook after school, you know what we’re talking about. With a world of information at their fingertips nowadays, it seems like kids should be finding it easier than ever to succeed in school. However, as more classrooms invest in the latest technology, test scores remain the same, bringing its effectiveness into question.



## Technology and Teaching

“Incorporating technology into the classroom requires a double innovation,” says Shelley Pasnik, director of the Center for Education and Technology, “Educators who receive new technology must first learn how to use the equipment and then decide whether or not it supports the class objectives and curriculum.”

For example, an instructor may restructure a lecture into a group activity, having students conduct online research to boost their understanding. With such a vast reference tool, the students might pose questions that no one in the class, not even the teacher himself, can answer. Many teachers and schools choose to avoid this situation by discouraging the use of computers in a well-organized lesson. Their latest shipment of Smartboards, ELMOs, or iPads stays locked in a closet as they struggle to find the time to effectively incorporate them into the curriculum plan.

Despite the challenges, incorporating technology into education still has proven benefits, especially when it comes to personalized learning. From math games that adjust the level of difficulty as players progress to electronic books that talk and respond to the tap of a finger, products that personalize the learning experience for students often benefit their understanding. An interactive game is more engaging than a book, so technology often promotes more practice and review in areas requiring memorization, such as spelling, math and geography. This frees up time in the classroom so educators can focus on skills like problem solving, character development and critical thinking.

Technology also makes it easier to spend more overall time on learning. “After school and weekend time can become effective learning time with the right technology,” says David Vinca, founder and executive director of eSpark Learning, an education company that focuses on bringing iPads and iPods into the classroom. Much like how smart phones extend the workday by allowing professionals to send emails anytime, educational technology extends the school day for kids who will happily play multiplication games or review grammar on computer programs.

Educators also find it easier to track and assess student progress with the help of technology. At the end of each lesson cycle in eSpark’s app, students record a video summarizing what they’ve learned, and email it to their teacher. If a student consistently misspells words of a certain pattern, the teacher will know immediately and reintroduce that specific skill. This kind of data-driven information is invaluable for teachers who want to revise and review.

## Maximizing Your Child’s Tech Time

Consider these three tips when you consider your child’s daily interaction with technology

- **Look for Connections.** When students use technology, it should be within the context of larger

learning goals rather than in isolation. "Technology used in isolation is less effective than when it's integrated into a curricular set of activities," says Pasnik.

- **Don't Assume.** There are a lot of facts floating out there, and everyone has an opinion. Base your understanding of education technology on reliable sources. Pasnik suggests asking your child's teacher about how technology is incorporated into the curriculum.
- **It's All in the Application.** The success of any tool depends on how it's used. Ask how a gadget or program furthers higher thinking, basic skills, or the child's ability to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize ideas. This way, you'll ensure that it's being used for more than its novelty.

## Looking Ahead

Technology may be changing the experience of education, but the role of teachers and parents grow increasingly important as they become the experts and guides for new learning resources. Teachers remain the constant in an ever-changing classroom environment, which will continue to shift with the technological tides. Vinca agrees. "However technology is used in class, it has the opportunity to be a game changer."