

Tablets out, imagination in

In the heart of Silicon Valley is a nine-classroom school where employees of tech giants Google, Apple and Yahoo send their children. But despite its location in America's digital centre, there is not an iPad, smartphone or screen in sight. The fact that parents working for the biggest technology companies are questioning the value of computers in education begs the question – is the futuristic dream of high-tech classrooms really in the best interests of the next generation?

A global report by the OECD organisation suggests that there is no link between excessive use of computers and high results for reading, maths and science. What is more, those students who use tablets and computers often tend to do worse than students who use them less frequently.

Beverly Amico from the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America explains that their teachers encourage students to learn subjects by expressing themselves through artistic activities such as painting and drawing, rather than consuming information downloaded onto a tablet. The idea is to get rid of the distraction of electronic media and to encourage stronger communication between teacher and pupil during lessons.

Amico claims one of the reasons parents who work in the digital industry are choosing a low-tech, no-tech education for their children is that it teaches students innovative thinking skills. And these are what many employers desire. She adds that students weaned on technology often lack the ability to think outside the box and solve problems.

Sarah Thorne, head of the London Acorn school, also questions the belief that limiting or removing the use of technology in class will make the students less competitive on the job market.

Students under the age of 12 at the school in Morden, London, are banned from using smartphones and computers, and watching TV or films at all times, including during holidays. The school's students are allowed to watch TV once they reach 12 years old and then only documentaries that have been previously vetted by parents. They cannot watch films until they are 14. The Internet is banned completely for everyone under 16, both at home and at school. And computers are only to be used as part of the school curriculum for students who are at least 14.

It may sound draconian, but Thorne believes taking a more considered approach to the use of technology in class allows teachers to help students develop core skills such as leadership, decision making and creativity. Besides, much of the technology which is cutting edge today is likely to appear primitive in tomorrow's world.

Thorne claims feedback from students about the restrictions has been positive. Younger pupils relish the chance to play and even teenagers who have come from a typical school admit they are happier.

Restricting the use of technology is also a challenge for the 21st century teachers, who are used to the easy accessibility of resources and information, thanks to interactive whiteboards and computers. "It is hard work," admits Ian Young, a class teacher. "You definitely have to be a lot more creative in how you deliver a lesson," he says. "You have to work with your voice more, whether it is loud or quiet, to give them incentive. You need to make sure you keep them interested in what's coming next." He adds: "I don't think we are doing children any favours by teaching them through machines at that young age."

What question does the author pose in the first paragraph?

- 1) What will education be like in the future?
- 2) Is high-tech really very useful in education?
- 3) How will the parents from technology companies educate their children?
- 4) Should the hi-tech gadgets be allowed in the classroom?

What does the OECD report suggest?

- 1) Students should not use computers in their studies.
- 2) The more the students use the computers the worse their results could be.
- 3) Superabundant use of computers doesn't influence students' achievements.
- 4) Results in Reading, Maths and Science benefit from use of computers.

Both Beverly Amico and Sarah Thorne think that limiting technology in the classroom will ...

- 1) help students concentrate better.
- 2) boost students' creativity.
- 3) develop students' communication skills.
- 4) better prepare students for the job market.

At the age of fourteen the students of Morden are allowed to ...

- 1) watch films.
- 2) use the Internet.
- 3) watch TV.
- 4) use smartphones.

The word "relish" in paragraph 8 "... younger pupils relish the opportunity ..." means ...

- 1) enjoy.
- 2) ignore.
- 3) envy.
- 4) inspire.

The word "they" in paragraph 8 "... admit they are happier" refers to ...

- 1) younger pupils.
- 2) restrictions.
- 3) teenagers.
- 4) teachers.

Ian Young believes that the 21st century demands that a teacher becomes more ...

- 1) creative.
- 2) hardworking.
- 3) entertaining.
- 4) informative.