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Distraction or Tool: Student Use of 1:1 Devices in Classrooms

Take a step into a classroom, and you will see everyone using computers for many purposes, whether it be on-task or not. Many parents believe these devices serve only as distractions that hinder the progression of students' learning, while others consider them as valuable assets that prepare students for relevant applications in the future. While it is true that distractions can impact student learning, the devices themselves should not be seen as the problem: it rather depends on what they are used for, how they are used, and how schools manage the devices. If schools work to enforce those standards, 1:1 devices like laptops will become much less of the distractions that they are in many schools right now. Although 1:1 technology can be a distraction in the classroom, teachers who properly employ these devices can make them more of a tool than a distraction, better preparing students for their careers.

1:1 devices enhance the learning experience as a tool, allowing students to gain experience with the tools that will be important for their futures through engaging and interactive activities. Most students are already heavily intertwined with technology, whether it be from scrolling social media, reading e-books, or getting help with their homework. As students will need to use such devices for various applications in their careers, it is only logical to integrate the devices that they are so familiar with into the classroom. Teachers cannot simply dismiss 1:1 devices as a distraction and hope that their students will have all the know-how to use these devices efficiently for their future jobs. These devices provide benefits to teachers as well, letting

them easily incorporate Internet resources in their lesson plans. For example, “Technology allows students to work with graphic and interactive displays ...[and] obtain immediate results. Teachers can ... incorporate online tutorials for students who need extra help, and connect graphic calculators to TV monitors” (Daggett). Giving students access to these academic resources will familiarize them with the applications that will be useful in the workplace. More recently, various brands have started incorporating gamification into online learning resources to make learning more enjoyable for students. For example, the website *PBS Kids* offers games that explore real-world applications of subjects, helping students connect the material they have learned to practical scenarios. Through the use of 1:1 technology in schools, students will develop problem-solving skills to a greater extent than what traditional textbooks and memorization offer, giving them more interactive learning experiences and a better understanding of the devices that will be vital for any career that requires basic analytical skills.

1:1 technology can present itself as a distraction in classrooms, but teachers can use the technology in more engaging scenarios and applications to prevent it from being so. Many sources argue that 1:1 devices are a strong source of distraction, with various studies detailing their effects. A recent analysis reveals that “on average across OECD countries, students who said that they were distracted by other students using digital devices in class in at least some math lessons scored 15 points lower in mathematics” (Langreo). This article also notes that around 66% of students feel distracted by their own devices during lessons. Student distraction is undeniably a problem within classrooms, causing students to perform at lower levels than teacher expectations. However, the devices themselves do not have to be the problem: “Rather, it's the way we incorporate electronic devices into situations in which we are already inclined to pay attention to too many things” (“Devices in the Classroom”). Lessons should instead focus on

using 1:1 devices for completing assignments and daily activities, allowing students to better accustom themselves to the devices they already depend on so much in their daily lives. This would prevent these devices from being as much of a distraction, as more of their time with these devices would be used productively rather than doing something off-task. The devices could then become the medium that students use for problem-solving and analyzing lab measurements, for example, familiarizing them with the hundreds of tools they will need in the future, whether it be for calculating complex math or visualizing recorded data. 1:1 devices provide various opportunities that would otherwise prevent students from career readiness, and distractions because of them can be prevented given the appropriate handling.

Alongside the proper employment of laptops in class, distractions related to 1:1 devices can be mitigated through administrative software management in schools. Currently, around “60% of school districts in the U.S. deployed Chromebooks, with Windows coming in second at around 20%” (Krivanek). With the large introduction of 1:1 devices into schools, many students now have access to devices that could display unwanted content and other distractive media. One of the primary goals of schools is to provide a safe learning environment where students are not exposed to any harmful material. Fortunately, a solution exists to this problem. Schools can employ software that blocks specific websites and apps across all school-owned computers, reducing the potential for this problem. For example, “K-12 IT teams can use the Google admin console to easily manage student Chromebooks and filter out unwanted educational apps or Chrome extensions ... and eliminate unwanted distractions” (Krivanek). Multiple programs are readily available to clear out distractive and unnecessary programs on the devices that schools are now providing their students. Not only will these measures prevent access to websites containing malicious or mature content, but they also have the added benefit of eliminating

access to distracting websites during class. Hence, students will only have access to the helpful tools that computers can provide, lowering the risk that 1:1 devices become an obstruction to the goal of student career preparation.

1:1 technology can be distracting in the classroom, but when used correctly, teachers can turn these devices into tools that help students prepare for their future employment. Schools that focus on this can push their students to become more comfortable with the devices they will be using in the work environment, accomplishing education's primary goal: setting up students' lives.

Works Cited:

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