

Will gizmos really improve student performance?

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There's no question that technology has embedded itself in every aspect of our society.

As our young prodigies head off to the halls of learning each morning, we hope they have positive experiences and expand their horizons.



We hope they learn something.

Today's classrooms are much different than those of past generations.

Heck, I can remember the first fax machine, cell phone, digital camera and email, so that tells you how much has changed in my career alone.

Today, there are more and more schools sporting 'smart boards' as in-class learning tools. Basically they're TV screens with computer and Internet access that allow the teachers to more fully engage their students. Chalkboards are a thing of the past, it seems.

While these are really neat additions to the classroom, they're not without their flaws.

As with anything, humans are still required to run said technological gizmos. Technology is better, but the overall IQ of our citizenry is not.

My kids have told me that a few times, a poorly Googled phrase has led to some rather odd and questionable search results, in full colour glory in front a class of open-mouthed kids.

I'm sure there are other stories out there about 'classroom malfunctions.'

Our provincial government is keen on technology in the classroom.

Ontario is helping students from junior kindergarten to Grade 12 develop '21st century skills' by investing in classroom technology that supports their learning.

Ontario's \$150 million technology and learning fund will further enrich the classroom experience for students across the province.

The fund will give kids more opportunities to become technologically savvy with tools, such as tablets, net books, cameras and software, while preparing them for success in the global economy.

This investment will also strengthen professional learning for educators who will use technology and digital resources to enhance student engagement, learning and achievement.

Improving digital access for students and teachers is part of the government's plan to invest in people, build modern infrastructure and support a dynamic and innovative business climate.

The bureaucrats say that teaching in the 21st century will focus on 'higher order skills for students. This includes important skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, creativity, entrepreneurship, communication and collaboration.'

This all sounds well and good, but will increased technology in the classroom force kids to use their God-given talents?

Some don't think so.

Pretty River Academy in Collingwood has banned cell phones in their school. They previously nixed Wifi in their halls as well.

'The cell phone is the biggest distraction to a child's learning,' said Brayden Plummer, school headmaster.

'This isn't about reversing technology ... Cell phones are amazing but have no place in the classroom. Some leading business schools

have even banned laptops because students retain more information by listening and writing, than by clicking and typing.?

He has a point.

While our provincial government believes technology will make our stars of tomorrow smarter and more competitive, our kids can't sign their names because cursive writing is no longer taught in our schools.

Most haven't cracked open a real book from their libraries.

Our kids are constantly reminded about the evils of bullying and yet we give them more electronic methods of conducting anti-social behaviour.

Hand a kid a tablet and will they surf the net for interesting facts about Canadian history, or look for new video games and asinine YouTube ?fails??

I'm surprised the provincial bureaucrats haven't dictated that classroom smart boards show cute cat videos at the start of each morning.

Higher order skills??I?think not.

While reading, writing and arithmetic can all take place via a smart tablet, the gizmos themselves in no way promote critical thinking, entrepreneurship or collaboration.

While surfing the net for accurate information takes a bit of skill and patience, I don't think these are common attributes of our young people.

While I?haven't walked the halls of any local high school lately, I'm sure during lunch and in between periods, the kids are likely propped up against their lockers or walking in zombie-like fashion, texting to kids right next to them!

Problem-solving? Not in the least.

And what about the kids who don't have access to, or can't afford, a slew of contraptions at home??How will this help them?

The best way to teach kids is to find out how they learn, engage them, make it fun and interesting. Add a dash of encouragement, advice and peer support and you have all the ingredients for success. I don't think handing out digital cameras in the classroom accomplishes anything.

As far as I'm concerned, the only way kids can be prepared for success in the global economy is to study, read daily news reports, take an interest in world affairs and find their niche. The only way a smart phone can help is make them better eBay shoppers!

If our bureaucrats really want to make a difference, they need to project future economic trends and upwardly mobile industries and gear this towards their students. Offering new electives in foreign languages, Internet business and inviting motivating speakers may also be beneficial.

What about asking students themselves??Just ?send to all? and watch the magic happen!