

My family bought our first computer when I was going into high school. I remember waiting for my dad to find the time to put it together and he never did. I became frustrated with waiting, it was like seeing a present at Christmas and being told, "Sorry, you'll have to wait until next week to open that." I finally became so impatient in waiting for my father that I decided to open the computer and put it together myself. I figured if I messed something up, then someone would be able to fix it. I had no fear and saw the computer as a way for me to explore a whole new world through technology. I really took this approach to exploring the computer and its possibilities. I was successful in putting the computer together and was always very comfortable using it and taking risks in order to learn how to use it better.

As I went through high school, I became competent in using Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. I began using the computer for socialization through e-mail and online messenger sites like AOL. While I was certainly not the most knowledgeable person with these new technologies, I saw them as a way for me to explore and discover new things.

When starting college, I quickly began working with technology when I became a work-study in Saginaw Valley State University's College of Education. It was here, that I began to work with the program Blackboard and I became responsible for setting up the courses for the professors I worked with. The thing that made me successful in this was again not that I was the most knowledgeable about technology, but that I was not intimidated by it. I worked very closely with the technology support department and was able to efficiently create the Blackboard courses semester after semester.

During my own courses at SVSU, the main reasons I used technology for education was with Word and PowerPoint. I also used the Internet and found it as a useful tool for research. There was little to no interaction with other students or professors online other than to send e-mails to one another.

After graduating, I moved down to North Carolina for my first teaching position. I taught first grade and we had one computer in the classroom. We seldom used this computer other than for having the students read books and take a comprehension test on the computer.

After two years in North Carolina, I moved to Luxembourg and have now been teaching here for almost five years. I was put into a classroom with six computers and was

more or less left up to myself to try and figure out how to use them successfully with the students. I started with what I knew from being a student and began using a kid-friendly version of Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. In my first few years in Luxembourg, I certainly did not make the most use of the computers because I was unsure of how to use them.

About two years ago, I also was given an interactive whiteboard (IWB) in my classroom. Again, this was a new technology and one that will take time to explore and figure out. I have received some training on this, but it was mainly the basics. Soon after getting the IWB, I began my Master's program and have not had the time to properly explore this technology yet, so I can use it more effectively with my students.

Last year, I was able to go to the ECIS (European Council of International Schools) conference in Nice and I was blown away by what I saw in the two keynote speakers. The first was Sugata Mitra, who used an experiment called the "Hole in the Wall" to demonstrate what children are capable of with technology. I was amazed. He showed how children in remote areas of India were able to teach themselves very complex ideas by using only a computer and collaboration with one another.

The second speaker was Adora Svitak, who was a 13-year-old child prodigy who is studying at an online public school. Adora is not only a student, but she also teaches online. Many of us who were at the conference left feeling amazed and uncomfortable by what we had seen. We were amazed in the sense that we saw a 13-year-old girl who was very intelligent and able to speak to a large group of teachers as equals. However, we were uncomfortable by the fact that we had witnessed a girl at 13 acting so much like an adult. Adora at the end of her speech listed her schedule and she was very regimented by studying and teaching. She never listed playing or spending time with friends as part of her scheduled activities. When asked about having a social life, she talked about going to Disney World with her family and talking to people online. Adora is someone who is growing up in a virtual world and her social skills appeared to be suffering from that. From her talk a few of my colleagues were left wondering why the ECIS had her come speak. I thought it was for us to question about how students learn online and making sure that we stress the importance for our students to learn to be social and how to play in a world that is becoming more and more virtual.

The ECIS conference led to a major change in the way I think about technology. Based on what I saw from Sugata Mitra, I wrote and had passed a proposal for this school year to remove our computer labs and put 7 laptops in the classrooms for grades 3-5. This allows the students to have the freedom to explore and collaborate together on the computers and we can integrate the technology into the classroom. Previously, if we wanted to use computers, we had to book time in a lab. This made it impossible to really utilize the computers as much as possible. If we wanted to use the computers in a lab, we had to stop what we were doing in the classroom and go to the lab. It made using the computers isolated from the classroom. Now, the students are able to have the technology integrated and they can further develop their online literacy. "Some literacy experts say that online reading skills will help children fare better when they begin looking for digital-age jobs (Rich)." By integrating these computers, we are providing students with opportunities for them to develop these online literacy skills in a more frequent and meaningful way.

Last year, I also had my students use Prezi as a way for them to create a presentation in school. Using what Mitra called the "grandmother technique," I really had no idea how to use the technology of Prezi, but allowed my students (fourth graders) to explore and work collaboratively to learn the program. I stood back and praised them like a grandma as they taught me how to use the program. It was incredible how the students were able to explore and learn how to use the program and it demonstrated that I do not have to be the expert to teach my students new things.

I also am stressing to parents the need for the students to have social lives and to play. My boys that I have in my class this year are obsessed with a game called *Minecraft*. *Minecraft* is a game that has the players as characters in virtual worlds. The addiction to this game seems similar to the Frontlines video, which depicted the obsession people have with World of Warcraft. Some parents have discussed with me that they see *Minecraft* as an addiction and some of the kids have admitted feeling addicted to the game. Instead of going out and playing, many of the boys are going home and playing *Minecraft* online all day. This then impacts the classroom because my boy students only wanted to discuss or write about things that had to do with the *Minecraft* game. At recess, instead of playing many of them also stand and discuss the game rather than playing. Along with support from the parents, I am trying to convince the students to play at school and outside of school.

When thinking about technology and where we are headed, I really believe that it will make us look at teaching and our students' learning in a different way. We read the article, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" and my response to that would be no. What I believe it is doing is changing the way we think and the way that we work. In his article, Nicholas Carr writes about his own struggles to be capable of doing deep reading of long pieces of work because of being so used to reading short articles and skimming on the Internet. This is something in education that we definitely need to be aware of. My class this year has a shorter attention span than any other class I have had. That does not mean that they are dumber. It just means that their brains function in a different way and I as their teacher have to use inquiry to find out how to best reach them. In the classroom, I have found that I have had to be much more animated and have the students up and moving around more to combat losing their attention.

The reality is that the technology is not going away and will become even more so a part of our students' lives. We need to embrace that reality, but also be aware of the dangers that come with it. Our schools need to ensure that we stress socializing and social skills, so that they do not get lost. We need to read books aloud to our students and have them read books to help them create attention spans and find deep meaning in stories. With the incredible amount of learning opportunities that comes with technology, we need to take advantage of them, but also be weary of the dangers that come forward as well.