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Debunked: 5 myths about classroom technology

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For decades, schools have been scaling up the technology incorporated into the classroom, from small computer labs designed to teach basic computer skills to student-assigned tablets for more complex, daily assignments (and occasional play).

Parents, lawmakers, and even some educators have spoken out against this trend, arguing that excessive classroom technology could end up doing more harm than good, but the foundations for most of these arguments are unsupported by empirical evidence.

Arguments against Classroom Technology in School

These are some of the biggest myths about classroom technology in school…and here's why they're unfounded:

1. Social limitations. Some argue that students who use technology in school regularly will be

less socialized than students who are forced to interact only with other students. The idea here is that technology is a substitute for human interaction, and will have a negative effect on developing children's social skills.
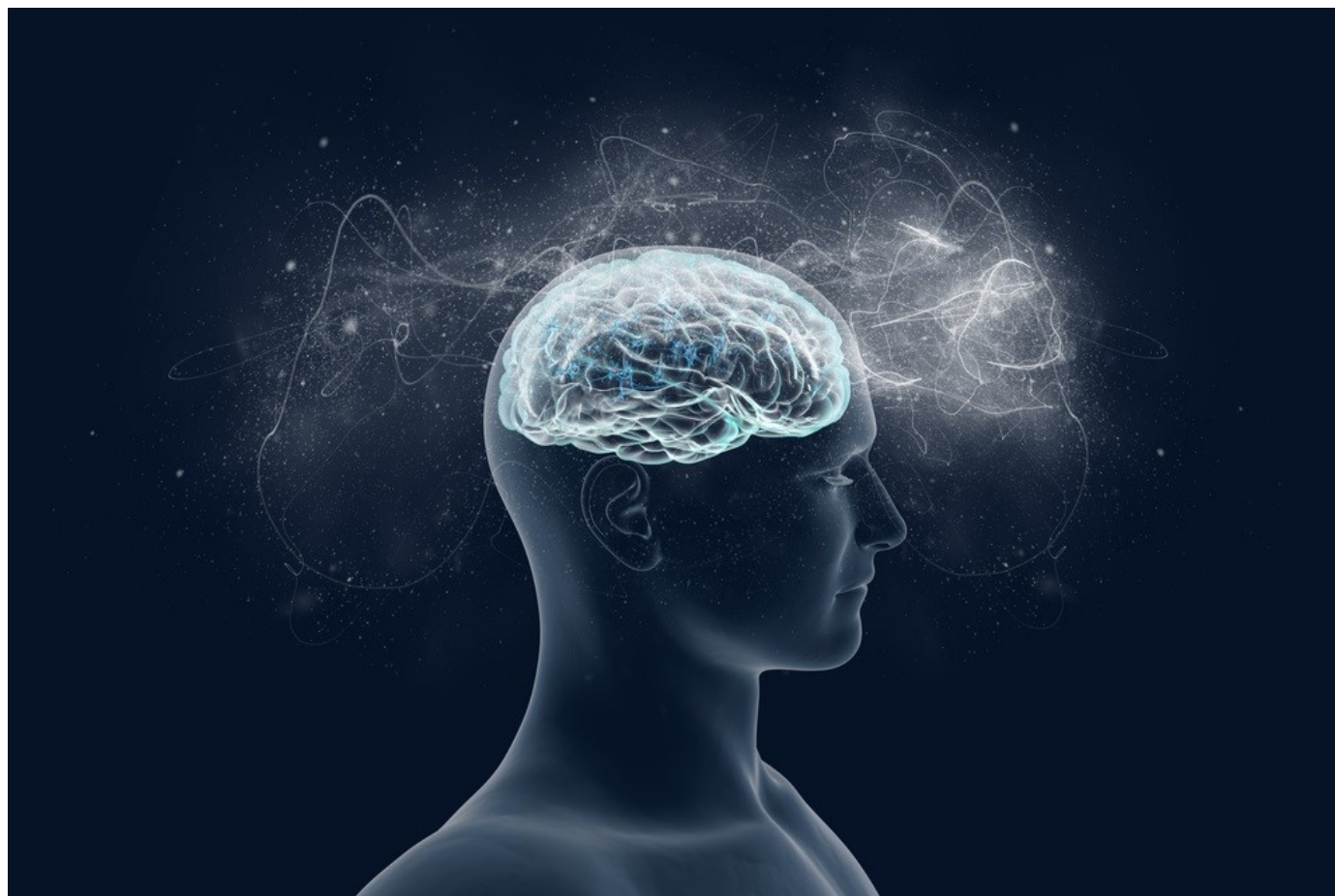
However, this is misleading for two reasons. First, technology can have a positive or negative effect on a person's social development [1], depending on how it's used—some technology can actually improve communication skills. Second, technology isn't being used to replace social interactions—it's being used to enhance them, and replace traditional textbooks and obsolete technologies.

2. Distractions. Some parents argue that technology poses more of a distraction than anything. Children could use their tablets to play games unrelated to the learning process, or refuse to follow the curriculum when a device is in front of them.
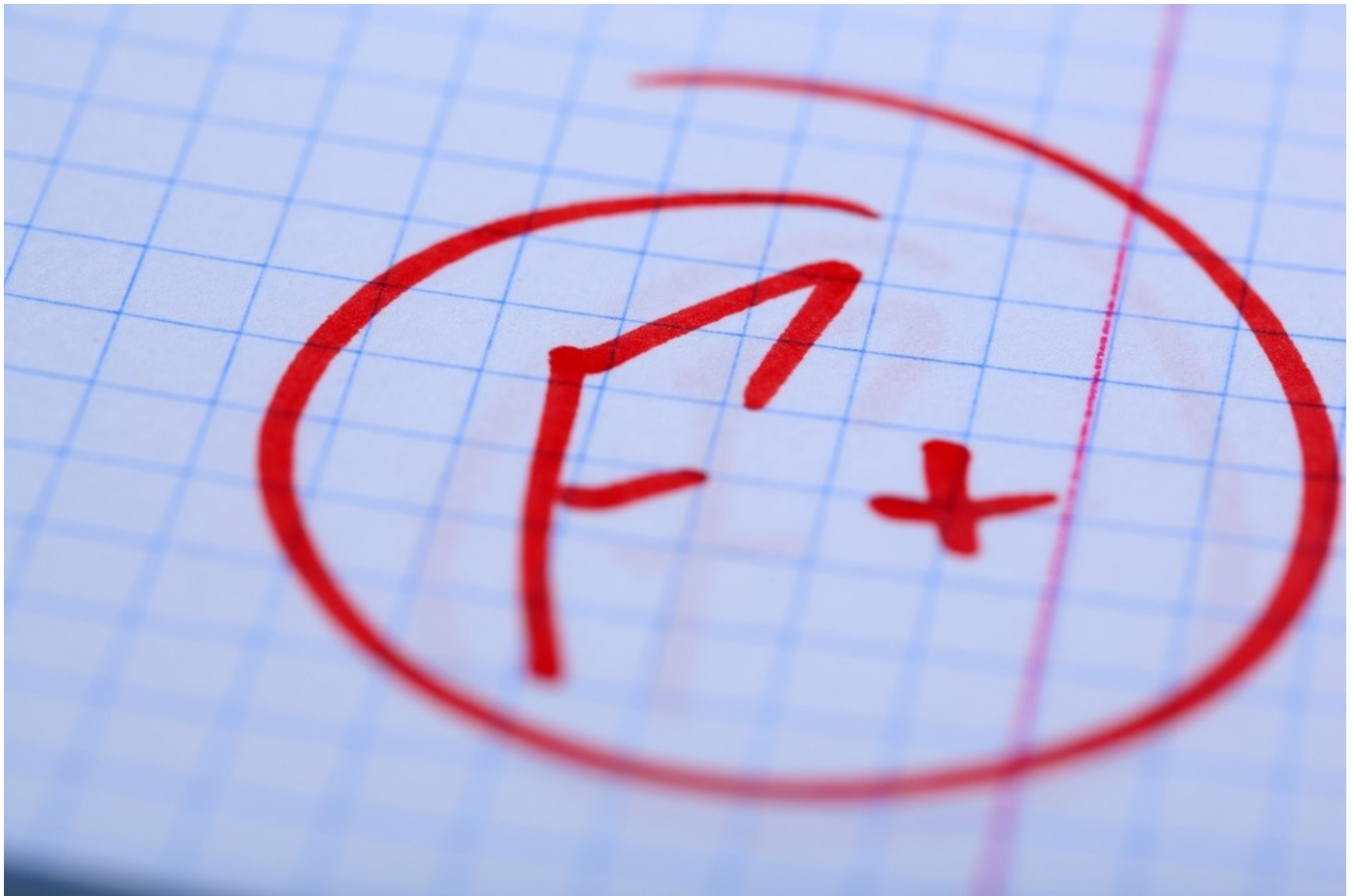
This is absolutely true, but it isn't an inherent problem with technology—it's an inherent problem with children. Anyone who's been in a classroom knows that anything is a potential distraction, whether it's writing notes on a sheet or paper or sending a text message. Technology doesn't make the classroom any more distracting than it already is.

(Next page: Classroom technology myths 3-5)

3. Stifling of cognitive development. It's true that our overreliance on technology can cause the deterioration of certain cognitive skills. For example, if you rely exclusively on GPS systems to navigate, related cognitive skills like navigation, memory, and spatial reasoning start to decline over time [2]. If you only teach a child to use a calculator, for example, they may never learn to do math problems in their head.

The problem with this argument is that technology is so ingrained in our everyday lives, our children may never be in a position to rely on these manual skills. Accountants don't do math in their heads, and writers don't (usually) use pencil and paper to write their first drafts. On top of that, schools aren't relying solely on technology to do the teaching—it's a hybrid model that teaches both technological and non-technological skills.

4. Test score effects. There are some isolated case studies of schools that have adopted technology, only to find their standardized test scores unimproved. An article from the *New York Times* [3] pointed to a school system in Arizona that invested more than $33 million into new technology, yet saw little-to-no improvement in the standardized test scores of its students.

Here's what's important to remember: standardized test scores aren't a full-picture perspective of what students are taking away from their education. Obviously, there are arguments for and against the use of standardized tests as a metric for measuring the success of an educational program, but the tests we use haven't caught up to the modern age. Standardized tests don't evaluate technological proficiency, nor can they accurately measure a child's potential in different future career paths. Instead, they're overly generalized, and schools with the highest test scores tend to be the ones focused exclusively on achieving those test scores (rather than preparing students for college, careers, or life in general).

5. Technology is expensive. Perhaps one of the best arguments against the use of technology in the classroom is the fact that technology is expensive to adopt, and may not yield benefits in proportion to that cost. The average American school district spends about $12,000 per child [4], while the cost of a single tablet or computer could eat up $500 alone.

However, there are many programs and organizations dedicated to introducing more technology into classrooms cheaply and effectively. Parents in many districts would be willing to provide their children with this equipment for a better learning experience, and not every child needs a personal device to themselves. Technology is expensive, but it's not unfeasibly so.

The Best of Both Worlds

Nobody is arguing that schools should transition to entirely tech-driven curriculum, whether that means engaging remotely with AI interfaces [5] or only using tablets for reading material.

But arguing against the use of technology only prevents students from developing the tech skills they'll need to live in our modern world—and may even limit what they're able to learn. The faster and more thoroughly we embrace technology in the classroom, the smarter and better-prepared our children can become.

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[1] positive or negative effect on a person's social development:
http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts/technology-can-have-positive-and-negative-impact-on-social-interactions
[2] navigation, memory, and spatial reasoning start to decline over time:
https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-11-reliance-gps-hippocampus-function-age.html
[3] article from the *New York Times*: **http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/technology/technology-in-schools-faces-questions-on-value.html?_r=2&emc=eta1**
[4] spends about $12,000 per child: **http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-how-per-pupil-spending-compares-across-us.html**
[5] engaging remotely with AI interfaces: **https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/26/could-online-tutors-and-artificial-intelligence-be-the-future-of-teaching**