

It often amazes me how time can make our past virtually obsolete. My educational and professional lives have been a seemingly hurried array of monumental events, yet many of these occurrences have become transformed with the emergence of technology. As a child of the 80's era, I was not exposed to exorbitant levels of technology because these types of advancements were only in their infancy. As time has passed I have had to learn how to adapt to this new form of information and communication, despite having my own reservations about accepting technology as one of the primary means of learning. But the question may be asked, do individuals have the power to control this emergence of technology and how it controls the human thinking process? To further understand this issue, we will perform an autobiographical inquiry of my own educational journey, the role that technological innovation plays in formulating cognitive abilities, how technology affects today's learners, and why this form of inquiry may have significant limitations in determining the effects of technology in modern society.

Technology has truly progressed over the past decades, but the progression of innovation should always be anticipated. Nothing can ever remain the same, as human beings have an innate ability to make their lives easier through the acquisition of knowledge. As I reflect upon my educational journey, I saw the change occurring before my very own eyes. While reading was appreciated and encouraged to me as I grew from a young child to an adolescent, I saw the incorporation of more interactive media replacing written text. The summer readings that I had come to expect during school breaks were soon replaced by movies about the books. At the time I did not complain, as this was a welcome alternative to the daunting task of reading yet another 400 page book, but as time progressed my curiosity peaked. Was the movie a true representation of the book, or a mere illusion of the general plot of the book? I had once asked one of my teachers this very question during a discussion session in my 11<sup>th</sup> grade literature course; however the instructor seemed perturbed that I would even question the validity of her educational practice. Why should she validate my concerns when the majority of her class was overjoyed that they were able to supplement a course requirement with a more engaging activity?

Discouraged and distraught, I succumbed to her explanation, and chose to seek opportunities to engage myself outside of the classroom and to take courses that encouraged more traditional forms of learning. I immersed myself in college-level AP courses, and was able to use the new forms of media that were emerging with traditional literary objectives. The internet was fairly new when I was in high school, so much of my research consisted of hours of study within the library. I remember walking in each morning and witnessing more books being moved in an effort to provide more computers for students, and soon my research was expected to come from internet and computer-based resources. Once I entered the undergraduate level at Florida State University, technology virtually had replaced the methodologies I had come to appreciate. While I had become accustomed to reaching for a book to support my research, I soon just came to the library for a quiet place to type and learn on the computer, and I was not

the only one. No one really ever had a book at their desks anymore: students opted to have their laptops, cell phones, and electronic devices to make learning easier. The progression of this innovation has only increased further: while I have been in school for roughly the past five years completing multiple degrees, libraries have been replaced with “e-libraries,” and my classrooms have shifted to virtual, online courses.

Though it may seem as if I am discouraged from this shift, I have undoubtedly learned how to incorporate technological innovation into my cognitive and learning abilities, but it has also shed light on how some features of traditional learning are becoming lost. In an article by Nicholas Carr, he states that the brain is conditioned to reprogram itself and how it functions in attempt to build “intellectual technologies.” The old connections within our brains continuously break off to form new connections, so introducing new technologies is simply a part of life that helps keep our brains malleable and active. The emergence of digital media has helped me to perform research on levels that once seemed impossible. The internet and other web resources provide virtually an infinite amount of resources that are available within minutes. Research that use to take me weeks to complete, now takes only a few minutes as I simply save and copy data to my computer. I no longer have to venture to the library or wait for it to open: the internet has an infinite time of availability and is readily available with a click of a button. My days of reading paper books are virtually non-existent today as well. A quick trip on cyberspace can not only provide me a rapid download of a book, but I also can locate scholarly articles that explain the context of the book to avoid reading it if necessary.

Despite these advantages, technology is also diminishing the art of some forms of learning. Carr’s article, “Is Google Making Us Stupid,” he cites that technology has also led to lowered levels of focus and comprehension. Increased consumption using the web has led to “decreased ability to focus on long pieces of writing and the ability to absorb its contents,” and many individuals have resorted to just skimming articles. I can concur with this new trait of “skimming,” as my reading and analysis focuses on skimming a document or book rather than reading it for comprehension and enjoyment. Steven Weiland believes that the reader has a choice to make connections to hypermedia, and to be a more effective learner the reader must be “selective and discriminative” in how they search and research. Skimming may be effective in trying to select the right information; however, it does not replace the skill of critical analyzing and absorbing the information that is found. The individual must invest more time to assess the article, and to find a greater purpose and enjoyment of reading in its entirety.

Patrick Tucker shares Carr’s sentiments, and in his own article, “The Dawn of the Postliterate Age,” he speaks upon another declining area of knowledge: literacy and communication. He has observed that electronic communication differs significantly from printed material, in that this form of communication “does not conform to the basic rules of syntax and grammar.” Electronic writing has found a way to replace traditional literature, and as

we have moved into the age of texting and emailing writing is now “adolescent and conversational.” The dominant form of communication for me on a professional and educational level is email, and it has been a challenge to not succumb to the rudimentary language that I am exposed to with my peers and colleagues. Poor language skills seem to be a normal function of today’s society, as proper skills are increasingly shunned by the younger generations. Inevitably this form of communication has also exposed itself within other forms of speech and language, and has crossed the traditional boundaries of culture and race. Virtually all modern cultures and societies have embraced this shift in literacy, and the art of literature the eloquence of proper of speech and dictation is continuing to decline.

While there is evidence that my autobiographical inquiries may only reflect a biased account on a topic, one can not refute its unique purpose. We all experience life on different levels; however, sharing our experiences can often help others to understand their own journeys. I may have never understood the depth and complexity of how technology has shaped my educational and professional career if I had not attempted my own inquiry into my past and present, and I am confident that many others experience the same level of gratification from understanding how various events and activities have a common tie. It should also be noted that despite the shortcomings that this form of inquiry may have it undoubtedly has validity on some level. No one can rightfully judge or criticize personal experience: experiences are a narrative story that quantify and explain how a person’s existence has affected their life. Autobiographical inquiry, in essence, is how humans tell the story of their lives. Each story contains humanly significant forms of data, and helps a person to make sense of the past, in light of their own present experiences. Other forms of inquiry may have told the story of the rise of technological innovation more efficiently; however, to understand the human experience of a subject one must always incorporate the “literature of experience” into their analysis as it key to understanding purpose, and may be the salvation to saving the true art of learning.