

Article

Technology and learning: Reading books crucial

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I HAVE noticed increasingly more young children (and even babies) playing with iPads.

Some parents see iPad as a convenient tool to occupy their children's time and attention. It's easy to carry, and kids appear captivated by the ease of use and versatility. However, I am worried.

I am aware of the opportunities computers can offer to a child's mental development, but I am also aware of the harm it can do.

Two books, one by Nicholas Carr (*What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains: The Shallows*) and Mark Bauerlein (*The Dumbest Generation: How Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*), cite scientific research that show schools equipped with computers fail to show any improvement in the children's grades.

The key problem is computers and the Internet discourage reading of printed books, a skill crucial to a child's learning and thinking development.

Instead, computers and the Internet encourage "shallow reading", by which we "scan" sentences instead of reading every word in a sentence.

Shallow reading discourages us to think deeply and to internalise information, so people who shallow-read often have difficulty in understanding complex ideas.

Scientific research shows that schoolchildren who are prolific users of computers but read few printed books have difficulty in understanding complex ideas and concepts from text.

Instead, those who do better in school are children who are prolific readers of printed books.

Computers and the Internet can be a distraction to learning and work. The computer screen rarely just shows plain text. Instead, it has text and picture links and even animation that distracts us from reading and thinking deeply.

These hyperlinks encourage us to leave the page we are reading to another page which may instead lead us to another page, and so on.

This distraction is as though we are reading a printed book while trying to listen in to someone's conversation at the next table.

Computers do aid in a child's education, but they are poor substitutes to reading printed books and to the physical, hands-on approach in handling real objects.

A child needs to develop the effort and focus needed to understand complex ideas and concepts that they read from a text. Proficiency in reading printed books teaches a child to have self-learning skills required later in life.

My experience as a university lecturer is that university students have poor self-learning skills.

When students are faced with a difficult problem, they often become stumped without someone's direct help.

University students are often not self-reliant learners. Even when these students are given books that contain the solution they need, they still fail to understand the information.

This disorder is very frustrating to me as a lecturer because I cannot count on books to help my students. I have to explain and teach my students one-on-one.

Asking them to read books is of little help. It is not so much that students are lazy to read; the sad truth is they just cannot understand what they have read. There appears to be some mental block.

The students read, and they understand the individual words -- but, for some reason, they fail to grasp the meaning of the whole text.

Consequently, computers, such as iPad, though useful, must be introduced to our children with great care.

These tools can discourage our children from reading books.

Our children can become more hooked to what is shown on the computer screen than that on a printed book.

When this imbalance happens, we should be very alarmed.

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