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Learning with Laptops: An Urban School Shows Gains (Excerpt)

by Ellen R. Delisio

Education World, an online educational resource, recently visited East Rock Magnet School in Connecticut to find out about the school's new laptop program.

Within seconds, Robert, a fourth grader at East Rock Magnet School, located several important facts about the ocelot, the subject of a report-in-progress.

After pointing out a picture of the spotted jungle cat, Robert noted to a visitor that no two ocelots look alike, and their primary predators are hunters and poachers.

Unlike most fourth graders, though, Robert was not flipping through the pages of an encyclopedia on his hunt for ocelot information. Instead, he was clicking away on his wireless laptop, as were all of his classmates.

A kindergarten through eighth grade school in New Haven, Connecticut, East Rock's curriculum is focused on global issues and laptop integration. In 2002, the school was selected as one of five in the United States to participate in the federal Model Laptop Program, and received a \$620,000 grant.

The laptop program has transformed learning at East Rock. Led by Domenic Grignano, the school's ever-energized, ever-focused technology facilitator/systems engineer, laptop use has become a way of life at the inner-city school...

Preparing The Way

...

With the blessing of his principal, Grignano led the charge to apply for the federal grant for the laptop program, doing the research and submitting the paperwork. "We thought the laptops would help students do research and help improve test scores," principal Salvatore Punzo told *Education World*.

...

In 2003, student scores on the... [Connecticut]... Mastery Tests increased at all grade levels.

"The students receive a well-rounded education and the laptops play a part in that," Punzo said...

integration (*verb*) bringing things together that were previously separate
grant (*noun*) money given by an organization for a specific purpose

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Students Plunge In

Laptop assignments quickly became students' favorite, several teachers said.

"I've integrated them into a lot of content areas," said... [third-grade teacher Katherine Werth]... "I can use technology to enhance the lessons. The kids love them; they are so motivating."

"It's definitely easier to teach with them," added third grade teacher Lynn Kelly. "The kids are more eager to learn. We use them for reading. I'd like to use them for math, but the program is very regimented."

"They also help the children socially—now students help one another."

New Approaches to Reading, Research, Music

On the morning of *Education World's* visit, Kelly's students were busy summarizing chapters from the book *James and the Giant Peach*, and researching insects related to the book. After finding some facts about an insect, each student downloaded a photo of a bug to go with his or her report.

"It's easier to look for things," one student said, about working on a laptop. "You can find pictures and articles about things that might not be in books," Hahn noted.

"I like using this every day," added his classmate, Frankie. "If you get a word wrong, it tells you. And you have more space to write."

...

"I like it better than writing [on paper]," said Jacob, 10, who was searching for facts about Komodo dragons. "It's faster and easier to find stuff. It's much easier and faster than books. And you can find lots of information when you get on Google."

...

Encouraging Results

East Rock's students and programs already have caught people's attention, in and outside of Connecticut. East Rock was one of three schools honored in 2003 by the Connecticut Department of Education for making substantial gains on the state's mastery test scores since 2000. A report released in November 2003...praised the school and staff members for their technology application and student gains early in the course of the program. "East Rock Magnet School should be considered a model site for technology integration," according to the report.

.....
regimented (*adjective*) strictly organized

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“East Rock provides a real good, grounded education,” DeCarlo-Sullivan told *Education World*. “East Rock students stand out when they go on to high school.”

For Punzo, the facts that the laptops offer students new and better ways to learn, and that achievement is up, make up the bottom line for the program. “It has made my job more exciting, more meaningful, and showed staff that with hard work and dedication, kids can learn,” Punzo said....

Delisio, Ellen R. "Learning With Laptops: An Urban School Shows Gains." *Education World*, 2010, accessed January 16, 2015, http://www.educationworld.com/a_issues/schools/schools020.shtml.

1 According to the text, what are some ways that students benefit from using laptops in class? Use text evidence to support your answer.

The World Is Digital, But Please Close Your Laptop in Class (Excerpt)

by Peter C. Herman

For years now, teachers at all levels have been told that the more computers in the classroom, the better. Digital improves learning, and besides, since our students can't be parted from their devices, we had better join them. . . . So textbooks migrated to tablets. Writing migrated to laptops. Teacher-student interactions turned into e-mail or Twitter exchanges. Even the classes themselves took place on the web. Over and over, we were told that the traditional, brick and mortar classroom is dead.

But two recent studies confirm what most K-12 and university teachers already know: that computers not only do not necessarily help education, they can actually hinder it.

The *New York Times* recently reported on a 2012 study proving that kids who learn to write on a keyboard are at a distinct disadvantage to kids who learn handwriting. It seems that when children learn to write by hand, they "remain better able to generate ideas and retain information." The key word here is "remain." Learning to write on a keyboard stunts their brain development. Kids who wrote by hand, on the other hand, "consistently produced more words more quickly than they did on a keyboard, but expressed more ideas."

The *Times* study focused on preschool, but another study by researchers at UCLA and Princeton University proves that when college students take notes by hand, they learn a lot more, because "the act of taking notes on a computer actually seems to interfere with their ability to remember information" . . . Listening to a teacher and then summarizing the lecture as it goes along turns out to be entirely active, because you have to evaluate the material, decide what is important, and write it down in your own words. Taking notes with a laptop encourages kids to record the lecture verbatim. More words, but less learning.

None of this is news to me. I realized long ago that allowing laptops in the classroom is a recipe for distraction, that students will inevitably attend to Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr rather than the lecture. So, I banned them. And not just laptops. I ban everything that connects to the web. My usual line is: if you can turn it on, it goes off. And the grade goes down by one letter for each infraction.

verbatim (*adverb*) in exactly the same words

infraction (*noun*) a breaking of the rules

Name: _____

Date: _____

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Nor am I alone. The *New Yorker* recently published a short article by a computer scientist at Dartmouth College on why he banned laptops in his classroom, and how others in his department did the same.

But here's the surprising thing: not one of my students ever complained. Not in person. Not in the anonymous evaluations. Instead, they seem to find it a relief to not be connected. For an hour or so, it's as if they find shelter from the digital storm. And they like it.

The point was really driven home to me when I looked at my student evaluations from Literature and the Problem of Technology. This was a "hybrid" course. Meaning, we met twice a week, and the third class period was devoted to online activities: a journal, which I alone read, and a class blog, in which students posted and commented on each other's ideas.

Students loved the course... But it was not the digital part of the class that made the difference. Instead, students praised the class discussions... As for the online journals and blogs, they hardly mentioned them. Instead, they appreciated a course that explored how literature gave them the opportunity to think deeply and complexly about technology, led by a teacher who knew what he was talking about, and wanted them to learn. What they liked was exactly the sort of class we've been told over and over is so old-fashioned it should just wither and die.

Personally, I really liked the journals and blogs, and the writing those exercises generates showed that the students got a lot out of them as well. But that's not what students really valued. Instead, they valued the traditional classroom experience.

So maybe the pendulum is starting to swing back. After the mania for replacing teachers with screens and books with tablets... maybe we are finally figuring out that while computers have their place in the classroom, that place is on the side....

Herman, Peter C. "The World Is Digital, But Please Close Your Laptop In Class." *Times of San Diego*, June 12, 2014, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://timesofsaniego.com/opinion/2014/06/12/world-digital-please-close-laptop-class/>.

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 2 According to the text, what are some of the reasons the author has banned laptops from his classroom? Use text evidence to support your answer.

Argument Essay: Laptops in the Classroom

Task

Read "Learning with Laptops: An Urban School Shows Gains" and "The World Is Digital, But Please Close Your Laptop in Class." Use evidence from the texts to answer the questions after each text. Then write an argument essay responding to the prompt below.

Context

Understanding how to use computers is important in today's world. But when it comes to students using this technology in the classroom, there are a lot of mixed opinions. Some believe that laptops and computers can help students learn while others think they're just a distraction.

Prompt

Does using laptops in the classroom have a more positive or negative impact on students?

Guidelines

Be sure to:

- Read each text carefully and write notes as necessary.
- As you read, keep in mind the text-dependent questions that follow each text.
- Use the text(s) to determine your answers.
- Answer each question. Write your responses in the space provided.