

Apparently I am a “Drifting Surfer”. This means that I infrequently use online and uses technology for basic information gathering. It wouldn’t bother me to give up the internet or cell phone. Digital resources are not at the center of how I get information, keep in touch with people, or do my job. This is according to the survey on what kind of technology user I am. While this description does not exactly hit the spot, it does shed light on my basic views on the use of information and communications technologies (ICT). In this essay, I intend on revealing how I became the user of ICTs that I am now and also how this has affected me in the past as a student and today as an educator.

My life is not and never was centered on innovative technology of any kind. I grew up envious of people who had game systems like Nintendo and would always take the opportunity to play with those game systems if given the chance. Such experiences were mostly short lived until my family got our first computer in 1993. Other than being the most expensive deck of cards, the computer was limited in the games we could actually play on it. From this experience, I grew up wanting to have the most innovative technology but it seemed like we were always slow in the uptake. Whenever I had the chance to interact with technology like Nintendo, I found that I was always able and eager to learn just enough to be able to do what I want.

Similar things happened in regards to technology when I went into high school. When everybody in my math classes had new graphing calculators, I was still using TI-30’s for a few years. I did my first internet searches in high school before my family acquired the internet in 1999. Reasons behind our slower entry into the technology of the time were more economical than anything else. My family and I did not grow up in fear of technology but we knew how to get by with what we had and I knew I could learn to adapt to new technology and other ICTs when necessary. We have never felt the need to keep up with the ever changing world of technology of the day.

It wasn’t until I went to college in 2001 where I learned to be more immersed with the ICTs of the day and had to adapt faster than ever before to be able to keep up with my classmates that were already immersed. I learned to use e-mail for the first time to get a hold of classmates and professors. This was also the time that instant messaging through America Online became one of the most common ways of keeping in touch with each other. Three years later, I stubbornly accepted my first cell phone and joined the social network Facebook. While initially overwhelmed, I always found that I could adapt quite well to the demands that made me a proficient user of the day’s ICTs.

There was always this attitude of not needing any of it as well. Part of this also had to do with the fact that technology is changing so fast. I felt that by the time I was proficient at one thing, there would already be changes beyond my control. I used Facebook for a period of two years before it changed so much that I have no interest in using it anymore. There does not seem to be a huge precedent to keep up and so I do not spend the valuable time trying to do so.

Such attitudes could be seen when I got my first job as a long-term substitute teacher at Holt High School. There I had access to computers for my students and I also had a Smartboard that allowed me and students to interact directly with assignments. I already had experience with Smartboard in college and so I utilized it for the purposes I found necessary. My classes were also outfitted with calculators that all my students could use. I allowed my students to use all of this technology for their own gain as often as possible but I started to become cynical on the uses as I found students not using the technology for the purposes they were there for. Rather, this allowed students another way to become distracted.

The next year, I taught at Lansing Eastern High School where our exposure to technology was extremely limited. While there were computer labs, they were usually monopolized by other teachers. Since I never found myself completely dependant on the uses of any ICTs in the classroom, I was able to adapt to this situation. Unfortunately, little has changed today as I am currently struggling to use technology in my current classroom. I acquired a digital projector that projected on a small whiteboard but the school district cannot afford a lamp for replacement and so even that interactive technology can't be utilized.

The purpose of this essay is to explore how my learning to work with ICTs affects my role as a teacher. It is interesting to reflect on my attitude about technology. Being that my reflection is an example of autobiographical inquiry, I have to recognize that I will be projecting my own experiences into how I feel it best to teach. Unfortunately, my own experiences are not the same as the many students I work with and so I do understand my own limitations as I write this.

I grew up knowing that I really did not need technology and that has carried over into my current teaching profession where I am skeptical about it uses in the classroom. Not all students could say the same due to their dependence. On top of that, my access to technology is limited. My school district provides plenty of professional development on how to utilize certain programs for helping my students learn but I rarely go to them since I know I will probably never use or have access to the technology to begin with. I do not find it worth my time (which I do not have a lot of these days) learning technology that I may never use.

However significant and insignificant my experiences might be, I do have questions and concerns about where we are and where we might go as educators using technology. To end this paper, I want to address a few areas of concern provided by the writers of *Digital Nation* and some of my own questions. The main question I have formulated is how do we determine the needs of our children? I feel this question is the underlying question to all questions pertaining to what children need to learn. If we desire to have our children become productive, we have to see that they will probably need to be focused for some period time over something. Unfortunately we seem to accept that not all people think linearly and so our teaching needs to reflect that as if we cannot train people to focus on one task.

I think this question actually leads us to the issue of multitasking and the conditions of attention. I have noticed that many people, including teachers, accepted multitasking as the norm with a sort of Lamarckian evolutionary stance but we have to accept that research shows the opposite in regards to our productivity. In my own life I have learned that if I truly want to be effective at anything, I will need to focus most of my attention to that one item. I sometimes wonder what many of my students will do when they get married and they try to multitask their way to having good communication with their spouses. I know I would have been hit in the head by our frying pan already if I try to accept that as the norm. Then again, I find it interesting that my students are often focused one way in thinking when they play video games and in their social life. I wonder more often if we teachers adapt to what the students think they need more.

This leads us to the last part of what we are gaining and losing in the advent of our technological generation. I know as a teacher, I really do welcome technology in the form of presentation and interaction of the materials for students. I also like the accessibility to relevant information provided by the internet which allows me to quickly find the information I need as a teacher and for students. These, while I am spending a little time discussing them, play a huge role on why today's ICTs are so important.

My concerns are in regards to what students think they need and the losses that we should anticipate. I am less worried about the printed book going away (I don't think that will happen) as I am in the loss of focus and deep understanding to any one thing in our lives. The internet provides quick

information that we think we need. Video games provide us with a quick thrill that can distract us from our situation that seems less pleasing. All of these things are very egocentric and self-centered. I face this constantly as a math teacher when I try to help my students learn something that does not come with a quick and easy solution since life itself does not provide such a thing.

If deep understanding of anything and focus in general is a value in our culture to be productive, we might need to see how technology can really help us in those areas. As a teacher I need to see how I can use technology to help my students become productive without offering them opportunities to check out. I find myself quite cynical in my views of today's culture and am probably on the bandwagon of Mark Bauerlein but I wonder if we depend more on technology than we should? Or is this more of a reflection of myself and how I got by in this world growing up?