Paper or electronic?

Business

A couple years ago, if you asked me which I liked better “ to read on the Kindle or actual books”, I would have answered “ actual books” and quickly followed my answer up with the common argument against replacing natural reading with an electronic simulation. As my fellow student at my high school, Natalie R., put it, “ sometimes old fashion, like a pencil and paper is the better way to go”.

Though I originally agreed with Natalie, my opinion changed as I began seeing the benefits of electronics taking the place paper materials. There is a way we can benefit from electronics that can be seen everyday at school. We see people with their spines curved over, straining to support a backpack that exceeds a reasonable amount of weight. This excessive weight consists of books, textbooks, papers and binders. A thin sheet of paper may seem light but it becomes very heavy when more builds up.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission warns that an overweight backpack can cause consequences to a person’s health. They report that more than 9, 500 kids between 5-18 years old suffered from backpack related injuries. Research shows that “ thirty-seven percent of children aged 11 to 14 years report back pain, the majority of whom attribute the pain to wearing a school backpack”(Warner). Well, what can we do to lessen the weight that our students must carry on their backs? We can replace those bulky textbooks, handouts, worksheets and all other paper materials with weightless electronic files. An abundant amount of these digital files can all be stored in a single computer or tablet. If students were provided a laptop with all their school materials compacted into it, they would be able to carry their things around much more easily.

One may argue that lending every student with a laptop or expecting them to buy their own is unreasonable because computers are too expensive. However, while most laptops cost from $300 to $1000, a textbook usually cost around $100 and each student will require more than one. Digital textbooks are generally cheaper because publishers do not have to include the costs of paper and ink in its price. Theresa Walsh Giarrusso wrote an article about the Stepinac School in White Plains, New York. She reports that the school saved a tremendous amount of money by converting from the use of paper to their electronic counterparts.

“ Students at the Stepinac school paid $700 for textbooks previously and this year only $150 for access to the digital library”(Giarrusso). The initial cost of laptops may seem massive, however, it is an investment that will pay back over time. Another fact to consider is that the production of paper is horrid for the environment. While forests that are cleared to make paper can be planted back, paper production’s environmental impact does not only consist of chopping down trees. A U. S.

Toxic Release Inventory report published by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) explains that pulp and paper mills are among the worst polluters to air, water and land of any industry in the country. By taking advantage of computers instead of using paper after paper, we can help limit the toxic effects of paper manufacturers. There is understandable concern that if our education becomes too centered on electronics, their dependability becomes a problem. If a student’s computer were to malfunction, they may lose a lot of time and work they spent on a class assignment.

Online storage systems such asGoogleDrive can greatly reduce the consequences of these occasional mishaps. If one’s computer were to break, they can simply retrieve lost files from where they saved it on the Internet. There are a few students who lose papers often; I’m one of them. However, I’ve never missed an assignment that I’ve saved on Google Drive.

Though there are a few issues surrounding electronics, they are outweighed by the convenience they provide. Replacing paper with computers would be a tremendous change in the way many schools work. The tradition of learning with paper has been around for thousands of years, changing it so much may seem nearly impossible. However, many teachers have already started to depend on electronics and the Internet to teach. My Spanish class began using an online textbook this year. The majority of the students I surveyed find a digital textbook more convenient than a paper one.

This was because they do not have to carry the hefty books around school in their bags and can access them easily from anywhere with Internet. In addition to containing the same text as the hardcover book, the online textbook provides interactive learning activities that the students can complete on their computers. Many people I’ve talked to find the online activities more enjoyable than doing practices on paper. Some students find traditional written exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks overly repetitive and tiresome. According to an article in the New York Times written by Allan Schwarz, there is an entire school district in Indiana that transferred 90% of their curriculum to online.

However, the change didn’t happen overnight. Students did not suddenly wake up one day to find everything paper scrapped and replaced with laptops rented from the school. Instead, the school district made the switch gradually over the course of four years. Where did they start? Two words. Online textbooks.

If other schools were to follow that example, our society can slowly change our teaching and learning methods to eventually take full advantage of electronics in our academics. Thousands of years ago, humans used animal skins, barks and stone slabs to write on. However, these materials were quickly replaced when paper was invented. Why? Because paper is convenient, light and easy to store. Thousands of years after paper, the first computer was invented.

The computer brought many benefits and, like the paper, became an influential part of mankind. Except, some people are reluctant to let electronics become too involved with our education. Paper and electronics are both forms of human technology. Our species has progressed far with the invention of paper, now it is time to take a step up. As humans we should take as much benefit as we can from electronics in order to advance more efficiently.

After all, they are even more convenient, lighter and easier to store than paper.