

Nostalgic for Chalkboards: Are wired classrooms changing the way that students learn?

Chalkboards, one room school houses, an apple for the teacher, walking to school, using both sides of the paper, desks with flip open tops, writing with pencils right down to the nub...there is something in the air during back-to-school time that prompts **nostalgic** thoughts of academia.

All those images of schooldays persist as icons of academia, even though not a single one of the items in the list above is used in a modern classroom—they are nothing more than relics, quaint memories from educational history.

My, how education has changed! Now the chalkboard is nothing more than a relic of classrooms past. Today's classrooms are wired, interactive, and media-rich. Gone are the chalkboards and the notebooks; in their places are digital displays and laptops.

But have these new technological teaching tools helped or hindered the way that kids learn in the classroom? Multi-media visual tools have certainly improved the scope of a teacher's lesson preparation and delivery. Teachers can teach a lesson all while showing resources, three-dimensional mind maps, color images, video clips and every possible resource available to help drive home the message of the lesson. But, has technology in the classroom limited the scope of how far a student's brain has to stretch to understand that lesson?

Is too much technology doing the hard work for students—the visualizing, the imagining? Is it making it so that students don't have to rely on their brains to make the necessary connections? They don't have to fill in the gaps or do the mental legwork to understand so that they can have the "A-Ha!" moments of true understanding. They don't have to extend their mental capacities beyond what they see in front of them, because it was all there for them, all laid out in full-color and pretty pictures. Why remember the answer when you can just Google it?

Consider classrooms of the past: with little or no high tech tools, great thinkers made important intellectual leaps using nothing but brain power...no word processors to fill in words as they typed great dissertations, no spell check, no computers to help them fill in the gaps. If they could accomplish these tasks with no help, shouldn't today's students be able to as well?

The irony here is that chalkboards, in their day, actually revolutionized the classroom. They made it possible for the teacher to teach multiple students at once using visual aids. It was the first time teachers could write a message and have all students see it.

Chalkboards haven't disappeared from classrooms just yet. They are still there at the front of many classrooms—sometimes hidden behind projector screens—a **quaint** reminder of the way things used to be.