

A new and serious disease arises in schools

Sir,

We live in new and difficult times. In classrooms in schools all over the world, a new kind of addiction afflicts our students.^[1] Students are having trouble finding time to study, difficulty focusing, poor concentration, nervous fingers, and are unable to take their eyes off the screen of a small device.^[2] The content of their classes is not interesting to them. Teachers are finding it nearly impossible to keep the attention of students, captivated by their virtual world that holds them in a state of dependence.^[3] This problem has intensified leaving educators ill-equipped to understand and confront the issue.^[4]

Some education professionals suggest that it may be necessary to incorporate the devices into the classroom that they could actually be used to increase learning.^[5] However, students will not use their technology for educational purposes on their own, and teachers are not trained how to incorporate this technology into their classrooms, even if such a strategy is possible. I would argue that such a strategy is not only difficult to execute but in fact dangerous.

Just like someone who starts with a less potent drug and evolves into heavier drug use, social media and incessant online activity steps up addiction. This story started with applications such as Orkut, went through social media platforms such as Facebook, and is now dominated by newer apps such as WhatsApp and Instagram.^[6]

Try to find a student who has seen the latest, or any, newscast or documentary, who has read a newspaper or a magazine article, or taken an online course. They are hard to find. This method of engaging with information is a relic of the past, for old people. Our youth today have no time or patience for this style of learning. They are instead exposed to knowledge only through social networks with groups who share the same ideas.^[7]

Banning access to their devices does not help. They are adept at hiding their devices and activity while becoming conditioned by short conversations, limited comments, inane videos, selfie photos, and hateful discussions which they interact with through poor writing.^[7] We are facing a new, progressive, and degenerative disease in the school environment, for which the impacts are only beginning to appear, and it only seems to be getting worse.^[8]

All professionals involved will need to come together to address this issue. It is worth reflecting on what type of professional is being trained in this new context. Teachers, professors, health professionals, and society as a whole need to understand that the consequences will be profound and lasting if our students continue to turn their attention to smartphones and social networks rather than to the content the courses deal with.

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