

Boys and Technology: 2nd Annual Conference
Learning together in tomorrow's digital age
Crowther Institute
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"It's a young person's world - a student's view of the future"

Thank you very much. As Mr. Urwin has introduced me I am Zach Miller and I will be talking to you today as a student to give you idea of how I use technology in my life.

In the past 12 and half years of my schooling, technology has come a long way. In prep at Brighton Primary School, there was a blackboard with "chalk," if we wanted to find something out, we would have to look it up in a book and the most advanced piece of machinery in my classroom was an electronic typewriter. It was a very different environment.

Today, my schooling offers a lot more.

On a typical day, I'll try and get to school early so I can view the online year 12 Bulletin to know what is happening in the school; I'll check my emails that usually will have updates on University Open days, lectures, Gap year information or messages from my teachers regarding a tutoring session.

In the classroom, my teachers take advantage of the projectors by using power points to display information, show us useful websites or view Youtube videos.

After school, I will probably have three different conversations, over the phone, email or via text messages, with peers regarding the homework for Literature or Psychology or Revolutions. It is extremely useful to be able to call up one of your mates just to clarify what the homework was, what a particular question is asking or how to approach an essay topic.

In year 12, what I have also found to be very effective is an online class discussion board. For subjects like English or Revolutions that require quotes and documents, my classes are able to share resources, post quotes, sight WebPages and save each other a lot of time that would usually be spent looking for these references. These discussion boards also give the opportunity to those boys who may be a bit quieter in class to voice their opinion giving perspectives that never occurred otherwise.

These technologies have become a part of my day-to-day routine and are fundamental to how I learn and communicate. Yet, none of them existed in an educational context when I started my schooling.

Much of the value of these technologies stems from the content they bring to the learning experience. When film was first introduced to the classroom, it brought

engaging information that teachers may not have been able to provide. I'm about to show you a short video that elaborates my point.

>>>>Show video<<<<

Stimulate. Motivate. Educate. The same ideals are used in the classroom today, just with different methods of achieving them. However, as my friend explained, technology must be pointed in the right direction. The use of film is a lot like the use of Internet with students. Although the internet can be used as a great tool, I can attest to the fact that one can be easily distracted.

As you are most likely aware, research conducted by boys nowadays is done entirely online. It is an unlimited recourse. However, the World Wide Web makes it very easy to lose focus and forget why you went online in the first place.

When I am researching, I will start at wikipedia. But as I search for quotes on the Sino Soviet split and its affect on the Chinese communist party. My thoughts wander from that party, to Saturday nights party, and if the photos have been uploaded to Facebook yet and of coarse, if I looked good in them.

I figure 5 minutes couldn't hurt, I'll check it out. I open a new tab and log onto Facebook. There lies a time void that will suck a minimum of half an hour. Between friends statuses, comical fan pages and the latest's photos, you are bound to lose time. Then maybe a quick look at Youtube, E-bay and AFL.com, what was originally supposed to be a 5-minute check of Facebook, has absorbed an hour of my study time.

Well maybe an hour isn't such a big deal. But you think about that over a week, there is 7 hours. Over a month, that's 30 hours. You can see how this might become problematic to my learning capabilities.

There is no doubt that Facebook can be a distraction, but on the other hand, I'm only a teenager and we need an outlet. We need to socialize and it's great to see how I looked in the photos.

Also, as a young lad who attends an all boys' school, these social networks do help me keep in touch with the ladies and you can find yourself connecting with people a lot quicker than if you only saw them occasionally, giving a chance to break down the barriers.

Facebook and other distracting websites are like a lion that you need to keep tame. If you let it out of the cage, it could get out of control. It's all about finding an appropriate balance.

If I could design a school from scratch, using the technologies of today, there would some significant differences to the way I am currently learning in the classroom. I'm just speaking from a year 12 perspective.

The most essential tool to all students of my school would be an Ipad, a tablet or similar device. This would be the fundamental tool for all education and would be taken to every class.

I spoke to some of the boys in my year level and they all agreed that they would happily use tablets in every class. It seems one of the biggest inconveniences of year 12, among other years, is carrying 30kg worth of books to and from school every morning and night. To have it all in something weighing 600g would be simply brilliant.

There would be NO textbooks. Rather, the information you require for each class would be downloaded onto your tablet. All books for classes are kept within this tablet. If there are paragraphs you don't understand, ideas that need to be explored, it's all there at your fingertips.

One of the things I have always wanted going through year 12 is to have each class recorded on film for later reference as a Pod-cast. Universities do it, it would be great if high schools could follow suit. In every class a teacher will have a 15 – 30 explanation of the course work, and it would be invaluable to access this again from home while you study or complete homework. If you are unwell and miss a class, it can be beamed onto your computer so you don't miss a beat.

The Internet has allowed us to be more connected than ever. It could potentially allow for interaction between schools that are studying the same text. To be able to communicate with students from a different school would provide a perspective that you may not have previously been exposed to.

However, with all of these technical advancements, the role of the teacher will continue to be the most vital point of any form of education. In my experience, there is nothing more valuable in a classroom than the teacher standing at the front.

I have learnt some of my greatest life lessons, especially over the last two years, from the challenges that my teachers have set me. These are not specifically in relation to the subject; it is the relationship you form with the teacher, the little gems of experience they share with the class. Things they would do, things they regret not doing, places they would visit, people that inspire them. To me and to the boys I learn with, this is the cornerstone of education. The relationship between teacher and pupil. No amount of technology could replace that.

It was Bill Gates who said, "Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is most important".

There is so much potential in the technology of today. I believe we need to take advantage of what we have on offer; take the next step in education. 31 billion Google searches are made every month. 2 billion Youtube videos are watched every day.

The Internet, the tablet, the discussion board, these are the eyes that allow us to gaze upon the entire world. There may be distractions, there may be “lions” that need to be kept tame, but the stimulation, the motivation and the education that results from making this progress far outweighs any negatives.

Technology has transformed the way we look at learning. It expands the creativity and intellectual curiosity of students. We live in an exciting time; lets take advantage of what we have. Let’s embrace it.