**Article of the Week #4**

**Directions:**

1. **Show evidence of a close reading (highlighting key points and making notes in the margins – can be questions, thoughts, confusion, etc.)**
2. **Answer the question at the bottom of the article in paragraph form.**

**No need for more gadgets in the classroom**

*The Chronicle Herald*

July 2, 2013 - 12:00am [By MICHAEL ZWAAGSTRA](http://thechronicleherald.ca/author/michael-zwaagstra)

When it comes to technology in the classroom, many school principals seem to think more is better. After all, how can they provide students a solid 21st-century education unless they ensure classrooms are fully equipped with the latest technological gadgets?

Earlier this year, it was reported that South Queens Junior High School in Liverpool plans to put an iPad in the hands of each student — at the parents’ expense. A spokesperson for the South Shore regional school board confidently predicted other schools will soon follow suit since “textbooks will be a thing of the past in two to four years.”

However, before rushing to equip schools with the latest technological gadgets, it is prudent to ask whether this will improve student learning. Considering the significant cost of purchasing, maintaining, and upgrading technological devices such as iPads, we need to ensure it is not simply another expensive fad.

Peter Reiman and Anindito Aditomo of the University of Sydney recently conducted an analysis of the research literature about the impact of technology on student achievement. Their findings were published in the International Guide to Student Achievement (2013). They conclude that most studies show only a moderate academic benefit from technology and that “the effect of computer technology seems to be particularly small in studies that use either large samples or randomized control groups.”

In other words, rigorous research studies reveal that the wholesale introduction of computer technology in classrooms has, at best, only a limited impact on student achievement. One needs to ask whether this limited benefit justifies making technology the focus of school reform.

Larry Cuban, a professor of education at Stanford University, certainly doesn’t think so. In an article published in the April 17, 2013 edition of Education Week, Cuban notes that technology purveyors have promised for decades that schools need the latest gadget to engage their students. To make his point, Cuban quotes from an early typewriter ad that promises to “raise her marks,” a filmstrip ad that says it can help “pupils comprehend faster,” and an Apple ad that tells teachers that an Apple IIe “makes it easy to become attached to your students.” While the technology may change, the overblown promises remain the same.

If schools truly wish to improve academic achievement, they should focus on the three essentials of learning — a content-rich curriculum, sound lessons, and purposeful reading and writing in every discipline.

In his 2011 book Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning, Mike Schmoker demonstrates that schools focusing on these three things substantially outperform schools that do not. According to Schmoker, technology is unnecessary when it comes to improving student achievement and too much emphasis on technology can get in the way of the essentials of learning.

For example, Schmoker notes that reading properly written textbooks is the type of reading students need to do more often. “Textbooks, along with other carefully selected nonfiction documents, afford students the kind of content-rich, semantically rich prose that . . . students need to acquire and critically process essential knowledge,” writes Schmoker. While students may read some non-fiction on their iPads, it is unlikely they will read the same amount of dense, complex prose they would normally encounter in a course textbook.

Some technology advocates suggest that iPads are better than regular textbooks because they can provide more up-to-date information to students. However, this argument overlooks the fact that most sound textbook content is not outdated. The history of Canadian Confederation remains the same now as it was 10 years ago, as do most of the basic scientific concepts students need to understand. When updates are needed, there is nothing stopping teachers from providing supplemental information to their students.

Anyone who thinks students will be left behind if schools do not incorporate the latest technological gadgets needs to take a deep breath. The reality is that students have no difficulty learning how to use technology whether or not schools show them how to do it. In fact, using the latest technology is something that comes naturally to most young students. What does not come naturally is the kind of intense, systematic reading and writing that only happens when it is explicitly taught.

Before school administrators rush to adopt the latest technological gadget, they need to ask themselves whether it is the wisest course of action. Technology may be flashy and exciting, but it should not be the driver of education reform.

**Michael Zwaagstra is the AIMS Fellow in Common Sense Education, a high school social studies teacher, and co-author of the book, What’s Wrong With Our Schools and How We Can Fix Them.**

**Response Question (answer in paragraph form and staple to this sheet): After reading the article, do you believe that giving iPads to every student would help or hinder their education?**