

Jaime Adams

Technology Experience

I think my first experience with educational technology was in sixth grade when my dad brought home our first home computer that we were allowed to use. I spent hours going to websites about anything from hump back whales to foreign lands. I think I printed every page that I visited. In my mind, this was valuable information, and if it was worth reading, it should be on a printed page. I have thought of this experience many times throughout this course while reflecting on how different my use of technology is now. Never would I contemplate printing every article read over the past several months. Does that somehow mean that I have evolved into a digital age reader? I was particularly struck by this in the article "R U Really Reading." Was my sixth grade self reading and comprehending more than the student I am now? I think I took most comfort in the words from David McCullough that "learning is not to be found on a printout. It's not on call at the touch of the finger. Learning is acquired mainly from books, and most readily from great books." As one who has, I think, become a strong digital age reader, this brought comfort as I realized I was not merely reading social media, Wikipedia, and brief articles. I am still reading books and informational text; I have simply adjusted to the format that fits into the digital age.

Jumping ahead, I think to my second year of teaching. I had just started in a new school, and my brother-in-law, who knew I was looking for encouragement in my new environment sent me an article by Claudia Wallis and Sonja Steptoe entitled "How to Bring Our Schools Out of the 20th Century." It opened with a story of Rip Van Winkle awakening in the 21st century and being totally lost among all of the latest inventions. It is not until he walks into a classroom that he finally recognizes something familiar from 1906. I know that the story has probably been told a hundred different ways and is a tired

example, but at the time, I had found my purpose. I knew that my mission was to make the classroom a place that Rip Van Winkle would think as unfamiliar as the flying machines he saw overhead.

From that moment further, I spent the bulk of my time finding new ways to integrate technology not just into my classroom, but into the entire school. I started fundraisers with local businesses to get projectors and smart boards in every classroom. I wrote grants and applications to every technology initiative I could find to get laptops, digital devices, and anything else imaginable for our school. I became the lead for creating technology integrated lesson plans and even taught a few professional learning seminars on utilizing technology in the classroom for other teachers within our district. I was accepted to a master's program for technology leadership in education and made it through the first year of the program before the very predictable happened: burnout. Much like the South Korean youths seen in "Digital Nation," I had done so much and in so little time, I had to unplug. This burnout also coincided with the birth of my children, so it is difficult to know if the technology and teaching work were the only factors, but whether it was one of many or the main reasons, I still had to step away. I dropped out of my master's degree program, left my teaching position, shut down my website, and even deactivated my Facebook account.

After a brief hiatus from just about everything, I was ready to re-enter the world of technology. This was mostly through working with a mentor of mine who was able to help me understand that everything in moderation is vital. It is interesting that the theme of finding a mentor has recurred so often within this course. If only I had had that wisdom earlier! My goal now was to always work with the understanding that technology and work did not have to be my only focus, and I need to be able to shut down at the end of the day rather than having to unplug completely.

In order to avoid my mistakes of the past, I thought I would enter into the world of software for this venture into technology. To me, this would offer the passion I had for technology with less

vulnerability to the burnout of teaching. While I started in customer service for a manufacturing software company, I made sure to pay attention not only to the way to assist users in navigating the system, but the reason why the system reacted the ways that it did. Soon I was such an expert on how the software worked, that I wrote all of the company's training manuals for the system. As I knew the system almost as well as those that developed it, as well as the common complaints of use from the clients, I began to see ways to improve the software. I worked tirelessly to write requirements and use cases for software fixes that would help integrate the use of the software into our clients' daily lives.

I quickly knew that while it may pique my interest to integrate technology into a world that has been resistant to it, it was not the manufacturing world that I really wanted to change. Fortunately, my teaching background combined with my experience with a SAS corporation helped me land a position within the technology division of AdvancED, a large accreditation agency. ASSIST, Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools, was the perfect arena for me to meld my love of technology with improving schools and systems. Within AdvancED, my role changed from business analyst to project manager, and I knew that I needed to be able to offer more to our clients in order to get users to integrate their use of technology into their daily routines. So many of technology users within the education world are so resistant to it, that it quickly became clear it would not be my technology background alone that would help integrate technology into use. I spent countless hours researching online different project management processes and communication techniques. Through this research, I was able to create processes that not only improved our company but also how I began to look at the integration of technology within education in order for me to meaningfully impact the people that were so resistant to it.

In my experience with AdvancED, I have seen the way accreditation was run in the past and the people who want everything to continue to run as it ever has. I have also seen the possibilities. I have

seen what technology can offer to the school improvement process in the rapid feedback and data analytics that allows a state department to receive a clear view into so many of their schools at a high level. I have been in conversations with administrators that realize that through the use of technology they can spend less time as compliance monitors and more time as supporters and council for the schools that need it. Technology may not offer the narrative inquiry experience that Vivan Paley acquired, but it does provide the venue for teachers like her to express those stories to those that need to hear it.

To say that technology is the solution for improving our schools would be a gross misstatement and an entire misrepresentation of the work that I do. However, I do agree with so many points that were made in the film "Digital Nation." We are living in a different world than we were twenty years ago. Technology has changed the way we communicate with each other on every level. I strongly disagree with the notion that we need to keep on teaching the way we have always taught in order to have our students learn prolonged attention to a subject, and I strongly agree that technology can be utilized as a tool to bring so many types of learning to our students. Will technology give our students the full experience had by Mary Catherine Bateson in *Peripheral Visions* through immersion within another culture? Perhaps not, but it does allow more students to at least simulate those types of experiences that would have never been possible in the past.

There are clearly limitations to what technology can provide. However, I see that technology is not meant to replace our methods of inquiry, but rather to be used as a tool to facilitate many of the methods possible. I was especially struck by the concept of digital natives presented by the film. While I believe that I have a good handle on technology and its limitless potential, I am excited to see what will become of the educational world when the digital natives are the ones who are truly "running the show."