

EDUCATION 2.0: NEVER MEMORIZE AGAIN?

BY SARAH PEREZ

Memorization is a waste of time when Google is only a few clicks away. That’s what Don Tapscott, author of the bestselling books *Wikinomics* and *Growing Up Digital*, believes. Tapscott, considered by many to be a leading commentator on our Internet age, believes the age of learning through the memorization of facts and figures is coming to an end. Instead, students should be taught to think creatively and better understand the knowledge that’s available online.

Rote Learning is a Waste of Time

According to Tapscott, the existence of Google, Wikipedia, and other online libraries means that rote memorization is no longer a necessary part of education. “Teachers are no longer the fountain of knowledge; the internet is,” Tapscott told the Times. “Kids should learn about history to understand the world and why things are the way they are. But they don’t need to know all the dates. It is enough that they know about the Battle of Hastings, without having to memorize that it was in 1066. They can look that up and position it in history with a click on Google,” he said.

He doesn’t feel that method of learning is anti-education since the information we must all digest is coming in at lightning speed. “Children are going to have to reinvent their knowledge base multiple times,” he continues. “So for them memorizing facts and figures is a waste of time.”

For the older generations who grew up having to memorize historical dates and mathematical formulas, the idea that memorization shouldn’t be a part of the educational experience is somewhat shocking. Of course you need to know the exact year something happened...don’t you? Or is it better to just have a general idea so you can focus on better understanding the context and meaning?

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Our Wired Brains

Today’s students are growing up in a world where multi-tasking has them completely immersed in digital experiences. They text and surf the net while listening to music and updating their Facebook page. This “continuous partial attention” and its impacts on our brains is a much-discussed topic these days in educational circles. Are we driving distracted or have our brains adapted to the incoming stimuli?

A new book on the subject, “iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind,” states that our exposure to the net is impacting the way our brains form neural pathways. Wiring up our brains like this makes us adept at filtering information, making snap decisions, and fielding the incoming digital debris, but sustained concentration, reading body language, and making offline friends are skills that are fading away.

If our brains are, in fact, becoming rewired, wouldn’t it make sense that the way we teach students to learn should adapt, too? Actually, there aren’t too many people who think so. Most educators, like Richard Cairns, Headmaster of Brighton College, one of the U.K.’s top-performing independent schools, believe that core level of knowledge was essential. “It’s important that children learn facts. If you have no store of knowledge in your head to draw from, you cannot easily engage in discussions or make informed decisions,” he says.

Do you agree?