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The Dynamic Duo of Decrease

All forms of culture and education centers around digital technology and the Internet. Before the digital and Internet age, humans relied on each other for guidance and direction. Human hands created the music and painted the landscapes. Human minds thought problems through, and questioned the source of information. Before digital technology and the Internet, children were more imaginative in their play. The rawness of recorded music is being refined through technology, and the fine arts are displayed on computer screens in vivid pixels of color. Eureka is what we may be thinking, but seeking perfection through machine intelligence comes with an unpredictable price tag. Digital technology and the Internet decreases creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills for creating music and art, imagining our identities, and utilizing human logic to make decisions while using the Net as a resource of knowledge.

Creativity requires imagination and critical thinking skills. If I want to be an architect, it would be foolish to study chemistry and not design. If one wants to be a painter of portraits, it would be ignorant for one to not know which paint brushes, or strokes to use to create form. If one desires to be a proficient guitarist, *Guitar Hero* is not going to teach one how to master the instrument. To learn how to become any of the above correctly, requires study and learning through natural intelligence, and human instruction. Digital technology and the Internet can offer tips and basic instruction on whatever it is that we want to learn, or create, but overall, technology and the Net will eventually diminish creativity, imagination and critical thinking

skills, because of the simplicity in which the lessons are learned, and the ease of obtaining immediate answers. Similarly, when writers look for inspiration traditionally, he or she would look to life and nature, for some, that is no longer the case. For example, when author Shane Hegarty meet young writers looking for inspiration for their own stories, he tells them, "find an interesting picture [on the web] and write a story based on what they see or feel…or open an on-line map and find the curiosities there." It is apparent that Shane believes the Net is a viable resource for inspiration and it is. The Internet and digital technology can be an inspiration for creativity.

On the other hand, digital technology denies musical artists the ability to create and compose original music. For example, when me and my first songwriting partner teamed up to write songs for other artists, we sat at the piano and tried out different chord progressions, chord shapes, and improvised melody lines. Although the musical scale has only seven notes, none of the songs we wrote sounded like any song on the radio at that time. However, when sampling became immensely popular in the mid to late 80's through the genres of Rap and Hip-hop, rappers, rhymers and their producers, with the aid of digital technology, took snippets of original songs and repurposed those snippets as backing tracks for their own words, causing the songs to sound familiar, and therefore appealing, but this practice has caused legal implications for the appropriators. When the music group De La Soul, and rapper Biz Markie were sued by song publishers, one judge's opinion was, "Thou Shalt Not Steal" (Fassler). As much as these artists want to believe that they are creating something new, they are not creating in the truer sense of the word; they are in effect stealing. Yet, in defense of sampling, intellectual property scholar Kembrew McLeod states, "But when it comes to transformative sampling, we need to acknowledge that musicians have always copied each other…" (Fassler). In support of

originality, digital technology blurs the line of what is real, and what is not. Sampling is not musically creative; it is a blatant attempt to take another's work, and make it your own.

In addition, technology is also misrepresenting the fine arts. Not long ago, I took an introduction to art class. Students were required to purchase art supplies such as pencils, charcoal, ink, paint and brushes. To create our portfolio, the requirement was for us to sketch draw and paint still life forms and natural objects such as plants and trees. With the advances in technology, machine intelligence has also encroached upon this aesthetic discipline. In reference to Harold Cohen, the author of AARON the world's first computer programming system that creates drawings and paintings, researcher Linda Candy states, "In the 21st century, we are moving well beyond debating the master-slave relationship of human and machine towards the irresistible embrace of interdependency…" (Candy). Technology has made everything so much easier for humans and reliance upon computers to help us create could very well mean that we are willing to hand over all of our natural ability to be creative, to machines. In addition, there are gatekeepers in every discipline. Those gatekeepers are there for a reason; to protect the integrity of creativity and art, but digital apps are crashing the gates. Research company Yankelovich says, "technology has empowered regular folks to become everyday artisans…" (Ebenkamp). The fourth amendment in the US Constitution allows for freedom of speech. Yet, the freedom of speech and the right to be heard are not the same thing, and art generated by a app is different from a human artist painting on a canvas; one is real, while the other is not.

The decreasing of creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills, is prevalent inside classrooms, for example, during lecture in every class I attend, I see students engaged with their smart phones instead of listening to the professor, or engaging in class discussion. In addition, I see students in classes that have computers, playing card games, checking their favorite web

sites, instagram, or absentmindedly surfing the Net. Even with permissions and the understanding that the Internet is a part of classroom curriculum, Internet access affects student learning processes. According to Patricia Greenfield, a distinguished professor of psychology at UCLA, says that students who were given access to the Internet during class lectures, did not process what the speaker said as well as students who do not have Internet access(Wolpert). As much as we may wish to believe that Internet does not diminish groups of core learning skills, research is telling us otherwise. In fact, psychologist Greenfield states, "Wiring classrooms for Internet access does not enhance learning" (Wolpert). Internet access inside classrooms is a distraction, and not a beneficial way to impart knowledge because, it decreases students' creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills.

In 1990, the Internet was seen as a good thing and was gaining in popularity. The conversation was that digital technology and the Internet would open up ways for young people to explore identities. For example, in the past identities were developed through role-play in neighborhoods across America. As kids, we used our imaginations while pretending to be super heroes, firemen, police officers, business owners, cowboys and Indians, and bankers, or even bank robbers! The idea in role play, is to try on different personalities and identities to help decide the kind of person children want to become as adults. Now, fewer young people try out adult roles. Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner states, "modern kids see their whole life as a series of apps" (Parry). What Gardner is touching upon is this, digital technology and the Internet is an interference in imagining and discovering our individual selves, which in turn, decreases our ability to form a personal identity rather than a publicly identity based on a technical algorithm of friends and likes. Indeed, imagination and role playing are vital to the mental health of children, educator Sylvie Sklan states, "…children are encouraged to learn

through play and artistic activities" (Jenkin). Hopefully, more schools will pay attention to the effect of having wired classrooms.

Digital technology and the Internet is not welcomed in all classrooms. I remember, before the advent of electronics and the Net in schools, learners paid attention in class, and respected the teacher. The only outlet for boredom was to doodle, fall asleep, pass notes back and forth, or in the case of some, be verbally disruptive. Yet, most of the students were active learners participating in hands-on demonstrations, or reading aloud, but now, technology and the Internet are the disruptions. Consequently, parents of students in the Silicon Valley remember that time too when interruptions were humanistic, and used as lessons to govern behavior. These parents do not believe that technology inside the classroom hold value when it comes to learning, or instruction. Notwithstanding that the school is located in the heart of America's digital center, not a single iPad, smartphone, or tablet can be found inside the classrooms(Jenkin). Although technology and the Net save time, these devices are not imperative to a student's education. In fact, reports have raised concerns about the disruptive behavior associated with the use of mobile phones and tablets in the classroom(Jenkin). What is important is for learners to earn their grades by interacting with the lesson, their instructors and fellow classmates, and by thinking for themselves, without relying heavily on the Net to solve problems.

In all fairness, the Internet is an information gold mine. As one who *Googles* sometimes more than twice daily, and yes, clicking on hyperlinks, I have discovered websites from Astronomy to Zeus, and a lot of other stuff in between. I love searching the Internet, for useful information, with the goal of adding to my personal knowledge base. However, all that glitter is not gold, and discernment must be used in order to not be duped. By utilizing critical thinking skills, I have to be conscious of what kind of information I am digesting, and the source of that

information, including scholarly articles. In contrast, most people, in particular students, do not use critical thinking skills when using the Net. Indiscriminate surfers are believing everything; every website visited, and every article skimmed, as truthful information. According to research, students are giving little regard as to the accuracy of information on the Internet" (Graham). I suppose the processes for critical thinking falls short because, so many students feel pressured time wise to complete course work that compromise is used in place of ethics. Most scholars find lack of logic unacceptable. "'Anyone who makes errors of logic in his or her thinking is regarded as a poor thinker..."' (Paris). So, the experts are saying in effect, even when one has a hard deadline, making incorrect decisions is unprincipled, and it is up to each individual to manage time wisely and to make the right decision.

Digital technology and the Internet decreases creativity, imagination and critical thinking skills for creating music and art, imagining our identities, and utilizing human logic to make decisions while using the Net as a resource of knowledge. The sampling of original songs is different from creatively composing a song, or musical composition. Computer generated art is different and ignores the discipline and artistic elements of drawing and painting. Technology and the Internet is disruptive in classrooms, and the information we gather from the Net is not being vetted by critical thinking skills. Should we continue to allow machine intelligence to dictate our natural intelligence, humans will eventually feel like they have no real purpose in life because, as we continue to move in the direction of outsourcing of our natural intelligence by willingly handing over our thinking to machine intelligence, and using that source to think, solve problems and recall information for us, our brains will eventually undergo atrophy. Now is the time to awaken to the possibility of brain deterioration and put a serious limit on when and how often digital technology and the Net is used in everyday life.

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