

# Why can't we say no to EdTech in Quebec schools?

This website is about 1:1 “educational” screen use, or EdTEch, in Quebec schools, and why **parents are strangely inert** when it comes to understanding or speaking about this issue. (1:1 means 1 personal device for each child.)

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## A. Introduction

In September 2023, my 12-year-old son came home and described his first day of junior high school: the corridors lined with fellow students staring at their iPads, playing video games between classes and at lunch on a beautiful fall day. During classes, he found it strange to see each child staring at an iPad, disconnected from those around, while the teacher surveilled their screens. It was not something he had experienced before. I was devastated. The following day, I arrived at his school at the end of classes, when the vast majority of the children whipped out their iPhones or iPads and sat or walked, necks bent at alarming angles, staring at screens, often with mouths hanging open. Each in their own sphere of reality. I felt a sense of deep loss - loss of childhood, loss of aliveness, loss of culture, - as well as panic: What have we done?

There is something happening to our children at school that we know is wrong and is not even that difficult to fix. Yet we are in a strange state of **inertia** about it.

This website aims to try to understand our strange passivity.

This website is NOT about children's screen use in general, or families' choices in their own homes. This website is NOT a conversation about device usage in society at large. It is not even about cellphone use in schools. **This website is about 1:1 “educational” screen use, or EdTEch, in our children's schools.** From 8 am to 4 pm, Monday to Friday. It's a serious problem with a simple solution. (1:1 means 1 personal device for each child.)

My experience as a parent of a Montreal student has been one of confusion and at times disbelief around the issue of screen saturation in our schools. When I speak with other parents and teachers about this issue, I usually encounter one of 3 responses:

1. The majority of parents are very concerned but feel there is nothing they can do. They are worried about screen addiction, social media use and children's mental health. It is a diffuse, passive worry fed by sporadic scary media headlines like "Cyberbullying!", "Anxiety!", "ADHD!"
2. A small group of parents and teachers admonishes me for asking questions because the experts have everything in hand and we need to have confidence in them! Am I an expert? Who the hell do I think I am to question EdTech in schools? Surely the teachers and administrators know what they're doing!
3. Many teachers and some parents offer half-hearted, predictable arguments (mantras) *for* screens in schools. These hackneyed arguments serve as a passive distraction from useful engagement with the reality of what is going on. I list the mantras below.

Interestingly, in regard to our own screen use, adults often talk about how difficult it is to not get sucked in to scrolling, how we can't remember anything anymore, how we don't go out anymore, how great the latest TV show is and how hard it is to get through a book these days. It's very useful to have a YouTube video to teach us anything, if only we could remember what we learned. A few people are taking online courses at Harvard, but most of us spend more time sharing memes.

Writing this report has been more difficult for me than it would have been before Facebook Marketplace, Twitter and online Scrabble. My brain is different now. I have less to work with. It takes me a lot longer to feel out big ideas. Sure, Facebook Marketplace is very useful, but I am more stupid, less creative, less motivated, more irritable, less gentle, and less connected to others than I was five years ago.

And yet we want to inflict this cognitive, emotional and interpersonal decline upon children at the very time and in the very place they are supposed to develop their intellectual and moral abilities, to discover what the world is like and find their place in it.

We parents know what screens do to our brains and our lives, but we seem unable to think together and address this issue for our children in an active and realistic way.

Some Montreal schools have opted for the Chromebook over the iPad, because it feels like less of a shiny gadget. With a Chromebook, it's a little easier to maintain the fiction that screens and apps in class are essential, serious educational tools. But the reality is that EdTech, social media, phones, iPads, and ChromeBooks are all the same thing when it comes the lucrative business of dulling our children through clicks.

EdTech, which is really Big Tech, is a term that comprises “learning” devices like iPads, and “educational” social media apps such as Classroom, Studyo, Desmos, i+Interactif, My CECZone, ClassDojo, among others.

I’m creating this website as a resource for parents to think together and for encouragement to speak up. Just because there’s some shiny gimmick from 2015 like an iPad, doesn’t mean that that children must have one in schools. Many families use iPads or other screens at home, as is their prerogative. But do children really need another 8 hours a day on a screen? Even when the iPad or ChromeBook is closed on the desk, the screens have a powerful impact on all aspects of learning, growth, and relationships at school.

There are so many “facts” that weigh against using iPads, Chromebooks, - any personal screens really - in schools. I go into some of them on this website. But at this point in the game, the issues are less about those facts and more about *why* we are sleepwalking through this very recent and very profound shift in what it means to be a child. Why are we allowing our children to be more anxious, less able to learn, to sleep, to connect with others, and to pay attention? What exactly are we offering our children during their most vulnerable and vital developmental stages?

This is less of a factual question, (even though the facts are staring us in the face), and more of an ethical question.

Why, as adults who know that being online makes us more stupid, forgetful, stressed and lonely, must we force zombie culture on children all day long, 5 days a week?

And why is it so taboo to talk about this?

## B. The Mantras

The mantras are the repetitive catchphrases heard in Quebec’s “debate” about “educational” screen use, or EdTech, in schools.

The mantras lead us straight into EdTech’s pockets by giving the impression that we are thinking deeply about screens in schools and moving forward in a coherent, child-centered way. Our so-called “debate” belies the reckless experiment on our children that is actually occurring.

Some parents, teachers, politicians and journalists are pro EdTech in schools. Their responses have been repeated so often that they have become **mantras**. I am struck by the vehemence with which people will make these flimsy arguments, a sort of religious fervour. The mantras are often recited with a condescending smugness: “Don’t be a Luddite. Be reasonable.”

The mantras create an artificial seriousness, as if someone out there is thinking deeply and guiding our children in the right direction. (Perhaps it is Premier Legault? Or Bill Gates?)

Someone? Anyone?) The mantras show up in newspaper headlines once in a while and then recede, leaving people with the sense that we as a society are taking things seriously. This superficial debate serves to distract us from the deeper questions at hand, at thus stymies any real action. The mantras make citizens passive, even robotic at times: experts are no doubt figuring it all out, so we don't have to think, or judge what is right in front of our eyes.

I list the mantras and respond to them. Then I address some of the issues that the mantras are masking, that we are not talking about, the questions we are not asking. Then I will get back to the main question: *Why can't we say no? Why are we so inert, so passive? Why can't we change course?* Why do we, in Quebec schools, have to barrel ahead on a path (Côté, 2025) we know is hurting our children while other countries are already shifting course?

I asked teachers and the principal at my son's school: Why the iPad? Here are the stock responses:

- [Mantra 1: Schools must teach children how to use technology or they will be left behind!](#)
- [Mantra 2: If schools don't teach children how to use technology, the parents will fail to do so properly.](#)
- [Mantra 3: Schools need to teach children how to use technology as a tool.](#)
  - [Rather than a learning tool, the iPad becomes a tool of control.](#)
  - [EdTech is less a tool than a source of ever-expanding intrusion.](#)
- [Mantra 4: We need to teach children how to use technology safely.](#)
- [Mantra 5: There are apps that are really cool, like Google Earth, which we can't get in the analogue world.](#)
- [Mantra 6: There are some cool things you can do on a screen that you can't do with paper and pencil. You can't manipulate cool 3D objects in math without the apps.](#)
- [Mantra 7: Screens/Apps help with communication.](#)
- [Mantra 8: Screens are convenient for teachers.](#)
- [Mantra 9: Using screens instead of paper is saving the Earth.](#)
- [Mantra 10: So you want to take the kids back to the Stone Age? You Luddite!](#)
- [Mantra 11: But screens make learning so much more fun!](#)
- [Mantra 12: The experts have it figured out and are protecting our children and we parents should not interfere.](#)
- [Mantra 13: Be calm and reasonable, we can have a place for gadgets/EdTech AND analogue learning.](#)
- [Mantra 14: Parents and some teachers feel uneasy about using gadgets/EdTech in schools, but what can we do? It's out of our hands!](#)

**Mantra 1:** Schools must teach children how to use technology or they will be left behind!

Have you ever seen a 2-year-old with an iPad? Children are learning how to use technology just fine. Not to mention the elderly glued to their devices as well.

When I was a child, I learned to use a Vic20 computer. Good thing I did, because they are everywhere now! When our children are older, technology will be completely different. The screens and applications they are using will be long gone.

There's a difference between learning technology and using a gadget. The children are not learning how to *build* an iPad or *use* Excel, or *develop* an app. They are learning how to swipe and scroll, copy and paste, like any 2-year-old or 80-year-old consumer.

The iPad is clearly a stupid tool for research and writing. If you really want to prepare children to be researchers or leaders in technological innovation, then you should at least teach them how to type properly. But our children will have neither the ability to write cursorily nor type quickly. We've trapped them in a sort of nether land between analogue and virtual worlds. It baffles me that we don't teach them to type quickly and well.

**Mantra 2:** If schools don't teach children how to use technology, parents will fail to do so properly.

There may be some families who do not guide their children in the use of technology, but it's rare. However, forcing all children to spend their days on a screen is not the solution to this manufactured problem.

It is much simpler, safer and more educational to teach a specific class on technology use, or on how to build computers, or on how to code in a computer lab. No need for each child to be in front of a personal screen all day long to do that.

After having seen the "teaching about technology use" at my son's school, I call bullshit on this reason for screens in class.

The reality is that rather than teaching what technology and the online world are about, the screen is reified as a sort of ubiquitous oracle of truth. The medium becomes the message. The first time my son's class was introduced to "online research", his teacher asked the class to write a few paragraphs on a certain subject. They were told to go to Wikipedia for the information. Not one child (nor the teacher) questioned the veracity of what they read in the Wikipedia entry. They were not taught what Wikipedia even is. The reality is that rather than teaching children about the digital world and how to understand it (a difficult yet important task, best taught in the family), the schools are teaching children to treat the screen as their master. When the children's learning experience is framed through this ubiquitous little rectangular gadget, they learn, on an embodied level, that the screen is the portal to reality, to truth.

I think it's too much to ask teachers to teach their subjects while also safely navigating the evolving online world with children on personal devices.

**Mantra 3:** Schools need to teach children how to use technology as a tool

My son's school prides itself on teaching children how to be "responsible" and "autonomous". These are worthwhile goals. However, from day one, the children must use an app called Studyo on their iPad for their class and homework agendas. A tool is only a tool if the child has an ability or skill to extend. It's like giving a child a robotic leg, without ever teaching them to walk on their own leg. It becomes less of a tool and more of a complete outsourcing of the skill. Children need to learn to think, organise their time, make notes of dates, ideally with a notebook and pen, *before* they might consider a digital tool to augment their skill or save time, etc. We are depriving children of using their brains, developing thinking and organisational skills by substituting apps for brains at this age. The children are less autonomous, less attentive, less responsible and less able to organise their time and activities, because they are deprived of the opportunity to learn to do so. They've outsourced their brains before they've even begun to develop them.

Promoting autonomy and responsibility while using EdTech is less about cultivating virtues and more about virtue-signaling.

Here is another example of the iPad not being used as a tool, but rather as a replacement for learning and reflection: Children in all grades at my son's school must purchase and use the AntiDote application for English and French. These apps give you definitions and spelling and grammar corrections. The child never has to take the time to look something up in a dictionary, using their brain and hands, which is actually how kids learn. Glancing at a screen is not the same as taking the time to manually look something up, think, and write it down. We adults all know this. Can you remember much about what you read on the internet 5 minutes ago, this morning, last week, or last month?

The students also miss out on the opportunity to discover unexpected new words, as they sift through the pages of a dictionary. They don't get the sense of language as a whole, the beauty of so many words, and the many worlds contained in each word.

Then there is the travesty of giving children note-taking apps before they have even learned to take notes. When you type on a screen, you tend to transcribe words from the lecture verbatim. When you write with a pen, you have to process the information and summarise as you write. Studies show that students using handwritten notes score much higher on conceptual understanding questions. i.e. you have to think and understand more deeply when taking handwritten notes in class. (Allbert, 2025) Also, we don't need studies to know this!

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Rather than a learning tool, the iPad becomes a tool of control.

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In my son's class, he was the only one writing notes in a paper agenda. However, this was frowned upon and some of the teachers refused to verbally tell the class the dates of the exam, or what the homework was, insisting that the children go online to find out. I have been very stuck by the intensity of some teachers' responses when one child dares to not bow down to the screen god. My 12-year-old was sent to the principal's office twice for NOT having an unrestricted browser on his iPad. A very shaming experience for him. For context, a child in his class was caught cheating on a test. The teacher caught him but told the class she was not sending him to the principal's office because that was a bit "extreme".

When I told the teacher that my son would be using a book dictionary, the teacher was clearly annoyed. His response? "But a dictionary is so HEAVY to carry around." I said that my son was an athlete and could probably handle it. Nevertheless, my son uses a paper dictionary at school and at home, so that he can take the time to actually learn and write definitions. Another teacher mocked him in class for using a dictionary *during* a test. When using a book rather than a screen becomes a source of anger and distress for the adults, leading to the humiliation of the child, then the screen is not a learning tool, but a means of control. When teachers get angry at a child for NOT using the screen, pedagogy morphs into some a strange ideology. What is this ideology?

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EdTech is less a tool than a source of ever-expanding intrusion.

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You have one app or platform, and then suddenly you have many. It's addictive. That's the whole point of the apps that we use today, unfortunately. It's how they're built. Each app necessitates other apps. Each app creates a problem that must be solved with, you guessed it, another app! It's pay day for the EdTech companies and the school administration cadre that comes along with screens, aka the Education Technology Complex, or ETC.

When children use screens at school, they must use many different apps, a hodgepodge of communication modalities, learning platforms, portals, emails, and notifications. It is not a cohesive plan founded on sound pedagogical and ethical principles. Each teacher uses the apps and modalities that are most convenient for him. The children's capacities to think for themselves, organise in a grounded, thoughtful way are further inhibited. There is absolutely no reason for a 12-year-old to have to check countless apps to get through the day. This is fertile ground for promoting obsessive-compulsive behaviours, to say the very least.

**Mantra 4:** We need to teach children how to use technology safely.

Schools are so eager to offer this defense. But really, it's an excuse for the enormous bureaucratic machine (the Education Technology Complex or ETC) which has sprouted up around screens in schools. The schools, i.e. the taxpayers and parents, pour vast amounts of

money into workshops and specialised staff, entire tech departments, and endless educational materials to “protect” children, to teach them about “safe” social media use and how to manage their anxiety. There is a lot of money to be made in this field!

The Education Technology Complex conveniently fails to recognise that the educational platforms such as Studyo, Classroom, Desmos, i+Interactif, Hudl, MonClubSportif, My CECZone, are also social media. They use the same algorithmic designs to incite dopamine hits and increase user “time on screen”. These apps reduce learning to a form of passive entertainment, flatten human relationships, commodify the students, surveil and extract information to make vast profits for Silicon Valley billionaires.

We spend millions of tax dollars teaching children how to protect themselves from social media, how to manage screen use, while at the same time forcing their educations to be mediated through social media, mesmerizing the children with silly gamified exercises, putting screens in front of their faces at every opportunity.

In the name of safety, we are blindly handing children tools that are useless and unsafe in many ways and then expending so much energy running around trying to pick up the pieces of the inevitable fallout. Can't we just focus on learning how to read, write, and do math?

At my son's school, there is endless *blah blah blah* about internet safety. I'm very struck by how practical safety is not even a consideration. For example, the children are not told to cover their cameras and turn off their microphones when not in use. Or to turn down the blue light that interferes with their circadian rhythms, and their hormonal and immune systems.

At my son's school, the children must have unrestricted browsers in order to not inconvenience the teachers. The teacher might spontaneously choose a site for the students to open in class. If the student doesn't have free access to any new site of the teacher's choosing, the teacher gets upset. Giving children unrestricted browsers is serious neglect. Yes, the IT department blocks some porn sites, but when my kid started high school, the kids could watch beheadings on the news on their iPads. I showed the principal a beheading accessible on my 12-year old's unrestricted iPad at school, but she was strangely unconcerned. Many of the children use VPNs and easily bypass the school's on-site restrictions. In fact, it's considered a badge of honour to get around the IT department blocks while at school.

We're not teaching kids how to use tech safely. We are submerging kids in endless tech so that they can't even see it, never mind reflect on safe usage.

This is not safe. It is abuse.

**Mantra 5:** There are apps that are really cool, like Google Earth, which we can't get in the analogue world.

Um, Ok. Well the teacher can project their computer on a screen in front of the class if it's so important. Done. No need for 3000 iPads.

Any parent who looks through the "Transformative!" content on their child's iPad or Chromebook can see that it's just a hodgepodge of exercises taken off the internet. No different than a handout. I mean, come on. Just a lot less work for the teacher!

**Mantra 6:** There are some cool things you can do on a screen that you can't do with paper and pencil. You can't manipulate cool 3D objects in math without the apps.

Again, before you do the virtual stuff, it's important to use your brain so that you have a capacity to extend as opposed to replace. If you're so excited about children having an iPad for math, then wait until they are 16. In Quebec schools, there is no acknowledgement of the different developmental needs of children with respect to screen use. A 12-year-old is not a 16-year-old. The fact that there is no discussion about the different developmental needs of students at different ages in this "debate" is indicative of the lack of seriousness. Personally, I don't think the advantages of a 3D app in math outweigh the disadvantages of screen learning for a 16-year-old either. [Children's math scores continue to plummet](#). (Tyson, The False Promise of Device-Based Education, 2024).

When I was studying psychology in university, I took statistics courses in the math department. We learned how to do the statistical tests and models by hand with a pencil, paper and calculator. Students who took statistics in the psychology department used applications to manipulate the data. When I got to grad school, I realised that the vast majority of doctoral students had very little understanding of the statistics that they were running in their experiments. They were good technicians, but did not understand the MEANING of the numbers, what the tests represented (models in vector space). And this lack of grappling directly with the math made it almost impossible for them to come up with good experimental design. Many grad students feel deep anxiety because they can write up fancy papers but not understand their own work on a fundamental level. It's like moving to long division after only learning addition and subtraction with a calculator. You would never really understand what you were doing.

An architect friend of mine told me that their recent interns cannot even sketch a 3D object on paper, which you need to be able to do on the fly in the field. They can only use software.

Of course, a computer is an excellent and necessary tool for many things. But in order to use it well, you need to have learned in a deeper way first. For most children, the app itself is a distraction from the material it is trying to teach, not a tool. My son was intrigued by the possibility of using different text colours in the class app. His teacher admonished him for focusing on fonts rather than on the subject he was writing about. We give the children shiny

gizmos, designed to create compulsive behaviour, and are upset when they are distracted from the task at hand.

### **Mantra 7:** Screens/Apps help with communication.

The screens provide ways for teachers to communicate with students and parents. However, as any parent of school age children will tell you, the technology just spirals out of control. For my high school son, the teachers communicate through multiple platforms. There is lots of replication of information. And still, (surprise!), the children couldn't organise themselves out of a paper bag. Let the children write down things in class in their agenda for heaven's sake. Technology just becomes more and more complicated. Having 25 apps makes life less efficient and a lot more stressful. Why are we doing this to the kids?

Posting information on a bulletin board works perfectly when the children are in the same building 5 days a week and can easily just walk by, read it, and note it down. Done.

### **Mantra 8:** Screens are convenient for teachers.

Yes. This one's true. It's easier to cut and paste or download lessons from the internet than create your own. It's easier to send out group emails to children than interact one on one. But is this a good argument for screens in the schools? Quebec seems to think so. (Leduc, 2024)

As a 12-year-old, my son must use countless apps and online management platforms to do basic schoolwork. Even though his classes and schedules are accessed through 3 platforms, Studyo, Classroom and the school's Portal, individual teachers add their own protocols and apps. His music teacher organises the next practice by emailing his own calendar app that the child must log in to and see if it fits into his class schedule (which is clear on all of the other platforms), and then email the teacher to confirm. They can't just plan it in person when they see each other, iPads in hand. Another teacher insists that absences be emailed to him directly, even though the parent has already notified the Portal system. Spanish class involves each child staring at their screen being taught by a "fun" app rather than a teacher. Each sports team uses its own social media platform. It is endless. And that's the point of EdTech.

The people who argue most for EdTech in classrooms are those who benefit from the perpetuation of the status quo. Teachers have a stake in the Education Technology Complex. So do administrators, the ever-growing tech departments, the schools that are funded by Silicon Valley, and the ever-growing staff to help with mental health issues.

*Is faster and more convenient better for students?* (Crary, 24/7 Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep, 2014)

It's not about the kids.

**Mantra 9:** Using screens instead of paper is saving the Earth.

I almost can't bear to respond to this inane mantra. Paper is recyclable, screens aren't. Have you ever seen a lithium mine, or the vast data storage facilities that power the internet, the endless IT departments (more machines to manage the children's devices), the "mountains of useless digital trash"? (Crary, 24/7 Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep, 2014) These machines end up in landfills, child slaves are mining rare earth minerals used by our devices, mountain ranges are being destroyed. The heat alone from these screens and data facilities is astronomical, the resources used far outweigh paper. It blows my mind that this reasoning still exists.

The same school that pride itself on saving of paper, requires the children to buy new copies of the same novels every year, rather than each grade passing them on to the following cohort, as schools have done since the invention of the printing press.

**Mantra 10:** So you want to take the kids back to the Stone Age? You Luddite!

This is a false choice between being left behind or being some sort of digital savant. The toddlers are tech savvy without school. But they are not thriving and will not thrive if they cannot learn, if they miss major developmental milestones, including emotional regulation, outside play and social learning. No one is saying that a digital tool cannot be useful at an age-appropriate time. But that is not the reality of what is going on. The reality is that we are passively offering up our children to a giant experiment that is making a few people incredibly wealthy and hurting our kids.

**Mantra 11:** But screens make learning so much more fun!

Gamifying learning is about maximizing users through dopamine hits cloaked in false promises of depth. Screens offer a mindless digital busyness, inhibit deep learning and deep reading.

Online games may be fun, but feeling anxious, having imposter syndrome, being unable to concentrate, memorize, analyze, make connections, or express yourself through writing and conversation, is decidedly NOT fun.

Dopamine hits are how EdTech makes money. The more stimulated children are, the more good feelings they get from clicking something on the screen while "learning", the more the kids will keep "using". Social media, video games, Internet scrolling, slot machines, EdTech, it's all the same entertainment playbook.

When children are deprived of the screen, the game or the app, they feel anxious, bored and irritable, jonesing for their next hit. Reading a book, thinking and class discussions become much more difficult.

The business of games and gambling and porn are increasingly integrating into unified “service” platforms. (Sippel & Rausch, 2025) The profits are growing exponentially. The dangers to our kids are only thought about after the technology or the app or the algorithm is in their hands, if at all. Our approach as a society has been to throw the kids into this ever-changing world of technology that we understand almost nothing about, and then ineffectively scramble to find “solutions” to the inevitable harms. In no other area of life do we treat our children this way. We don’t allow our children to roam free at night and then figure out ways to make that safer once we have “data”. We don’t allow our kids go to strangers’ houses and then analyse the situation later. It’s incredible how quickly we let our children out into the digital world without waiting to know more, to at least understand the impacts on adults before the children. Why do we *continue* to hand over our children to strangers in Silicon Valley, even now? We used to warn children about taking candy from strangers, but now parents don’t even hesitate to accept any sweet little digital offering if it’s wrapped in enticing words like “Progress! Fun!”

**Mantra 12:** The experts have it figured out and are protecting our children and we parents should not interfere.

This mantra serves to infantilise parents and silence questions.

Sorry, but no one is driving this bus except those profiting financially: the Education Technology Complex. Everyone else is winging it.

This transition from print to screen-based learning **occurred with no hesitation** whatsoever. Think about it. Did you think deeply about the transition from your flip phone to your iPhone? Did you imagine the transition’s impact on your future life?

Do you see children achieving more in reading, writing, speaking, and math since the advent of EdTech? Any CEGEP or university professor will tell you how depressing it is to welcome students who are unable to [read, think, or write at the tertiary level](#).

Rather than leaving it to others, parents need to remember that strong relationships between parents and children and between parents and teachers create better learning environments.

**Mantra 13:** Be calm and reasonable, we can have a place for gadgets/EdTech AND analogue learning.

Why? What need are the gadgets fulfilling? Do the purported benefits outweigh the harms in any way? What exactly is the benefit of the iPad in the classroom? Who asked for 40 extra hours of screen time a week? Why be calm when our children, as a whole, are not thriving?

**Mantra 14:** Parents and some teachers feel uneasy about using gadgets/EdTech in schools, but what can we do? It's out of our hands!

Which brings us to my main question, **Why can't we say no?**

Actually, it's very, very easy to take screens out of schools. You just say no. Pull the plug on the ballooning administrative machine. Buy some textbooks, agendas, pens and paper, and voilà! you're in business. Sweden just did it. All of the money saved on tech support, endless workshops, consultants, administrators, etc. can easily buy the textbooks. Also, textbooks can be reused year after year! What a concept!

## C. What are we not talking about?

Before we get to the question, "Why can't we say no?", I want to look at a few issues to which we are blind when stuck in the rut of the mantras.

1. [The true meaning of attention](#)
2. [Disrupted attention when the screens are closed](#)
3. [We put the burden of addressing the problem on the children.](#)
4. [Who's behind EdTech?](#)
5. [Does EdTech work?](#)
6. [What ever happened to more than a century of excellent research on child development and learning?](#)
7. [Screens generate passive learners.](#)
8. [Why are children no longer taught to write in cursive?](#)
9. [What do we lose when we lose deep reading?](#)
10. [Through EdTEch, children grow less connected to real things.](#)
11. [Je ne me souviens pas. The homogenization of children's worlds](#)
12. [The tools are not tools.](#)
13. [Surveillance and the sale of our children's data. "EdTech is Big Tech."](#)
14. [The A.I. question](#)
15. [Children are losing intellectual virtues in the very place they should be cultivating them.](#)
16. [Most university students are now functionally illiterate.](#)
17. [The real digital divide](#)
18. [When it comes to screens, why don't we differentiate between different developmental ages?](#)
19. [PORNOGRAPHY](#)

## 1- The True Meaning of Attention

Many experts talk about attention with regards to children's productivity: their ability to do homework, to listen and sit still in class. But we overlook the most important aspects of attention. Attention is fundamental to the very shape and vitality of our lives. Attention is how we engage with others, how we form deep bonds, how we show love. It's a quality that needs to be nurtured in children in order to grow into adults able to relate without anxiety, to feel loved and to show love, to understand others and ourselves.

When we lose ourselves to ever-increasing distractions, we lose the capacity to understand the people in our lives. When the screens are on and off all day long, the minute interactions of daily life are reduced, forgotten, or overlooked. But a good life and a healthy society depend on these interactions, on how we treat each other in small moments. These experiences are fundamental to the quality of our life and loves.

Author David Brooks talks about the skill of seeing. (Brooks, 2023) The ability to accurately see another, to make others feel seen, valued and understood is one of our most important human skills. This skill is a form of attention, of attunement, of presence. When we are seen, we grow. Brooks says, "Respect is a gift you offer with your eyes." (2023, p. 32)

Another word for seeing others in this way is "beholding".

**"[P]ersonal encounters (...) are the sum and substance of our daily existence. The way we attend to others determines the kind of person we become."** (Brooks, 2023)

On the first day of high school, I was shocked to hear that half the children spent breaks between classes and at lunch playing video games on their iPads. There was some outcry from parents, and now the children have to play their games in the central meeting place of the school, not in the hallways. These children and also those around them are losing the opportunity to interact, to pay attention to each other in small ways. Think about how we parents are with young children, always getting them to say hello and goodbye, to acknowledge others with a thank you. It feels vital. It's part of the human fabric. But for our high school students, this basic human element is now optional.

## 2- Disrupted attention when the screens are closed

Did you know that when a human looks at a screen, it takes a full 20 minutes to come back into presence, for the nervous system capacity to re-expand to take in both the internal and external world? When there is a laptop or phone present in the room, even when not in use, we are distracted. In class, student eyes are moving from the teacher, to the screen, to a book, back to the screen, to the teacher, etc. True presence and connection are impossible in such a context, and thus learning does not occur on a deep level. We are kidding ourselves if we think

that children are getting some sort of glamorous technological benefit. What we actually get is disordered attention.

The repeated looking at screens puts the nervous system into the autonomic survival state of fight/flight/freeze. Eyes rigidly looking straight ahead at the screen, along with the screen's high flicker rate cause hyper arousal of the nervous system, which in turn shuts down much of the brain's frontal lobe, thus negatively impacting language development, visual processing, memory and social cognition. This is not the ideal physiological context for the classroom. Then we wonder why so many kids are impulsive, restless, and/or depressed.

The fight or flight state is in marked contrast to the ventral vagal state of the nervous system. The ventral vagal state is dominant in contexts of eye contact, safety, presence, groundedness and peripheral vision. Learning and curiosity are easily available to us in this state, not to mention love and gratitude.

Professor Jonathan Haidt says "I banned the use of all screens in all of my classes at New York University several years ago, because it became clear that many college students can't stay present in class when there's a laptop or phone on their desk. I don't see how we can expect eight-year-olds to do it."

### 3- We put the burden of addressing the problem on the children.

We're not giving children the context to learn deeply, to be fully human in the classroom. To add insult to injury, we are putting the onus on children to fix the situation by attending tutorials on technology, workshops on attention, more workshops on the dangers of social media, more workshops on anxiety. By not addressing the fundamental issues, the "solutions" proliferate, to the eternal financial benefit of the Education Technology Complex.

Last year, parents at my kid's school received an email saying that children were throwing food at lunch and that the situation was out of control. There was no consideration of the fact that when a child is on and off a screen all day, he's antsy and restless. And yet we admonish the child for not being attentive, connected and grounded!

When children are caught using AI to do their homework, they get called out in class as cheaters. We adults have not reckoned with our own fuzzy limits around tech use in schools, as we force children to carry addictive devices at all times. Then we get upset when the child isn't able to set appropriate boundaries around gadgets. This is an abdication of our duty as adults.

### 4- Who's behind EdTech?

Since the very beginning of the World Wide Web in 1991, EdTech has been worming its way into schools. Couched in dazzling terms such as "Innovative!", "21<sup>st</sup> Century!",

“Transformative!”, EdTech was here to redeem world of education! We are now in the midst of an EdTech boom because we all drank the Kool Aid.

Maybe the question should be less about *what* are we allowing children to access and more about *who* we are allowing to access our children “Perhaps we thought we were giving children the right to access everything which might be good out there but instead we’ve given everyone else, the good and the bad, access to our children.” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V6nuckFK88](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V6nuckFK88) 3:34 (Winkleman, 2025)

EdTech companies are among the most profitable corporations in history. The industry is expected to reach 800 billion in profits in the next 5 years (Yelenevych, 2022). The industry is essentially a financial feedback loop between a web of Big Tech corporations and their “philanthropic” educational foundations. The foundations are funded in part with public money and directed by the billionaires. They do “research” to manufacture a need or demand, such as “Interactive learning!” or “Personalized Experiences!”. Then their own companies offer the “solutions”. Think of any big tech name, and they are involved in what are essentially greedy “predatory practices on the minds of children and educators.” (Champney, *We Can't Forget We Are Raising Humans*, 2024)”

Silicon Valley curriculum developers both instigated and promoted the move from traditional print to digital formats because digital means more users and more “time on device”, which means billions in profits. Not because it’s good for children. We continue to fall, hook, line, and sinker, for buzzy, meaningless marketing language. For example, McGraw Hill, a highly profitable developer in educational apps and gaming (they go together), says “we’re working to expand the possibilities of content and technology to support learning in a connected world”. (Champney, 2024) Whatever that means.

“Personalized learning for all!” But “all” does not include the children of Silicon Valley developers who go to elite schools that use pencils and paper and are device-free. When you build the EdTech to create dulled, compulsive users, you are less likely to allow your own children near it.

The leaders in Silicon Valley use paper and pens. In fact, it’s a status symbol in the upper echelons of society to *not* be a slave to technology. The leaders know what they have created for the lowly masses; they know the impact on the brain’s ability to learn, to think deeply, to connect and engage. They are familiar with the addictive nature of EdTech; they wrote the algorithms! Steve Jobs, inventor of the iPad, did not allow his own children access to his invention.

“There are only two industries that call their customers ‘users’: illegal drugs and software”, says computer scientist Edward Tufte in the film *The Social Dilemma*. (Orlowski, 2020)

It is parents who must direct their children's learning, support their relationships, and nurture their growth, not big Tech. Why did we hand our kids over to the billionaires?

## 5- Does EdTech work?

Well that depends on whom you ask. If you ask the developers and all of the people who profit from it, EdTech has been a smashing success. Many careers are thriving in this Education Technology Complex. It is growing by leaps and bounds every year. The goals of business are profit and expansion and control. And so yes, EdTech works.

Funnily enough, when I ask teachers about the benefits of screens in class, no one ever says that they facilitate learning. They never say that "cutting and pasting some information from Google into a PowerPoint [is] superior to reading a passage in a well-researched textbook and handwriting a response", or that "homework listed on Teams better than jotted down in a paper homework diary", or that "digitally transporting a child to the Egyptian pyramids better than the child imagining it". (Winkleman, 2025) They stick to [the mantras](#).

However, the harms of screens for schoolchildren extend far beyond the poor educational outcomes, as this website is elucidating.

In 2013, Bill Gates said: "It would be great if our education stuff worked. But that we won't know for probably a decade. (Strauss, 2013)"

Well now we know. It worked very well for Mr. Gates.

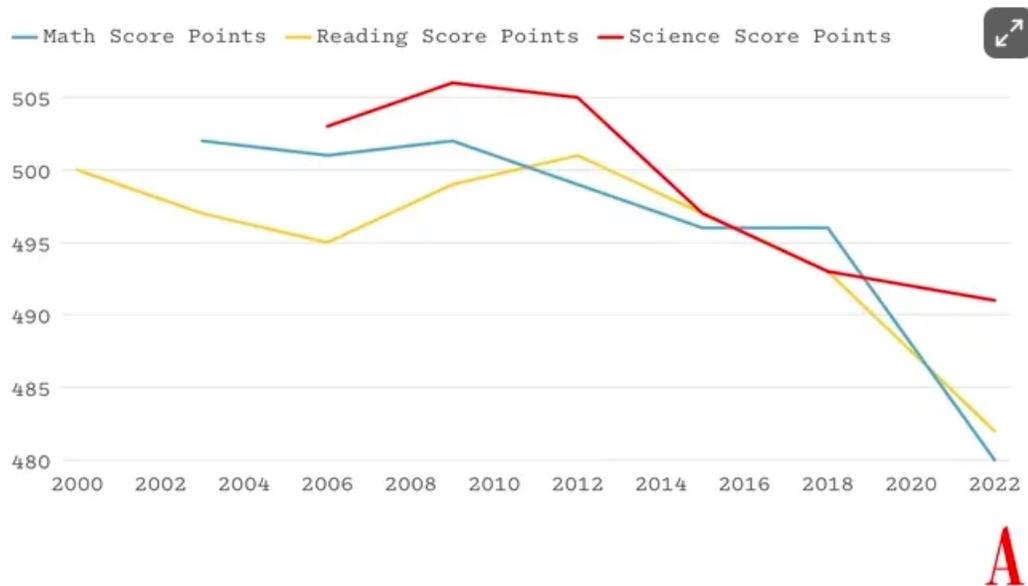
I really hesitate to put any "data" about the effectiveness of EdTech on this website because the "data" masks what we already know. We know it in our bones. We can look around and see that the children are not thriving academically or emotionally. We have already outsourced our responsibility for our children. We don't need to continue to outsource our responsibility to data "experts" to find out if we've made the right choice. It's time for a big course correction for parents and schools, and it's not even a difficult one.

However, I will make a few comments about the "data".

The data that supports EdTech is pretty sketchy. It's funded by the very companies that make it. It's unsurprising that most of the industry-funded studies ignore the negative impacts on attention and well-being. (Miles, 2018) Also, it's difficult to properly evaluate the apps and devices because they change and evolve rapidly.

Let's look at educational outcomes for children since 2012, the outset of the "digital revolution" in our schools. The test scores are dismal and getting worse around the world. (Horvath, 2024) Here is what "progress" in 38 countries looks like:

## Global PISA Test Scores in Decline



*Image source: [The Atlantic](#), from the OECD.*

Take a look at one example of a broader report on the global use of EdTech: The 2023 Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) report, which states that "There is little robust evidence on digital technology's added value in education." This huge study finds almost nothing to recommend EdTech.

The UNESCO study itself is part of the Education Technology Complex. How many scientists, NGOs, government departments, granting agencies, administrators, and website administrators do you need to change a lightbulb? I mean, figure out that a voice activated laptop helps blind kids, or that if you simply ship millions of gadgets to remote students, learning does not improve, or that gadgets distract kids, even when turned off?

The Education Technology machine continues to grow, producing more meaningless reports, more science-ish data, more apps, more connectivity, more clicks, more consultants, more administrators, more pretending that serious people are taking our children's school lives seriously.

“Who has proven that this deluge of screen education is good for our children? No one has.” (Winkleman, 2025) 8:40.

## 6- What ever happened to a more than a century of excellent research on child development and learning?

What shocks me about the issue of data on the effectiveness of screens in schools is that we have erased more than a century of excellent, slow and steady research on education, learning, and child development. Suddenly, it doesn't exist! The child development departments in universities around the world are bizarrely overlooked, gone from our collective scientific memory. The literature in these fields is vast: how children develop through human connection, eye contact and embodiment, and the psychological impacts of being deprived of these elements. We don't need Bill Gates's personal musings or a UNESCO report on iPads in India to tell us what makes a good learning environment. We can use our own experience and knowing as parents, but if we must have experts, then we can turn to a century of outstanding research on how children thrive and grow. Children learn in connection, safety, slowness, and presence, through challenge, continuity, and steadiness, through unmediated play and multisensory exploration of the world around them, through art and dance and the teacher's smiling eyes.

## 7- Screens generate passive learners.

When using a pencil and paper, children are able to use techniques that support comprehension of math or reading problems such as underlining important words, going back and rechecking answers, looking at a previous problem and then trying again. Children use their fingers and senses to interact physically with the material. These are critical learning skills which are lost in the online model. The majority of my son's online work is clicking answers as quickly as he can, then feeling frustrated when he can't figure it out immediately. He's prone to just clicking on a guess and waiting for the app to spit out the right answer. He is passively learning. He is a voyeur of content, a consumer, rather than an active, embodied participant.

The screen flattens learning. With pencil and paper, there is a translation that happens. You read text, and it comes alive in your imagination, you form a mental map, which you then analyse and ponder and come to an understanding, a formulation, which you can communicate through writing or speaking. Writing on paper and speaking are also forms of thinking. We have to think through complexity. It's a form of intellectual labour which involves “stress, mental trial and error, and time”. (Stevenson, 2023) With a screen and an app, you just take in the information visually and then spit it out as you type the answer in the prescribed format. There is less to figure out on your own. We do not become as emotionally involved. Nor do we retain the information as you would from paper. (Christensen, 2013) An app is essentially a set of digital shortcuts to an end goal. *When we digitize learning processes, we move from manual and slow to “repeatable, fast, and mindless”.* (Stevenson, 2023)

“The entire mental state changes when someone receives images from a screen. [rather than from a tangible book]. (...) Rather than consciously directing its attention and producing the images necessary for thought by itself, the mind is semi-hypnotized—it lazily absorbs and follows the images that are presented to it on the screen.” (Moynihan, 2015)

We transform what we read into something we can think about. Nowadays, as Roald Dahl's Oompa Loompas sang, with screens and distractions, a child "cannot think – he only sees!" (Dahl, 2008, pp. 171-173, as cited in Moynihan, 2015)

Children learn in an embodied world: holding a book, writing with the hands, reading an unlit page, turning the page, moving, touching, exploring in time and space. There is so much neuroscience and traditional knowledge about how children actually learn. But we seem to have completely forgotten that we are embodied beings who need bodies to learn in direct contact with our environment.

“The sensory dimension of print reading adds an important redundancy to information - a kind of ‘geometry’ to words - which contributes to our overall understanding of what we read.” Piper, as cited in (Gaskovski, 2025)

## 8- Why are children no longer taught to write in cursive?

EdTech companies have convinced us that there is only one path forward in learning, that a child clicking on a screen is progress. Ensuring that fewer children can write on paper ensures an expanding market of consumers. But writing in cursive is an important sensorimotor learning process in and of itself. Cursive writing forces your hand to stay on the paper, to put your thoughts into words, *and to feel the relationship between the words and ideas*. Writing allows for elegance and complexity, which are forms of understanding, of structuring thoughts and of discovery.

What a pleasure to be in the flow of thinking! The word cursive comes from the Latin “currere”, meaning to flow, to run. Vivian Parra writes,

“This is why we should go back to writing in cursive, especially at school. Because this is not just about recovering a writing style, but about giving breath to our thoughts again. Everything that makes us live, that feeds the soul, that sustains the spirit, is connected to breathing. Without breath, as the ancient Greeks said, there is no thought. And without thoughts there is no life.”

The intricate multisensory dance of thinking and expression is lost when we force children to tap, scroll and flit between apps and tabs.

Most adults don't write much anymore, but this is no reason to deny children the deep learning benefits (better focus, more flow of thought, higher retention, better spelling, the use of much more of the brain) and joys of cursive writing. Adults also don't sing new things (like the alphabet) or use math flash cards, but that doesn't mean that singing and flash cards aren't important learning tools in school.

## 9- What do we lose when we lose deep reading?

Adults everywhere bemoan the loss of reading books. You often hear people say things like "I used to read a book a week. Now I can't get through a book a year." Years of skimming and clicking between apps and tabs are rewiring our brains, making it very difficult for anything we read to sink into working memory. Is this what we want for our children during their learning years? Deep reading of physical books cultivates slower, deeper thought, contemplation, ease with silence, sustained attention, deep understanding of ourselves and our world. Deep reading of physical books "expands us into a fuller, more rooted human being". (Gaskovski, 2025)

What happens when we scroll "*forever on the surface of things?*" (Gaskovski, 2025):

*the surface of time, by forcing too much hurry and efficiency; the surface of relationships, which will be shallower and more functional; the surface of information, which will keep us credulous; the surface of our own thoughts and feelings, which will keep us alienated from our own depths.* (Gaskovski, 2025)

When we lose deep reading, we risk losing our inner life, the capacity to inhabit our own imaginations, to be lost in thought. "[T]he less you think, the harder thinking becomes" (India, Avoiding the Automation of Your Heart, 2025), and thus we compulsively turn to algorithms to escape the void.

**Real studying is a form of deep reading: slow, contemplative, laborious and boring at times. It comes from within, unmediated by apps.**

## 10- Through EdTEch, children grow less connected to real things.

"We are no longer touching the world, we're only looking at images of it", moving away from "the transcendent and the physical and the present". (Noble, 2025)

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Isn't the whole point of childhood to "touch the world"?

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When children spend their days (and evenings) on stimulating, gamified apps, the real world becomes much less interesting, too slow, too boring. They lose their capacity for wonder and beauty in the natural world. I see the impact of this every day. Montreal used to be alive with the shouts of children playing everywhere outside. Now? Most streets and alleys are eerily silent. There are several reasons for this, beyond the scope of this website. But the “boringness” of the real world and unmediated play is one of them.

Being connected to real things, to the reality of our shared human world is becoming more important, not less, as truth in our digital world becomes harder to discern.

### 11-*Je ne me souviens pas*. The Homogenization of Children’s Worlds

So many aspects of our lives have been homogenized through apps. Airbnb makes travel easier in many ways but standardizes travel experience around the world. Facebook is a standardized simulation of (a much reduced) community; it’s the same in Sweden as it is in Kenya. Every sphere of our social world has been simplified, commodified and homogenized. The same top-down flattening is true for our children’s classrooms and school cultures. Classroom, Studyo, Google Docs, and their algorithms shape and order our children’s learning experiences, 40 hours a week. These apps are the same anywhere, stripping our children’s daily lives of autonomy and particularity. Classrooms and school culture everywhere has become homogenized. Children’s worlds are smaller and same-y. When I was a child, my parents had a 1970’s photo book in the living room depicting children in daily life in every corner of the globe. I remember being entranced by the other kids and their different cultures, how families played, ate, were sad or joyous. The rich textures of their worlds came alive in those photographs! In contrast, we now offer children a culturally flattened world, teaching them to think, or not think, to scroll and click, in the same boring way. Rather than the touted *Individualized Learning!* we get blandness, a deadening of learning cultures.

We Quebecois pride ourselves on being a unique nation striving to stay alive in a sea of North American anglophone culture. But, when it comes to our children and their culture, our motto seems to be *Je ne me souviens pas*.

### 12. The tools are not tools.

EdTech is designed for clicks and behavior modification. Education is secondary. This is the sad truth. There are many organizations fighting to have actual tools, i.e. an app or device that is truly useful without being addictive, distracting, dehumanizing, anxiety-provoking, or a portal to porn, grooming, violence or fraud. Whether these advocates will succeed remains to be seen. It is striking to consider that in order to have some sort of educational gimmick, we have no choice but to bear these risks and harms. It's ridiculous that this is something that parents and

students would have to fight for. But it speaks volumes about the true nature of the Education Technology Complex.

If your child has a disability and may be helped by a device at school, you may decide to use it. *Parents decide best for their own children*. But again, this is not a reason for every child to be tethered to devices, or to need 30 apps to get through the school year. Even in instances where a device could help a disabled child, we still have to keep in mind that the apps and the devices are not primarily designed to be educational tools, so the same risks apply. It's sad that parents have to weigh their child's real needs against all of the harms that come bundled with the "tool".

### 13- Surveillance and the sale of our children's data. "EdTech is Big Tech."

The Internet Safety Lab (Findings Report 1: Overall App Safety Findings, 2024) reviewed the most common applications used in schools across the United States. What they found is **disturbing**:

**96% of EdTech applications share children's personal data with third-parties.**

Then there is the sale of our children's data on the dark web through hacking and cybercrime.

The U.S. Department of Education found that a student's educational record is worth \$250-350 on the black market. There are nearly 50 million children enrolled in American public schools. Collectively, this means **our children's data is worth roughly \$15 billion dollars**, which is a market too large for hackers to ignore. (Cherkin, 2025)

Here in Quebec, the government is getting in on the predatory action:

"The Quebec government says it does not require parents' consent to give students' personal information to an AI." (Peltz, 2025)

Parents and children have been stripped of the right to their own data. (Peltz, 2025) For our own "safety", the Quebec government will harvest the children's data and feed it into the EdTech machine. (Ironically, the government says that it is using the data to help with rising school dropout rates. I guess EdTech didn't help with that problem either.)

If you would like to fight this aspect of the Quebec ETC, please go [here](#).

In other countries parents are fighting back in the courts. A recent ruling in the US states:

*“Collecting student data for commercial benefit without parental notice or consent plausibly describes conduct that is ‘highly offensive to a reasonable person and . . . constitutes an egregious breach of the social norms.’”*

— U.S. District Judge James Donato, denying in part PowerSchool's Motion to Dismiss (March 2025) (Active Cases, 2025)

Should we not know who has access to our children? Allowing our children’s lives to be mined for data and profit without consent is something we need to take seriously for many reasons, beyond the current scope of this website. One is that Edtech uses the data to make the apps more addictive, so that the ETC can expand. Another is that strangers can use the data to approach the child personally.

#### 14- The AI question

I started exploring my questions around screens in schools six years ago when my son was in grade 3. It was then that I found out that his future high school uses iPads intensively. I wasn’t too worried because I figured that as the iPad was already an outdated tool, the gizmo would be gone by the time he got to high school. That the silliness would be over. I was wrong. Premier Legault has just budgeted another \$15.2 million for school iPads in 2025. (Côté, 2025)

Now I think there is a good chance that the gadgets will be gone from schools for a different reason: artificial intelligence. If teachers want to know if a child can read and write they are going to have to return to pencils and papers and real-life interactions to avoid the exponential rise in cheating, not to mention the cognitive decline that is everywhere in our schools. There’s not really any other way.

Although, as I write this, I realize that, actually, the problem of AI in schools will mean increasing demand for technological “solutions”, for more apps, more “scientific” studies, more consultants, more IT, more administrative overhead. We can debate and worry about AI for years, while the Education Technology Complex proliferates. Perfect!

A.I. is already being folded very quickly into existing EdTech apps and platforms. They will be one and the same. There is no regulation. A.I. in the classroom will usher in very complex difficulties for our children as well as amplifying current EdTech harms.

#### 15- Children are losing intellectual virtues in the very place they should be cultivating them.

As [previously mentioned](#), autonomy and responsibility are important virtues, but they are not the only ones that children need to cultivate in school. Intellectual virtues such as the “capacity for inner calm and order” (Moynihan, 2015), fortitude, perseverance, and patience make up the foundation of learning, and also form the foundation of true freedom and agency. These virtues

help us to develop our inner lives, they give us courage to try new things, to set goals and stick to our principles. They open us up to a meaningful life, the ability to do achieve what we want to achieve, to self-knowledge, to self-worth, curiosity, wonder.

Moynihan (2015) says that fortitude in the context of school is the “perseverance in the difficult tasks of study and the temperance to ponder matters throughout the day... the effort to forgo distracting entertainment to preserve the **silence** necessary to really learn.”

Through the twin disciplines of silence and contemplation, we can connect with the human pace of things. The pace and rhythm of using a stimulating app has nothing to do with the pace of thinking, learning, or of a real-life human friendship

## 16- Most university students are now functionally illiterate.

The average university student cannot read a serious novel “cover to cover and understand what they have read.” (Bookbinder, 2025). Speak with any CEGEP or university professor and they will tell you that there is a serious problem. Even Harvard has had to offer an introductory math course for incoming students, because few can do math at a college level. The issue is bigger than screens, but it’s pretty clear that screens, at the very least, are not helping. Students test scores have plummeted across the world. (Horvath, 2024) (Haidt & Rausch, 2025) Why is this not a huge issue? Why are we having silly conversations about the utility of screens when reading and thinking are becoming burdens for our children?

Professors are shocked and demoralized by their empty classrooms. Some have told me that it’s only at the final exam that they meet many of their students. Students show up intermittently, with no understanding of the sustained relational effort involved in true learning, or of the joys of shared intellectual pursuits. They have learned to click and flit, to passively watch “content”, and their brains and nervous systems are wired that way. Going to class and participating in real life is but one (stressful) option among many in their crowded educational/entertainment milieu which includes EdTech platforms, YouTube, AI and social media. The kids are there to tick a box, to move on to the next level in the video game of life. And they are incredibly anxious. (Big surprise!) The professors have to dumb down the material and become mental health counselors.

The kids are not alright. And what are we doing? We’re buying more iPads! (Côté, 2025)

## 17- The real digital divide

EdTEch has been sold to us as a way of bridging the “digital divide” between rich and poor, giving a leg up to poor children who can then access the same educational materials as the rich. However, this argument conveniently overlooks the fact that you could use technology to

facilitate access to materials for teachers and or parents in poor countries. There is no need for every child to be seated in front of a screen to balance this divide.

The reality is that the screens are amplifying the divide between rich and poor, or between the rich and ultra-rich. Between those who can afford to send their children to device-free elite schools, and those who send their kids to schools where they sit in front of silly apps all day. The divide is between those who can afford forest schools, outdoor activities, music, art, and sport, and those who must use the screen as a babysitter because they are working several jobs. The divide is between those who can think deeply, focus, and delay gratification, and those who are too tired and overwhelmed to do anything but mindlessly scroll, distracted and anxious. Between those who use screens to mediate their reality and those who don't.

This divide will very soon be reflected in our universities as AI will necessitate a 2-tiered system. Many universities may continue in the current system, graduating anxious and depressed students who can only "write" papers using AI, do multiple choice tests, and learn next to nothing. The other tier of universities will turn to something like the traditional Oxbridge model: the exams will be oral, in front of a professor or jury, demonstrating the students' grasp of the entire subject, and their ability to understand and synthesize a vast amount of knowledge and make it their own. To achieve this, students must read, write and communicate a great deal. These students will not be spending their days on apps, but together with other students and professors and tutors in classes and seminars, or reading and writing in silence.

Which type of university is your child prepared for?

18- When it comes to screens, why don't we differentiate between different developmental ages?

In Quebec, why is the iPad/Chromebook policy the same for 12-year-olds as for 17-year-olds?

Well, because EdTech is not about the children, and never was. It's about the most clicks. If you can get the 12-year-olds using it as much as the 17-year-olds, then you make more money, and have more kids dependent at a younger age. Cha-ching!

The use of EdTech/screens is grounded in marketing scripts rather than scientific, psychological or pedagogical theory. Thus, developmental differences, which would be addressed in a scientific framework, are not a consideration. Nothing is a real consideration, only the profit and expansion of the Education Technology Complex.

We pretend that all knowledge about child development before the 2015 introduction of the iPad does not exist. If Bill Gates wants iPads for toddlers, then it must be scientifically valid. However, the scientific literature has a lot to say about children's different developmental needs.

I think this question is related to our loss of connection to what is real. In the virtual world of everything at once, it's harder to see the particularity of things. We have lost the embodied sense that children and adult are different, that younger children are different from older children. (We have also lost the sense of difference between day and night, or between work and home.) By foisting screens on schoolchildren of all ages, we are burdening them with adult preoccupations, adult ways of thinking, and an endless stream of adult problems.

Why we don't distinguish, between our own uses of technology and those of children? Many adults spend their days doing meaningless busy work: endless emails, Slack chats, Zoom meetings, resetting passwords, calling help desks to do even the most minor of tasks, etc. Why must children be forced to do the same? Why not allow them to be free from this hellhole? Why not have a learning environment that "reclaim[s] time as lived time", as childhood time? (Crary, *The Digital Age is Destroying Us*, 2022)

## 19 -Pornography

The rapidly eroding differentiation between children and adults brings us to the issue of Internet pornography. Children who are first exposed to porn before the age of 18 are much more likely to become addicted. Most parents are unaware of the fact that children's brains are highly prone to addiction. It's certainly not trumpeted by the schools or EdTech. As a psychologist, I work with people who became addicted to porn as young children, some at age 5, and many in the 9-10 age range.

Even if your child does not have a phone or has a controlled device at school, chances are other children will show him porn. Parents have no control while the child is at school. "A recent survey (<https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2022-teens-and-pornography-final-web.pdf>) of teens found that not only had 30 percent of teens viewed porn during the school day, but of those teens, 44 percent had viewed it on a school-issued device. Asking parents to put their faith in filters thus means defaulting to the lowest common denominator, with less vigilant households and hapless school administrators creating an environment of almost effortless access to pornography. (Morell & Littlejohn, 2025)

And I haven't even touched on the issue of children being groomed by predators or by sexualized chatbots or blackmailed while watching pornography on school-controlled devices.

Montreal parents who restrict screens for their children are forced go against their own values once the child is enrolled in school. When I argued with my son's principal for the right to put restrictions on his iPad so that he can't see porn or violence, she said, "Well it wouldn't matter because he can just look at anyone else's iPad at school." She was right.

I question how blasé our society is about the children seeing porn. Sure, there is talk of governments putting age restrictions on websites, and occasional media coverage about children and porn. But it's really not so long ago, say 10 years, that things were very different. If a parent found out that there was even a *remote* chance that their child might view extreme sex acts at school, he would have rushed to the school and removed the child immediately! There would have been absolutely no hesitation. *None*. Now, the attitude is like that of my son's principal: well, that's how it is now, nothing we can do. We'll block sites here and there, but we'll have to wait for Silicon Valley or the government to give us more technological "solutions" and guidance. The horror and the urgency are gone.

Our world is so pornified that we have become desensitized to the extremity of what we see. Most Netflix shows have graphic sex or sexual violence, even the comedies. Pornography (and violence) has been completely normalized in every corner of our social and cultural worlds. Little shocks us anymore, including the fact that our kids have access to extreme porn at school.

Many parents watch so much porn themselves that they are desensitized to the reality of how horrifying and damaging it is for a child to watch a gang rape. Even the *possibility* of a child witnessing gang rapes is horrifying.

Well actually, we *can* control it, very, very easily, by making 8 hours a day, 5 days a week porn-free hours.

## D. Which brings us back to my question: **Why can't we just say no?**

Do you feel like your abilities to learn and grow intellectually and emotionally increased when you moved from print to screen? Do you feel more regulated, calmer and more connected after a long day of multitasking on screens? The answer is no for almost all adults. Yet somehow, it's OK for our kids.

*Why are we accepting so much less for our children?*

I find our **passive acceptance and resignation** in the face of EdTech and screens in schools very strange. Why can't we say no? Here are some possible answers that I have found to this perplexing question:

1. [We don't want to admit that we believed the hype.](#)
2. [Shame](#)
3. [To acknowledge that we may be hurting our children is too painful.](#)
4. [We feel some sort of desperate obligation](#)

5. [We have become desensitized to our children's reality.](#)
6. [We have been neurologically rewired.](#)
7. [We parents are suffering from a collective failure of imagination.](#)
8. [Rather than using our imaginations, we rely on mediated thinking.](#)
9. [Increasingly, we parents and teachers have never had the experience of deep, sustained effort and attention ourselves.](#)
10. [Parents have the sense that this issue is too big and we are powerless in the face of it.](#)
11. [Parental burnout](#)
12. [Parents want to draw children into our adult world.](#)
13. [It's easier to focus on the children than on ourselves.](#)

### 1- We don't want to admit that we believed the hype.

We don't want to admit that we that we were dazzled by shiny gizmos, that we were excited by buzz words such as *engaging!*, *data driven!*, *adaptable!*, and *self-paced!*, that we were deceived, persuaded, and influenced by those pillaging the daily moments of our children's lives.

### 2- Shame

We don't want to be denigrated as one who is needlessly in a moral panic, as Luddites who are averse to the god of progress. We fear being mocked by sophisticated "experts", or by self-proclaimed "calm and reasonable" people who see things in a more "balanced" way than we do.

### 3- To acknowledge that we may be hurting our children is too painful.

Hurting our children is the worst nightmare for any parent. It makes sense that we would want to deny something so devastating. Perhaps the ambient denial in our society is partly a means of psychological survival in difficult, uncertain times.

Do we want to confront how we have ceded responsibility for our children?

Do we want to consider that we've offered up our children to be monetized, optimized, and maximized by Big Tech, like sacrifices to a false god? Or, that we've offered up our children to increasingly technocratic governments that seek to manage every aspect of our lives?

Do we really want to grapple with the fact that we are putting devices in the hands of children that are designed to be addictive, intrusive and distracting in ways that we have never before seen in history? (Crary, 24/7 Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep, 2014)

#### 4- We feel some sort of desperate obligation

to maintain the illusion that everything is OK in Quebec schools. It's not.

#### 5- We have become desensitized to our children's reality.

We have become desensitized to children's excessive screen time through our own compulsive consumption. Part of this habitual acceptance and inertia stems from the activity of scrolling itself.

Strangely, we now see the omnipresence of screens in students' hands as "the way things are", even though it's actually very recent and new.

#### 6- We have been neurologically rewired.

We have become neurologically wired to stay on the surface of issues ([see mantras](#)), as we scroll through content without landing anywhere.

#### 7- We parents are suffering from a collective failure of imagination.

Jonathan Crary says that our own perceptions, thoughts and common knowledge are being swept away by an inundation of messaging telling us that our administered lives are immutable and that devices are indispensable. We feel that our only options are "adaptation and resignation". We can't even imagine saying no. We can't even imagine spaces where devices might not be needed, and thus we seem to no longer be able to imagine our children learning with a textbook, paper and pencil. We have come to the "passive acceptance of numbing online routines as synonymous with living." (Crary, *The Digital Age is Destroying Us*, 2022)

Why can't we imagine school as a place for children to be free of the devices that occupy every other moment of their lives? Give them a chance to feel happier and calmer as they learn, teach them to know the difference between virtual life and real life?

#### 8- Rather than using our imaginations, we rely on mediated thinking.

Our thinking is mediated by Facebook prompts, or by clicking between simplified choices, or by AI. It's getting more difficult to stretch our minds and imagination to both recognise what is happening and to see other ways forward. It takes imagination (and humility) to course correct. We are dependent and impotent. It's hard to see and respond to algorithms when our very minds are shaped by them.

When we outsource our judgment to Google, or to Reddit, or to teachers who have also

outsourced *their* thinking, we lose trust our in own judgment or that of our neighbours. We don't trust our parental instincts. And we have lost the fortitude to live by our inner compasses. This is a very dangerous place to be as a society.

Our children are watching us outsource our decisions and responsibilities. Perhaps we virtue signal about cultivating autonomy and responsibility in Quebec students because we know that these virtues are actually slipping away. How do we build self-reliance in an age of algorithms and AI? (India, 2025)

9- Increasingly, we parents and teachers have never had the experience of deep, sustained effort and attention ourselves.

We parents do not have the fortitude and temperance to maintain our concentration. Perhaps we never developed the "interior intellectual faculties (imagination and intellect) [to operate] in an independent, self-directed, and active manner." (Moynihan, 2015)

If we've never had the experience of studying for extended periods of time, memorizing, thinking, analyzing, making connections, creating order, and expressing our discoveries through writing or conversation, then it is difficult to grasp what is missing, or to be overly concerned with what children are missing. I often work with young adults who go through university with absolutely no experience of the joys of studying, of grappling with deep issues, of mastery. University and CEGEP are becoming hellish experiences of anxiety, self-doubt, imposter syndrome. Which leads to procrastination and students losing themselves in scrolling and passive entertainment. This experience then carries over to the workplace. Increasingly, schools and workplaces have become places of superficial busywork, crafting emails, filling out forms, dealing with technology issues, Zoom meetings, editing PowerPoints, because we don't know anything else. Nothing of substance. And this is what we are bequeathing to our children.

10- Parents have the sense that this issue is too big and we are powerless in the face of it.

We have no choice but to simply move ahead into online simulations of learning and community. Teachers and students can be managed like online accounts. We treat EdTech as an immutable god, that has always been here and will be here forever and has powers that diminish us. "There is a palpable defeated feeling that we have gone too far and no way to reel it all back in. A shoulder shrug that we live in a digital world and need to adapt, especially since AI is here and no longer on the horizon." I (Champney, 2024)

Many parents are experiencing disempowerment, separation, loss of community. But the school question is one area where the solution is straightforward, and also the most important. If we parents are feeling defeated, let's give our kids the tools to not be resigned to whatever is on offer from Silicon Valley, to not live in passive conformity. What can help parents to better

face complex issues and to maintain our agency: the cultivation of embodied learning, thinking, and living in the real world. It's not just for kids!

## 11- Parental burnout

Parental burnout is a real thing. As “smart” solutions to “protect” our children proliferate, so do the opportunities for harm. We have less time for the increasing bureaucratic load of monitoring children’s technology. Apple Screen Time is frustratingly complicated and doesn’t always work. Each app necessitates further apps. It’s overwhelming and exhausting. But very, very profitable for the Education Technology Complex.

Parents were assured that “parental controls” left them in control, but even the most dedicated parents found the technological ground shifting beneath their feet. Given the nonstop battles to protect their sixth-graders from body-shaming campaigns, deepfake sexting, gangbang videos, and “influencers” peddling self-harm, it is no wonder that we are facing an epidemic of parental burnout severe enough to warrant a surgeon general’s warning. (Morell & Littlejohn, 2025)

## 12- Parents want to draw children into our adult world.

We parents and teachers have fallen into a culture of passive entertainment and useless “bustle”. (Moynihan, 2015) We feel angst in moments of boredom, desensitized to real life. Children don’t naturally feel this way. When I’m caught up in digital busyness, updating an app that feels vital, or filling out problematic forms that never work, it feels jarring to be around a child who is living a fuller, more embodied experience. We have difficulty tolerating lively children who are in the real world. So maybe we give them a phone or a screen as a strange way of connecting, of being together in *our* world, in our prison. We can no longer meet the children where they are.

## 13- It’s easier to focus on the children than on ourselves.

The students should behave! They should use AI ethically! They should pay attention! They should attend a workshop on social media. Kids in my child’s school are called out for using AI for their homework. We’ve pushed a drug on them with no real limits and no serious thought yet expect the child to manage the drug reasonably. We’ve taught them to outsource their brains when it comes to notes or scheduling, or anything laborious such as opening a dictionary, but then we punish them for outsourcing their essays to another algorithm like ChatGPT.

## E. CONCLUSION

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*If EdTech in our schools is the answer, what was the question?  
(Winkleman, 2025)*

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In this website, I laid out many different ways to look at the use of EdTech in our schools. The more I thought and learned about this issue, the more it was clear to me that the important question is not whether or not kids should spend their school days attached to screens. Nor is the question about how we can use EdTech more judiciously, or even how to achieve a balance between apps and paper books. The question that stood out amid the din of industry buzz words, psychobabble, techno-fantasies, mantras, and robotic denial, was simply, *why can't we say no?*

**We parents are the primary educators of our children.** So why can't we say no to something we simply do not need?

I invite parents to stop outsourcing our responsibility, not only to Big Tech, but to schools, administrators, consultants, teachers, i.e. the Education Technology Complex. No matter how well-intentioned, there is no administrator or workshop consultant or principal or Californian philanthropist or government minister who will put your child's needs above their own more than you will. That is **reality**.

The so-called "digital revolution" in education has been a massive success for the Education Technology Complex whose goals are profit, power and expansion. Yet for children and parents, the promised era of emancipation and progress through 1:1 devices in classrooms has amounted to nothing but a fantasy. *The trumpeted benefits of EdTech are irrelevant or negligible in the face of its harms.* Perhaps your child is thriving at school, but many, many are not. We need to "break the illusion" that everything is fine.

The Education Technology Complex is comprised of many good people, like you or me, who are trying to make a positive impact. But each person occupies a tiny corner of the Complex, from which it's difficult to see the whole. A well-intentioned teacher who has her 12-year-old students do math exercises on iPads may not have thought about the [broader implications](#). She may be blind to the endlessly proliferating system in which she participates. It's time to step back and see the big picture, to come to our senses, to reality.

If you want to teach a specific course in music editing software, or Excel spreadsheets, or computer programming, then go ahead and do so. We can have classrooms with computers for those subjects. There is absolutely no reason for the entire education system to be connected to personal screens. We adults know that the idea of "balance" is becoming more of a pipe dream in our own lives. Why on earth do we expect children to find this balance?

And now AI is here, already a part of EdTech, bringing with it a multitude of increasingly complex issues for children's learning, morality, and thinking, for their psyches, emotions, relationships and safety. Even if you think that AI will be fantastic for your child, you can't say for sure. The bottom line is that we are continuing to throw our children into something that we do not fully understand. Why? *Good intentions are not enough*. Why not wait until we know better, until we better understand the harms and impacts of these devices, until there are guardrails in place, or until we create tools that are actually better than paper and pencils for children?

There are many complex and divisive issues facing our society today. The world is moving rapidly toward an uncertain future and we may feel powerless. But the problem of EdTech in schools has two major advantages:

1- All parents want their kids to learn and thrive at school, so we are starting from a shared reality.

2- **It's really simple to fix the problem!** We don't need the government, or Silicon Valley, or legislators to figure it out with expensive studies, high tech solutions and more ridiculous "debate". Parents can simply close the iPads or Chromebooks and send their children to school with notebooks and pens. En masse. The teachers can still project internet content in class if they want to.

All parents make mistakes with our children. Often! It's hard, but it's also part of life. When things go wrong, what we need to do is repair. We can heal, learn from our mistakes, and in the process teach and connect with our kids. It's good for children to learn that they can make mistakes and change course. Let's explain to our children why we thought being on and off iPad all day was good, and how we have come to understand differently.

The bureaucracy of gadgets in K-12 schools is incredibly costly, insane, and most of all, completely unnecessary. Schools should stop pouring our tax dollars into IT departments, administrators, specialists, and workshops about the problems created by screens in class, (online harms, cheating, anxiety, pornography; the list is profitably endless). Not to mention the potential costs when your school's system gets hacked. Rather than profiting from the problems, schools could actually address the problems they purport to care about:

**Let's give the kids 40 screen-free and porn-free hours a week. Let's create an oasis of learning, calm and freedom in a disconnected, screen-saturated world.**

Let's stop the corporatization of every second of our children's day. Let's give the kids back their childhood. It's the wise thing to do.

As we accelerate the ability to fool and imprison ourselves [and our children], those who profit from the emptying of our minds strive to convince us that the shallower we can become, the more we progress. (Bell, 2025)

Waiting for the Education Technology Complex to address their products' harms is like asking pharmaceutical companies to focus on making people well, rather than keeping patients chronically ill, without actually killing them. The Education Complex keeps the EdTech "issues" alive through the appearance of serious (and increasingly expensive) attempts to address it, while never fixing [the real problems](#). It's the perfect scalable business model. It allows for endless expansion by creating "artificially manufactured appetites" (Crary, *The Digital Age is Destroying Us*, 2022), lifelong "users", and justifies ever-more careers and exponential profits. It's a **systemic problem**. Our kids are the commodities.

Even if your child's school is stricter with screen use, or allows parental controls, or uses just the "best" apps, or tries to police the number of screen hours, the momentum of the Education Technology Complex only moves in one direction: more, more, more. *More* problems will arise (AI anyone?), and there will be ever *more* "Innovative!" solutions that cost more and harm children. EdTech and the administrative machine that supports it is only here to grow, to feed itself and expand.

Sweden is the first country to kick EdTech out of the classroom, to have the courage and wisdom to acknowledge that the experiment on our children has failed. (Winkleman, 2025)

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["We need to press pause and in many cases rewind." \(Winkleman, 2025\) 9:26](#)

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As moderator of this excellent discussion on EdTech, actor Hugh Grant sums it all up: **Screens in schools "are the last bloody things kids need!"**

The good news is that children's innate human capacities for learning, thinking and presence return remarkably quickly once they stop scrolling and clicking through corporately-mediated virtual platforms.

**I hope that this website gives you ideas to think about and encourages you to stand together with other parents and simply say "no".** It's a matter of numbers. If 25% of parents said "no" to screens in schools by sending their children to school with pen and paper, it would change overnight.

We the parents are the only people who are going to step in and make this change to protect our children.

No one else is coming to fix it.

## F. The Plan

1. Gather like-minded parents at your school.
2. Together, write a letter to the school, saying that as of January 1st, 2026, you no longer authorize the use of personal screens or apps at school for your children.
3. As of January 1st, send your child to school with notebooks and pens.

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