Classroom Innovation
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Laptops, tablets, and smartphones have made our lives easier and better in many important ways. However, in my experience, these devices lead to a lot of distraction in the classroom. I first started thinking about this in my first year of graduate school. I was sitting in a class that I was very interested in and was paying a lot of money for, yet I found myself regularly checking my email, Facebook, and chatting on Google Chat during class. I made the decision that from that point on I would only use pencil and paper in the classroom to take notes. Nevertheless, for the first three years of my teaching at the college level, I allowed students to take notes on laptops, tablets, and phones. The students, even the academically interested and motivated ones, were constantly distracted. One of the most important decisions I ever made in the classroom was to make it a "low technology" classroom, by not allowing laptops, tablets, or phones to be used in the classroom unless the student receives prior permission from the college.

Before implementing my "low technology" rule, I would often get students "fact-checking" me, or raising their hands in the middle of my lecture to ask about something they had just read on Wikipedia, that was only slightly related to the topic. These examples are of students who, in their minds, were using the technology to "enhance" their educational experience. In other instances I had other students, chatting, emailing, completing tasks for their jobs, paying bills, or posting on social media. On a number of occasions, I've had students email me something along the lines of, "Thanks for your reply, professor. I'm in Chemistry right now, but when the class ends, I'll drop off that paper at your office."

What I saw once I went to a "low technology" classroom was encouraging. I saw a much higher percentage of students participating in the in class discussions. I saw students wrestling with texts that I assigned in class, instead of giving me summaries about the author's ideas that they pulled from Wikipedia. I've had numerous students tell me that they don't know why other professors don't implement a similar policy, as they believe my class is the only one they've taken in which such a high number of students are regularly engaged.

While "low technology" may not seem "innovative," I think it meets the best definition of innovation, which is simply an improvement upon something. If instead we define innovation in a way that requires something "new" or something "never done before" then I think we run the risk of using it the way many people use the word "progress." G. K. Chesterton wrote, "Progress is simply a comparative of which we have not settled the superlative."[1] We have to know what we are attempting to make "progress" toward, in this case we have to know what our goal in education is in order to know whether or not something is truly "innovative". Sometimes the key to improving as educators will require us to rediscover some of the practices of the past, rather than always trying to come up with something new.

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[1] G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006), 14.