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Education

## Technology doesn't stop collaboration – but the curriculum does

By [Oliver Smith](#) 31 March 2017



### Summary

Kids huddling around a computer *is* learning.

It's troublesome. It's dangerous. It's expensive and it's taking away from teachers.

These are just some of the fearful arguments *against* technology in the classroom [voiced by Antony Jenkins and others](#) at the [Global Education and Skills Forum](#) in Dubai last week.

Indeed, according to Carnegie Mellon professor [Justine Cassell](#), technology *is* detrimental to learning today, but only because we're doing it wrong.

**Read more:** [The ex-CEO of Barclays thinks tech in the classroom is a terrible idea](#)

## Tech the *right* way



Justine Cassell, professor at Carnegie Mellon's Human-Computer Interaction Institute.

“You see a model of technology in classrooms, but it’s a model where children sit in front of a row of computers one by one, one to one,” says Cassell.

“This is so problematic, because it presumes that a computer can be stuck in front of a child and give that child an education.”

It presumed that a child is an ‘empty vessel’ that a powerful computer can simply pour knowledge into.

It’s a model that many curriculums around the world already use and promote, albeit with teachers rather than computers.

## Huddle together

Cassell says this model is flawed, not because of the technology, but because that’s not how ‘learning’ happens.

“Children co-construct knowledge, in fact, the definition of knowledge is to replace an idea that you have with another idea, and that only happens when those two ideas confront each other,” she says.

And that ‘co-construction’ only happens with dialogue, between students, among students, and with teachers.

“But technology, and teaching, today is a way of getting rid of children’s voices, of shutting them down. When we should use technology to raise children’s voices up.”

<https://www.thememo.com/2017/03/31/technology-doesnt-stop-collaboration-but-the-curriculum-does/>

## The future of learning

Cassell argues we need to transform learning from a 'solo sport' into a 'community activity', in fact that's already the case in some classrooms around the world.

“In Latin America what you'll notice is that although every child may be given a laptop, they're all working on each *other's* laptops.”

This is because learning has always been a community, collaborative exercise in these communities, rather than the assessment-driven solo experience that UK and US students are used to.

“Our models of education doesn't work in this environment, you can't assess [the children, because] you don't know who's work is whose. And if 21st century job skills include the ability to collaborate, why are we asking children to work alone?” says Cassell.

If we really want the next generation to be a collaborative, creative, tech-savvy workforce then we've got to start as we mean to go on, and that starts in school.



Oliver Smith is a Senior Reporter at *The Memo*. Winner of the Gold Award at [MHP's 30 To Watch 2015](#), he [previously covered](#) technology, media and telecoms at *City A.M.* newspaper. He can be found tweeting [@OliverSmithEU](#). You can email him at [oliver.smith@thememo.com](mailto:oliver.smith@thememo.com).