



# Striking a Balance Between Traditional and Digital Learning

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## Active Students Are Progressive Learners

In my previous [feature](#), I explored the importance of interactive learning, and explained in more detail how interactivity encompasses a 'hands-on learning' approach, as well as the use of digital technology to enhance educational progress. Both these ways of teaching and learning, under the banner of interactive education, encourage active understanding and ensure that students are not passive in the way they gather knowledge and gain new skills.

Encouraging active and varied learning in young children is a great way to instil this mindset for future life. Ensuring children are involved within their learning means that they are more likely to acquire knowledge, apply it to their lives and be active members of society.

## Traditional Methods of Learning

Active learning is incredibly important whatever the medium used. However, the more traditional methods of learning can be seen as outdated or 'boring'.

Traditional teaching methods include recitation, repetition and memorising subject matter by rote. This way of learning makes me think of [old fashioned](#) whiteboards and chalk, a strict school master, wooden desks with ink holes and silent pupils....

This way of learning was very common a few decades ago, however it isn't necessarily the only way traditional recitation and memorising learning techniques can be utilised within a learning environment. Learning by repetition can be very valuable and, dare I say, super fun!

An example can be shown through the use of a simple mathematics learning task. Ask your students to learn their five times table at home. Then when they come into class they will see you (the teacher) have written sums for the five times table on the white board, but the answers have been left blank.

You will then pick children at random to fill in the blanks and answer the sums. Firstly you can choose the children to answer each sum, quicker and quicker, on each round until you reach  $12 \times 5$ ! In the next round, if a child gets the answer right then they choose

the next student to answer. Before they choose the next student, tell them to close their eyes, spin around in a circle 4 times and then point. Whichever child is nearest to their pointed finger is the one to answer the following sum.

As you can see, this method of quick fire, repetitious learning by rote is varied, exciting and fun for all involved. Traditional methods have value, and let's be honest - learning by repetition works!

Another more traditional method of learning is the utilisation of textbooks and [learning worksheets](#). These also have value because they facilitate independent learning, concentration and methodical working. All of these skills are necessary for children to master and use in later life, whether it be in a professional or personal context.



According to a [study](#) from the International Journal of Education in Mathematics, [Science](#) and Technology, worksheet usage plays an 'important role as teachers agents in effective teaching practises'. The study explored the relation between worksheet usage and scientific achievement in students across multiple countries. Using [worksheets for grade 3](#) was found to be specifically popular, and to drive success in achievement, for students in Australia, Finland, Morocco, Norway, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

# Technological Methods of Learning

Let's take a look at technological methods of learning, and the ways in which this can enhance children's learning experiences. In today's society children are often so involved in their technology that they are less interactive in real life activities. This is obviously not ideal. Children need to learn that technology is a beautiful way for them to grow and learn, but also that face to face interaction and learning is just as important.

After all, balance is key!

A really beneficial way in which technology helps children learn, is by bringing their learning to life. Videos, [kids games](#) and interactive media provide a chance to see subject matter animated and in action. This allows children to understand the information more fully, as well as apply the [learning from the lesson](#) into their own lives.

For example, if children are learning about the Arctic and are simply reading about the area and its inhabitants from a textbook, there is the possibility that they may not comprehend and digest what they are learning about. This is likely to change when they are shown a video of the North Pole teeming with polar bears, whales, foxes, walruses and puffins.

As adults, we can empathise with how inspiring documentaries that show natural life in remote and beautiful places can be. It is exactly the same with children; they are more likely to grasp the beauty, complexity and diversity of the ecosystem they are learning about if they can see it living, moving and breathing in front of their eyes.

Modern technology and digital capacities enable us as teachers to bring learning to life for our pupils and, as a result, enhance the learning experience. Interactive whiteboards are a great example of this with smart boards, or electronic whiteboards, being used as a tool within the classroom to display images, text and [learning videos](#) onto a classroom board using a digital projector. Both the teacher and students can interact with the media directly on the screen using a tool or even a finger.



Conferencing software is another huge benefit of modern technology that enables the learning experience to be boosted. These platforms allow students and teachers to interact even when they are not in the same country as one another. As an ESL teacher, I teach children and adults in Japan and am able to utilise the interactivity of conferencing software, such as Zoom, to keep children engaged and active within our English learning. Zoom has a whiteboard functionality that allows all participants in the call to draw, write and colour on it during sessions - so all students remain actively learning throughout. This means classes can be versatile, innovative and interesting no matter what the topic.

## John Dewey - Learning by Doing

Education theorist [John Dewey](#) developed the pedagogy of 'learning by doing' and emphasised the importance of a hands-on approach to learning. The American philosopher established the University of Chicago Laboratory School, and inspired the current formation of the Danish school system because the government and educators were so convinced by his theories.

Dewey felt all students need to interact with their environment in order to adapt and learn. He didn't believe children should just sit there silently and listen to information day after day. He was passionate about the importance of children's ongoing movement, communication, exploration and self expression in the world, in order for them to fully understand themselves and the environment around them.

## Interactivity and balance are key - the best of both worlds

John Dewey's approach is incredibly valuable because it illustrates that whether you (as the educator) utilise modern or traditional approaches to learning, the key is to make the process active and engaging to help children learn in the best way.

Ensuring children are immersed with the subject matter is so crucial when it comes to the acquisition of knowledge, as well as the enjoyment of learning. In my experience, as a play-based educator and ESL teacher, when I have taught children about specific animals (for example) they remember more and remain engaged when the learning process is varied and becomes physical.

Talking to children about the way animals move, their shape, colour and traits, and then encouraging them to act this out is a beneficial way for them to fully understand the creatures and environment we are discussing. They can embody the animals by moving in the way they do, and this learning can be further solidified by showing pictures and [videos for 1st grade](#) to bring the experience to life for them. I also find this physical and interactive way of learning encourages children to share their own experiences that relate to the subject matter. They tell me about a similar animal they saw in the zoo, what it looked and sounded like, and how it made them feel. These are all perfect examples of interactive learning.

Focusing on both technological, modern methods of learning and traditional, academic techniques allows youngsters to develop holistically, remain socialised and keep actively engaged in all they do.

Finding a balance in education and learning is possible, and there is so much for children to learn through both approaches.

## About the author

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