

Is PowerPoint Crippling Our Students?

Yes

I don't use PowerPoint anymore. There ... I said it. I am not proud of it. I am a technology professor. All of our textbooks come with PowerPoint slides. I teach others how to use PowerPoint. I'm good at it. So good that my students' grades prove that with PowerPoint slides and the book, the instructor's value has diminished.

Sounds like online learning, you say. Not really. In online learning, at least the students communicate with each other. There is discussion, dialogue, exploration. My use of a technology tool has violated the social norms of a good educational classroom.



By Kathy Johnson

Am I willing to advance with technology and regress the socialization factor? Am I willing to become another distributor of **mindless media**? No! Never! What we gain with PowerPoint may not be worth the price.

PowerPoint Encourages Passivity. I know the MTV generation makes use of color, sound,

No

The college students and practicing teachers I instruct are crazy about PowerPoint. When my students come to computer class they are tired and exhausted from a day's work. They usually drag in late to class, and can't wait to leave early. The last thing they want to do is learn anything that would require mental work. They certainly don't want to hear some boring professor lecturing them on how to use PowerPoint. However, **the situation changes when they begin to work with the program.** Like magic, they become involved in the learning process. These unmotivated, tired people begin researching subjects in depth to create original presentations. Mind you, these presentations are not



By Vicki Sharp

superficial and thrown together like most papers and college reports. PowerPoint seems to bring out their creative side. On top of this, the program is easy to learn, use, and share with other people.

PowerPoint is a very versatile program. Students create electronic portfolios, Jeopardy-

movement, and cartoons. I realize that students are used to being bombarded with imagery. However, even television has realized the value of interactivity and audience response. American Idol's ratings indicate the value audience places on participation. PowerPoint makes good use of media features; however, it does not require the student to play an active role in its use as a learning media.

PowerPoint Inhibits Spontaneity. Have you ever used PowerPoint in a class where a student makes a point and the PowerPoint ends up going south? PowerPoint is a static document. It does not embrace change or open thought. No one could possibly document true discussion. True discussion is free flowing and can take many avenues to cover the same point. True discussion is the epitome of an educated society.

PowerPoint Promotes Inactivity. Today's student is accustomed to media that requires little from them to unveil the story. PowerPoint embraces this inactivity and displays the next thought with little input. Slide after slide reveals data that the student may have had little to no part in creating.

PowerPoint Welcomes Interactivity. Unfortunately, the interactivity is somewhat like a remote control for a television. If the student does not understand a point, a change is just one click away.

PowerPoint Removes Responsibility. Education requires the student to accept responsibility for what is learned, discussed, embraced, and rejected. PowerPoint assumes that the student is a clean slate and has nothing to contribute that cannot be covered

with just a bullet point or mini-movie. Even if the slide asks a question or invokes a thought, the student generally has little responsibility in its inception.

Please don't get me wrong. PowerPoint is a great tool! But is it a tool for education? Education needs students who are active, responsible, and engaged. Discussion needs to be free flowing and allow for interactivity. PowerPoint—with its text, movies, and sounds—reminds me too much of watching television with closed captioning on. Retrospectively, I have to remember that it is rarely the tool that is the problem—perhaps I need to review how I use it?

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like games, photo albums, interactive books, yearbooks, Web presentations, biographies, travelogues, graphs, organizational charts, and science presentations. The only limitation to what they can do with PowerPoint is their imagination. I have had students create presentations on the different parts of the human body. In the process, they used PowerPoint's drawing tools, printed the slide on a transparency, and saved the presentation as a Web page. Students have created clever interactive presentations on cell mitosis accompanied by music, sound effects, and digitized human voices. They have generated slide shows on Beethoven accompanied by sound effects and music. Others in my class have used camcorders, and prepared appealing film clips of field trips or school events, which they add to their presentations. For open house, the majority of my students create a digi-

tal photo album. For this on-screen presentation, each of their student's photos appeared with music, text, and dazzling effects. Students who are interested in art invariably create art presentations. One of the most original examples of this was a presentation on impressionistic paintings. The student imported color images of the different works of art from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., gallery onto slides, and recorded a narrative about each painting with appropriate music.

I feel strongly about PowerPoint and its educational benefits. Not only is this program exciting, but also it fulfills a teacher's first responsibility to motivate students to learn. The program certainly facilitates the development of research skills and encourages cooperative learning and problem solving. Using PowerPoint, I have seen reluctant readers motivated to read, and

inquisitive students have the freedom to explore topics independently. A simple presentation often offers a method of discovery that motivates students and helps them master higher-order thinking skills in language and reading. There is evidence that programs such as PowerPoint promote problem-solving transfer. Not only this, but they encourage students to be introspective and imaginative. In the end, as teachers you must decide whether to embrace this exciting and creative program or go back to the time when all we used was the chalkboard and overhead projector.

Dr. Vicki Sharp is a professor emeritus at California State University, Northridge. She has written more than 36 books in the field of education including three PowerPoint books. A few of her recent books are Make It with Microsoft PowerPoint Windows/Macintosh, Best Web Sites for Teachers, Sixth Edition, and Computer Education for Teachers, Fifth Edition.