Young Minds Behind the Genius Bar: The Pros and Cons of Technology in the Classroom

Most people today are familiar with Apple "Geniuses" – Apple employees who know their tech inside and out and who are dedicated to helping their customers understand and get the most from their Apple devices. And if you're an Apple fan, you've probably spent some time at one of the company's "Genius Bars." However, a new brand of genius is making waves in the computer science education industry: Elementary school students. Yes, you heard that correctly. Youngsters are the new heavyweights in tech today, giving them clear advantages in their education and future careers.

Students attending the [Fair Oaks Ranch School in California](#) have been given the opportunity to participate in that school's own "Genius Bar" program—and it seems to be wildly successful so far. Older, tech-savvy students assist younger or less experienced peers in learning how to use modern technology and software. The administrator of the genius bar drew inspiration from a recent conference and believed that applying the same principles in the classroom would encourage students to embrace technology and learning.

Develop Tech Policies for the Classroom

Exposing students to technology in the classroom has been [met with some mixed reception](#). While children are gaining experience earlier, some parents are concerned that their children are getting too much exposure to devices, both in the classroom as well as at home. Some believe that the current generation of schoolchildren is becoming too reliant upon electronic devices and are eschewing outdoor play and physical activity in favor of technology.

In addition, there are concerns that students are using the tech for socializing in messenger apps and playing games. If a student becomes distracted by the device, the teacher's first instinct would probably be to take the distracting device away—but what about lesson plans that are based on their devices? A student would be left at a clear disadvantage if he or she lost their technology "privileges."

It's clear that teachers and administrators need to develop guidelines and expectations for the use of electronics in the classroom, and that these systems will vary by the institution and the students. However, the struggle of forming a comprehensive technology usage policy pales in comparison to the tangible benefits children receive from tech use in their education.

Embrace the Advantages of Classroom Tech

For this generation of kids to keep up with the pace of technology, they have to be engaged from a young age. We know that when children at a young age are exposed to the technology that governs our modern world, that they become more [engaged with their lesson plans and acquire hands-on experience](#) they can take with them into high school and the workforce beyond. Replacing textbooks with e-readers and tablets is also more environmentally conscious. Also, when every student has equal access to updated technology, every student is given a more even chance at success.

In addition, when curating lesson plans around technology, teachers have more access to their students' progress. Lesson plan software easily tracks lesson completion and allows students to submit their work electronically, but it also allows for more one-on-one teacher-student connections and increased personalized attention to each student's strengths and weaknesses. Lesson plans become more immersive for the entire class with content that students can view, manipulate, and study on their own devices as the teacher leads a lesson.

Students with experience in technology will not only grow more adept at the use of electronic devices, their critical thinking skills will likely be more advanced. This exposure cultivates more interest in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) careers, and it bridges the divide between STEAM proponents and those who want to stick with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) only curriculums.

When students are engaging with technology at this level—whether building a world on Minecraft, creating a digital greeting card, completing math and science courses, or helping their peers learn and grow at gymnasium Genius Bars—we all win. And the benefits far outweigh the potential risks. Our children will carry this knowledge, and this comfort with technology, into their future careers. Who knows? We could be nurturing the next Bill Gates or Steve Jobs.