

Through the Hoops of MathXL

- Kyra Veprek

Being a 2000s kid, technology and I have grown up together, hand-in-hand. I was born in 1999, just two years before Apple released the first iPod, which would become the most popular mp3 player to date. I was only five years old during the birth of Facebook and merely eight when Apple released the iPhone, revolutionizing standards for cellular technology. With this simultaneous growth, there has also been an increase in the incorporation of technology in daily lives. Today you can instantly contact your family, check the weather, and even do your math homework with the click of a button. Increasingly, teachers are introducing homework and testing alternatives online in attempt to keep up with the pace of modern technology.

With this trend, my peers and I were not surprised to learn we would no longer be turning in hard copies of homework this year for math, but rather be managing homework and practice work on an online program called "MathXL." Being relatively tech-savvy, I found the idea of MathXL to be non-threatening due to the simple format and commands. It also featured immediate feedback which allowed one to view the scores for homework immediately, allowing him or her to quickly identify the problem in their math and pinpoint where he or she lacked understanding. Although the welcoming format and features shouted "easy A," many of my peers and I have found complete disappointment in the students we become as we develop a reliance on MathXL. First, MathXL directly enforces a tendency to cheat. One of the many tools that the website offers is a chance to view a sample problem with answers along with each question asked. Although they are intended to help students pick out the faults in their work, the sample problems allow students to copy the format of an answer rather than taking the time to grind through the steps to reaching a solution. Secondly, algebra concepts are ones that come easily to few and boggle the minds of many others. Many of the questions asked in homeworks are multiple choice questions that include a single plausible answer with three other absurd answers, leading towards the habit of using "guess and check" methods to answer questions rather than using math to calculate an answer. Finally, the website's assignment of percentage grades to homeworks often leads to frustration in the face of confusion. Since both the teacher and student see a score of value turned in, more often than not, students focus on the grade as opposed to the learning. I have found it typical for students to overwork a problem for the sole purpose of receiving a 100% on their homework, as opposed to working through homework to solidify an understanding of the concepts taught in class.

As technology progressively becomes part of the American life, it is natural for schools to feel the need to align curriculum and teaching standards with new technology; however, no piece of technology or new learning program will ever replace the benefits of teacher-student interactions in and outside of class. I have found that with a heavier reliance on new learning technologies, teachers are hasty to blame students' gaps in knowledge on their lack of use of said programs. Although students may be more inclined to work with computer and internet programs, it is unfair for teachers to work through the screen of the program, rather than directly with a student. Many schools race to have the most advanced online teaching tools, but a teacher's job is not to

demonstrate how to use the tools on different websites, it is to work hand-in-hand, face-to-face with students to make sure no knowledge is left behind.

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