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Living in the Zoom Age

We all know that the world is constantly changing. These changes often bring about some change to our individual lives. Sometimes, the world rapidly undergoes a large change. It seems that in an instant an aspect of our lives can become completely different. In 2020, this happened exactly. The COVID-19 pandemic was slowly brewing right under our noses but by the time it transformed our lives, it felt like it had suddenly snuck up on us. In March nearly everyone in the United States was forced to take their lives and contain them in their homes, only interacting virtually. For educators, they turned to zoom in order to teach. Zoom has seen a massive increase in users and activity through the pandemic. Although this is beneficial for zoom and its shareholders, for students it is proving to be a hindrance to their learning. Doing school virtually greatly decreases the stimulation of the brain, thus affecting the motivation of students and teachers. A classroom is an impossible environment to recreate virtually, yet that is the only tactic that has been used for educating in this time.

In a typical schooling environment most students wake up, brush their teeth, shower, eat breakfast, drive to school, find a parking spot, and walk to class. They also likely hold short conversations with at least one person on their way to class. All of this happens before that student even sits at a desk and begins officially learning. Each of these tiny tasks and interactions triggers electrical connections in the brain called synapses. When infants are developing it is important that parents create stimulation for their baby by interacting with their child. The more of these interactions that are had, the more synapses that will be formed. Repetition and constant

stimulation strengthen synapses however, if they are not being used, the brain will eliminate them for efficiency. In an online schooling environment, most people stumble into a chair and stare at a screen for hours—thus creating virtually no stimulation for the brain. This lack of stimulation decreases the attention span and the endurance of our brains and bodies. In addition, our emotional hormones and motivation are directly affected by synapses and stimulation. The lack of stimulation can lead to depression and limited motivation.

It is obvious that students are neither motivated nor sharp. Statistics conclude that 3 million students are missing from school—marginalized students are missing from school at a higher rate than other students. Even for those students who are consistently attending school, this lack of sharpness and motivation has limited the amount of time that their brains can effectively receive and store information. Zoom quickly tires students out and they can no longer learn effectively after approximately 30 minutes. This means that it is important for teachers to get the majority of the information out in the first half hour of class. They should also make an effort to extend the amount of time that students can learn by increasing the activity during class.

In most classrooms across America, students interact with each other and work together. Modern education has moved away from lifeless lectures and tried to teach by engaging students to think and learn from their own thoughts with the guidance of their teacher. This has proven very effective as it appears the human race is becoming smarter, both as individuals and as a whole. During zoom, we have moved backwards into an even more boring form of a lecture and virtually no interaction between students. Students learn most effectively in an environment where they can work together and even teach or learn from one another. This is easily achieved in the classroom because students can turn to each other and work together on a math problem, break down a poem, or be lab partners. Through zoom, nothing comes close to providing

students with this interaction that enhances their learning. Even in breakout rooms, conversations do not last long and it is difficult to connect through just a computer screen and a microphone. It's important that teachers do not try to replicate a classroom environment through zoom because that is simply not possible. The best way to go about it is through adapting the way the curriculum is taught and evaluated.

Teachers are finding themselves in a difficult position trying to do what is best for their students. Teachers feel for their students and are left feeling motivated to lighten the workload and decrease time spent on zoom. On the other hand, it is important that students stay on track with their progress in school in order for their next years to be useful. These two ideas are pulling teachers apart and they do not know what is best for their students. In addition, not unlike students, teachers are also getting fatigued from zoom. They are losing motivation as zoom classes are getting quieter and quieter as the semester progresses.

The most curious aspect of learning during the pandemic is that schools have fully committed to zoom. As commendable as commitment is, it appears as though schools have blindly bought into zoom as the only and best way to teach and learn during the pandemic. There has been little to no experimentation in alternative options. This period of education for the world is already an experiment as it is unknown what will happen to the generation of kids who learned entirely online for some period of their education. Therefore, it is in everyone's best interest if schools consider trying alternative methods to zoom. In a time that is abundant with risk, the danger of trying a new teaching style is minimal in comparison to the inherent peril of learning during the pandemic. It is a ripe opportunity to try alternative teaching methods such as: flip-classroom, collaboration, discussion oriented, or a combination of them all.

The changes that our world began to endure in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced businesses and educators alike to move their lives to a virtual platform. For schools this meant teaching and learning through zoom. Although zoom is one of the best virtual video conferencing platforms it does not compare to face to face learning. The affect on the cognitive health of a brain that online learning and living a confined life have could be detrimental to the future of our world due to the lack of stimulation that students experience. Considering that a classroom simply cannot be recreated virtually, it is most effective if educators invest time and energy into discovering and using alternative learning methods, instead of hastily dedicating their teaching solely to zoom.

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