

*Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds-  
and What We Can Do About It*

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Reaction Paper

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While preparing to write the book: *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds- and What We Can Do About It*, Dr. Healy asked hard questions and sought truthful answers. She asked questions that are important and relevant to the effects of computer use by children. Through her research she diligently searched for the truth in her hands-on method of research. Dr. Healy was not looking for answers that supported a particular position, rather she was looking for true and accurate answers.

Dr. Healy asked questions about the relevance of and the implementation of technology, more specifically, the use of computers in the education of children. She wanted to know if placing a child in front of a computer to play a game would be beneficial to the child or did the child need to have guidance and support while working. Her findings were interesting. She noted that students did in fact need guidance while using the computer. Dr. Healy discovered that far too often parents, as well as teachers, do not supervise, instruct or guide children while they are working

on the computer. These persons falsely assume that good learning is taking place.

Dr. Healy noted that children are being taught at younger and younger ages how to use computers. She wanted to know the implications that this phenomenon had on children. Dr. Healy noted that computers are used for a variety of reasons and in various ways by children. Computers are often used as babysitters. Parents sometimes have children "play" on the computer while they are completing other tasks such as cooking. Sometimes computers are used to reinforce skills. Parents as well as educators purchase and utilize software to reinforce skills that students are learning. An example of this is software that allows students to practice addition and subtraction skills. Another common use of computers with children is word processing applications. Teachers often encourage or require that students use some type of word processing to complete writing assignments. All of these approaches to technology implementation are valid and can be useful when used appropriately. Dr. Healy observed that children needed guidance and explicit instruction when using computers. She also noted that children should not be placed at a computer to play a game that is not well researched and has very little academic stimulus. Far too often children play games that are cute, but have very little academic value. The major theme that Healy

saw repeatedly was the miss use of this technology. Often parents and educators assume that technology utilizes good teaching practice because it engages the children and the children enjoy it. What they fail to realize is that not everything that engages children or that they enjoy is actually good or beneficial to them.

Dr. Healy was also concerned with the physical risks to children who use computers. She was concerned about short-term and long-term health implications. Dr. Healy actively searched for the answers to these issues. Dr. Healy believed that far too many people are using computers with out understanding the risks involved. She examined four potential risks to the developing child. The risks are: visual problems, postural and skeletal problems, dangers of radiation and the displacement of normal physical activities.

Dr. Healy posed the question as to whether or not computer usage affected students' vision. She asked several experts for their opinions. Dr. Healy discovered that indeed computer use is creating problems in children's developing eye sight. Dr. Healy noted that children are likely to stare at the computer screen for long periods of time without blinking. This causes visual strain. "Studies estimate that anywhere from half to 90 percent of regular computer users experience visual deterioration" (Healy, 1998).

In regard to postural and skeletal problems Dr. Healy noted that most computer stations were not designed for small children and that children are forced to sit on their legs or strain their necks to see the screen. These types of positions cause stress and strain on adult bodies. As of the printing of Dr. Healy's book there were no reports of such problems in children. The only well documented computer-related postural problem was "video wrist." This ailment resembles the adult carpal tunnel syndrome.

The examination of radiation hazards to children is a worthwhile cause, but is very unclear as to what is and what is not acceptable. Adult research shows that there are health risks such as immune system effects, cataracts and cancer. However, no studies are completely clear. Dr. Raymond Neutro suggests that children stay three feet away from computers and televisions. He maintains that at this distance student should be safe. It just makes sense to be precautions.

Dr. Healy asked the question, "Shouldn't they be playing?" She wanted to know what the consequences were for children who spent more time on the computer and less time playing outdoors. Health experts as well as psychologists believe that physical outdoor activity is vital for "health, good sleep patterns, dissipation of excess energy and socialization" (Healy, 1998). Also, children learn a tremendous amount through spontaneous play.

Teachers report that children today are stressed and anxious. One major reason for this is the lack of physical exercise. Another outcome of decreased physical exercise is hyperactivity among children. Research proves that regular exercise increases blood supply to the brain which gives it greater oxygen and energy supply which aids in mental abilities.

In conclusion, Dr. Healy suggests that one use careful monitoring when allowing children to use computers. She says that people should provide a safe learning environment and set guidelines when allowing computer usage.

Healy, J. (1998). *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds- and What We can Do About It*. New York: Simon & Schuster