Mr. Diesel had Vishal as a student in cinema class and describes him as a "breath of fresh air" with a gift for filmmaking. Mr. Diesel says he wonders if Vishal is a bit depressed, "Are we blowing his mind with the technology?"

Mr. Diesel, by contrast, does not think technology is behind the problems of Vishal and his schoolmates — in fact, he thinks it is the key to connecting with them, and the way to counteract their disaffection. "When I was teaching English, I never got a child to ask me if he could use a cell phone in class," he said. "Now they're always asking if they can use a cell phone in class."

Vishal remains a Latin student, one whom Mr. Eaton describes as particularly bright. But the teacher wonders if technology might be the reason Vishal seems to lose focus. "If a kid is used to seeing the world in 140 characters or less, it's going to be hard to get them to read," Mr. Eaton said. "It's a catastrophe." He says that technology has led to a "balkanization of their focus and duration of stamina," and that the students are "constantly jump-cutting." Many of them listen to music on iPods in class. "When you're learning, you need a longer attention span," he said. "I think it's harder for them to do that in the current environment."

"I am trying to take back their attention from their BlackBerrys and video games," he says. "To a degree, I'm using technology to do it." Mr. Reilly, the principal, favors the use of digital devices, he says, can create a culture in which students are addicted to the virtual world and lost in it.

Despite Woodside High's affluent setting, about 40 percent of its 1,800 students come from low-income families and receive a reduced-cost or free lunch. The school is sometimes called "Woodside Prep," and some students, especially those with more money, attend Woodside instead of their local high school. "This is the year," she says she told him. "This is your senior year and you can't afford not to focus." Vishal's parents do not have a computer at home, and the only way his father can afford a cell phone is to have it paid for by the school. Mr. Reilly, who says he sympathizes when young people feel disenfranchised, is determined to engage these 21st-century students. He typically favors iPads to teach Mandarin and obtained $3 million in grants for a multimedia center. The principal, David Reilly, 37, a former musician who says he sympathizes when young people feel disenfranchised, is determined to engage these 21st-century students. "This is the year," he says, "This is your senior year and you can't afford not to focus."

The same tension surfaces in Vishal, whose ability to be distracted by computers is rivaled by his proficiency with them. At the beginning of his junior year, he started using a computer to do his homework instead of his notebook. Vishal's mother says, "We were so happy. It made sense. But that was a year ago. It was a great idea." Vishal seems to have discovered the power of technology, and the power of distraction. "I am trying to take back their attention from their BlackBerrys and video games," he says. "To a degree, I'm using technology to do it."

Research also shows that students often juggle homework and entertainment. The Kaiser Family Foundation found earlier this year that half of students from 8 to 18 a day or spend hours playing video games, and virtually everyone is on Facebook. "The technology amplifies whoever you are," Mr. Reilly says. "It's powerful. It's powerful beyond our imagination."

For some, the amplification is intense. Allison Miller, 14, who always wanted to be a computer programmer, now finds it hard to focus on her schoolwork. "It's a catastrophe," said Alan Eaton, a charismatic Latin teacher. He says that technology has led to a "balkanization of their focus and duration of stamina," and that the students are "constantly jump-cutting." Many of them listen to music on iPods in class. "When you're learning, you need a longer attention span," he said. "I think it's harder for them to do that in the current environment."

"Video games don't make the hole; they fill it," says Sean, sitting at a picnic table in the quad, where he is surrounded by a multimillion-dollar view: on the nearby hills a distant view of the ocean. "I can text one person while talking on the phone to someone else." For some, the amplification is intense. Allison Miller, 14, who always wanted to be a computer programmer, now finds it hard to focus on her schoolwork. "It's a catastrophe," said Alan Eaton, a charismatic Latin teacher. He says that technology has led to a "balkanization of their focus and duration of stamina," and that the students are "constantly jump-cutting." Many of them listen to music on iPods in class. "When you're learning, you need a longer attention span," he said. "I think it's harder for them to do that in the current environment."

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By all rights, Vishal, a bright 17-year-old, should already have finished the book, "How to Read a Novel," which was assigned for summer reading. "I have most of it done," he says, "but we just keep getting new assignments." His shift to easier classes might not please college admissions officers, according to Woodside's college adviser, Zorina Matavulj. She says they want seniors to intensify their efforts. As it is, she says, even if Vishal improves his performance significantly, someone with his grades faces long odds in applying to the kinds of colleges he wants to attend.

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"Grown Up Digital paints a generally encouraging picture... an optimistic view of how humans are evolving to engage with technology. Literally evolving: Mr. Tapscott cites scientific research that people who use digital media from a young age have different brain development than those who don't... A must read." - Richard Florida, author, Who's Your City? and The Rise of the Creative Class.

"For anyone leading a talent-based organization, Grown Up Digital is an essential read." - William D. Green, Chairman & CEO, Accenture. "The first guide to the land of the Net Generation that should be read both by visitors and residents alike." - Nicholas Negroponte, Founder & Chairman, One Laptop Per Child. He typically favors Facebook, YouTube and making digital videos. That is the case this August afternoon. Bypassing Vonnegut, he clicks over to YouTube, meaning that tomorrow he will enter his senior year of high school hoping to see an improvement in his grades, but without having completed his only summer homework. And the effects could linger: The worry is we're raising a generation of kids in front of screens whose brains are going to be wired differently. But even as some parents and educators express unease about students' digital diets, they are intensifying efforts to use technology in the classroom, seeing it as a way to connect with students and give them essential skills. Growing Up With Gadgets. When he was 3, Vishal moved with his parents and older brother to their current home, a three-bedroom house in the working-class section of Redwood City, a suburb in Silicon Valley that is more diverse than some of its elite neighbors. Thin and quiet with a shy smile, Vishal passed the admissions test for a prestigious public elementary and middle school. Connect with Growing Up Digital. Don't miss out on updates and exclusives, coming in November 2018! I consent to my submitted data being collected via this form*. Talk to you soon! Something went wrong. we respect your privacy and take protecting it seriously. Growing Up Digital on Pinterest. © 2020 Growing Up Digital | Designed by: Theme Freesia | Powered by: WordPress.