Welcome to Episode 14 of the Nimble Youth Podcast, where we explore the evolving challenges and opportunities facing young people today. I'm your host, Matt Butterman. In this episode, we're delving into a topic that touches nearly every student's daily experience, technology in the classroom. From interactive whiteboards to AI powered tutoring tricks, digital devices have become central to how we teach and learn, but it isn't all progress. Consider this.

A recent study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that while moderate use of technology in school can support learning, excessive screen time is linked to lower student performance. At the same time, tools like adaptive learning software have been shown to significantly boost student outcomes in math and reading when boost student outcomes in math and reading when used appropriately. Here to help us unpack both the benefits and potential drawbacks of classroom tech, I'm joined today by Wyatt Hoyle, a math teacher at a high school in rural Colorado. Wyatt brings firsthand experience and insight into how digital tools are shaping the modern classroom and what that means for student success. So grab your headphones and let's jump into this timely and very important conversation.

So, Wyatt, you've just completed your first year, teaching math in rural Colorado. What's been the biggest surprise for you about how technology is being used in the classroom? Sure have. I would say my biggest surprise about technology being used in the classroom is just how much it has evolved since I was in high school, which was coming up on about ten years ago. So the technology is almost completely different from what I was accustomed to when I was in high school.

Yeah. It's changing constantly. So what's new this year is old next year. Right? Absolutely.

Yeah. So tell us a little bit about some of the learning platforms that you're using. Some of the names are PowerSchool, Infinite Campus, and, Canvas, Google Classroom. Tell us, tell our listeners what those are and how they both, they they really help, that your job as a teacher. Yeah.

So interestingly enough, there isn't really one universal software, throughout college and high school, as well as middle school, that does every type of tracking that high schools and, any schools really like to do. So PowerSchool is basically a way to manage attendance and grades and then you also have Infinite Campus that does the same thing. That varies by district so that's why it's sort of important to bring both of those up. Canvas and Google Classroom are the ones where assignments are stored. So the good news about technology in Classroom today is that if you're missing something, then you're most likely able to find it online.

Administration and a lot of school districts like to keep an electronic record on file. Getting back to the question at hand is that attendance is usually tracked by Infinite Campus and PowerSchool and they also track quarterly grades and then what Canvas and Google Classroom does is that they attract assignments and they also attract grades. So what I would suggest for every parent is that if you want a more updated record on your students' grades, I

would be sure to check Canvas or Google Classroom first. And then if you were to track your kids' attendance, I would suggest using Infinite Campus or PowerSchool. Yeah.

It is difficult because there's not one platform that covers everything. Right? Absolutely. Do you think that's gonna happen, down the road sometime? Yeah.

That's a good question. I know that in the medical field for EHRs, there's only really one universal platform that a lot of hospitals use. So I'm sure that as technology evolves, then education will catch right up to that standard. Yep. Yeah.

So, one issue that you and other teachers have seen is, parents don't understand what when they're looking at assignments that are missing, on some of these platforms, they don't really understand what that means and what how it affects the grades necessarily. And then the students using their sort of natural ability to understand new tech a little better than their parents or caregivers, some of whom, you know, maybe grandparents, they sometimes can gain the system, right, by by, marking things being done without submitting the work. So talk a little bit about how that plays out in the classroom. Absolutely. I would say that even for me as a teacher that my students probably know a little bit more about technology and gaming the system than I could then I would typically.

So as a teacher, it's always really important for me to stay on top of what students are sort of using to get away with. I say that as, sort of a marker for our parents that this is sort of an ongoing struggle that even teachers that see your child on a regular basis deal with. But I'll also say that it's really important as a parent to understand things like these, to understand what these grading softwares and school softwares do. So there's a lot of ways that you can get involved and be able to find the proper information for what you need, as far as students go. Yeah.

Yeah. So one of the goals of these educational platforms is to facilitate communication amongst all the people in the game. Right? So the students, their parents or caregivers, the teachers, and the administration. So let's talk a little bit about the administration.

How closely do you see school administrators, you know, tracking your grade book entries, and and there's your student outcomes? Is that a way for them to kind of evaluate your performance? Is it, does that sometimes, you know, make you nervous or stressful as well? Yeah. So from the administrator side of things, what their main job is to do is to present a front where they can be able to track teacher, teacher outcome as well as student outcome as well.

Right. So that's why I really stress that it's really important to understand what these academic softwares are doing, especially in terms of keeping all of your students' work on file. It's a way for, administration to see how well your child's doing. In their perspective, do these platforms help or do they sort of hinder your ability to actually focus on education, on teaching? Yeah. I would absolutely say they help.

It's a great way for everything to be filed and put away . It definitely helps that students can kind of be other students and have a universal way of keeping up with assignments. Right. So do you think in general accountable or just more anxious or some I guess, suppose some of both. Right? There's definitely a mixture between the two.

I would say that if a teacher is if a teacher and admin are on the same page, then it should be definitely used as a force for good and be less stressful. Yeah. Yeah. So, let's move on to a topic that we've already discussed multiple times on this podcast, and that's, cell phone use and sometimes, you know, addiction by young people, but cell phone use specifically in the classroom. And in Colorado, the state in which you teach, recently, there's been a a state law that allows schools to, limit, or or ban, I suppose, the use of cell phones in the classroom.

So what is the challenge of cell phone use in the classroom for you? Yeah. The challenge of cell phone use is definitely an ongoing struggle for me, as a teacher. I would say that it's definitely gotten worse over the few years, but I will also say that it would be interesting to see how Colorado is able to attack this problem because I could see that legislation through other states may make this a common, a common scenario. Yeah.

Yeah. So tell us a little bit about some of the techniques that you've used, with curtailing the use of cell phones in your classroom and maybe some of the pushback that you've gotten from students? Yeah. So I've used cell phone lockers. Basically, I give students the option of either keeping them in their backpack or giving them to me and I put them in a cell phone locker to provide continuity.

That's where my cell phone also stands or also stays as well. Yeah. So you're modeling good behavior. Absolutely. That's great.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And that sort of varies with levels of success. But, as I've noticed as kids sort of get off their cell phones, they're able to start paying attention a little bit easier, and they're sort of less stressed and are more in present or in tune with what's going on with daily instruction.

Right. Yeah. And I guess some of the pushback that you've gotten, actually comes from parents. Right? Absolutely.

Yeah. Parents wanna be able to be in touch with their kid and I totally understand that. And I think that sort of moving forward, it's gonna be interesting to see what school districts do to address the needs of parents, but also be able to provide a learning or a less distracted learning environment Right. For their students. Right.

So it's a balance that the school has to, has to weigh. So let's talk about what we sometimes call the elephant in the room, and that's AI, and how it, in the classroom, is both a boon and, occasionally, sometimes a burden as well. So what's your take on AI tools, I suppose something like ChatGPT, but other ones that may be more applicable to your role as a math teacher. Are they friends or foes in the classroom? For right now, I say that AI is definitely a foe.

I definitely understand that AI is definitely the way of the future. However, the cheating involved or the level of being able to cheat has gone a little bit lower, nor the standard has. And that's just sort of something that I think if anybody's aspiring to teach to be aware of. Yeah. It's definitely helped the it's definitely hindered the classroom in a way where they can, make it really hard to understand what they learn.

Likewise, as far as standardized testing goes, I think that AI can be the way of the future. I think that AI based on sort of customizing questions on what students miss in real time on a standardized test, can be able to give you proper data on where exactly a student's performance is. So it's definitely just a mixed bag just like any other industry, and it'll be interesting to see where AI is taken throughout, throughout the years. Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about MAP testing.

What is that, and what role does it play in sort of tracking student progress? Yeah. So MAPS testing is one of the new ways that tracks student performance. It's becoming a very universal test because the administration really likes it because of how easy it is to track student performance. But just sort of what I was saying with AI, they are able to cater questions based on what a student has missed and what a a student has gone correctly and can adjust the following on whether or not a student is gonna get a harder question or an easier question moving forward.

So Yeah. So it's helpful to, do you think it's helpful to, kind of, address those gaps in learning, because it can be easily customized? Is that true? Absolutely. It's amazing to see how standardized testing has evolved and how you can track student performance.

I guess moving on to the big picture, do you ever think we'll be in a situation where AI replaces people in the classroom entirely? I mean, my own suspicion is no. That is that for healthy learning, it always requires, you know, a human in the room. But, what's your take on that? Absolutely.

I'll say that AI will definitely change the way that classrooms are structured in the future. I don't think that they'll be able to fully get rid of the human element. And, it will just be interesting to see what ways that AI is able to sort of tackle the shortcomings we have in teaching Yeah. And in education in general. Right.

So it's a tool that just needs to be properly used. Right? Absolutely. Yeah. So let's delve into a stickier topic, and that's the use of AI to cheat on exams.

How do students do this? And are there any ways you can think of to help prevent this? Yeah. So, students cheating on exams, that's sort of where the phone element is sort of involved. Basically, now there are apps on the App Store or wherever where students can take a picture of a problem and then it solves the problem for you.

Yeah. I think a big one, the big name that's going on right now is QuestionAI. And that's sort of been a major component to how students were able to cheat in my classroom, in a way that I think is seen throughout the country, across the country. Yeah. No.

It's been so many years since I've taken a math test, we'll say decades, which is true. And, so do these AI programs actually, kind of show the work? I mean, that, one way that, when I was in school, you know, you could prove that, you know, you weren't cheating on exams is the teacher would sometimes give you credit even if the answer was wrong. If you showed your process, you know, you got partial credit for that. Right?

So these AI programs actually allow students to show their, quote, unquote, work. How's that? Yeah. Interestingly enough, the AI can show the work as well. Yeah. Luckily, you know, we're kind of in this window of teaching where if you are taught in a different way, those are gonna be some good indicators of whether or not a student has cheated or not.

So it's really just kind of a mixed bag on how that sort of plays out. Yeah. Yep. So moving on to, just kind of wrap up things. If if you could wave a magic wand and help improve one piece of classroom technology, and how it's used, what what would that be?

Like, what's your best piece of classroom tech that you're using these days? Yeah. And I would just say, I mean, I would probably wave a magic wand and make sure that all of my parents sort of are able to understand the different types of softwares that schools use. It's definitely a challenging, and daunting task to understand how that is used. But at the end of the day, I think it'll continue to get better throughout the years.

And I would just say to parents in general, just try to go to your parent teacher conferences even if it's for fifteen minutes. You'll probably get a lot of knowledge needed to, better manage your students' education at home. Right. So that that embodied experience meeting with the teacher in person one on one is still very important. Right?

Absolutely. And that seems to be the winning formula throughout time. Yeah. And, for them to learn these platforms, are there any sort of tutorials or do schools, help parents learn these platforms or is that something that needs to be done in your estimation? Yeah.

And I think that, depending on what school district you live in and everything, I think there probably could be some different forms that can be achieved and done. I would just say that there are definitely a lot of tools that a school admin can do if you ask. And, there's definitely a lot of tutorials that can be found online. I think kind of the good news is that school districts across the country use some form of platform that we've talked about today. Right.

So there is some universality. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Well, that's good. So we've spoken about how these learning platforms, ideally, facilitate communication amongst parents, students, the teachers, and the administration. But sometimes

there are issues with the parents either or the caregivers who, as we mentioned before, can sometimes be older people, grandparents, and so they may not be very tech savvy. And so there can be a lot of consternation when they finally figure out how to look up their kids' grades and they have a low grade or failing or something. What are some ways that you can, as a teacher, sort of hedge against that and and, facilitate communication in, you know, in in older ways, right, without the tech?

Yeah. So I'll say the main beauty about all of this tech is that it's definitely very proactive and sort of handling a situation before it gets to a point where it's too late. Meaning that if there is a student missing a bunch of grades or missing a bunch of class, attendance and everything, you can be able to see that in real time and be able to correct that. All that to say is that I think there's a stigma between the school and the parents about what the school wants to do and what the parent wants to do. And what the school wants to do is they wanna be able to provide your child or student or carry or Caregiver.

Caregiver. Yeah. The best chance to succeed because that's what the state and the school district wants to see overall is to be able to produce successful kids. So, just to kinda get rid of that stigma, between what the school wants and what the parent wants, everybody wants the same thing. And, to sort of bridge that communication gap, I think that's where a big aspect of parent teacher conferences come in or open house comes in.

Even if you can just attend one of them and it's towards the end of the school year, it still would give the teacher enough time to be able to correct any sort of shortfall or downcoming that could happen at the end of the year where we can't really correct. And yeah. Yeah. As they say, your phone lines are always open and Absolutely. In many cases, your door is always open.

Yep. So yeah. Well, thanks, Wyatt, for sharing your experiences and your insights as an educator. And to our listeners, if you've got a team navigating school tech or you're just curious yourself about what education looks like today, please share this episode and join the conversation. Please visit our website at www.nimbleyouthpodcast.com for recordings of past episodes.

And, for this episode, our show notes will include guides to the platforms that we've discussed today. And, if you're having trouble, yourself, learning some of the new tech, we hope that this will be helpful for you as well. Until next time, please take care of yourselves and each other.