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Portugal's Laptop Reinvention of School and the Economy

Writing as a Huffington Post contributor and digital learning proponent Don Tapscott makes the case for laptop programs after visiting Portugal.

A recent article by writer Dan Tapscott describes the important role technology has played in Portugal's economy and education system. In 2005, according to Tapscott, Jose Socrates, Portugal's prime minister, began pushing his nation to invest heavily in a "technological shock." The economy was sagging, and the schools had received some of the lowest educational achievement scores in Western Europe.

Under Socrates' leadership, Portugal launched the biggest program in the world to equip every child in the country with a laptop and web access. In an effort to make sure that everyone in the workforce could handle a computer and the Internet effectively, broadband access was expanded and computers were distributed to students starting in grade one. Portugal also invested 400 million Euros to make sure each classroom has access to the Internet. In addition, most classrooms in the public system have been equipped with interactive white boards.

Government funds and the fees for 3G licenses to mobile operators subsidized the sale of one million laptops to teachers, school children and adult learners—bringing the price per computer down to approximately \$200. Educators and students also got discounted broadband access. Low-income students get deeper discounts, with access virtually free for the poorest kids.

The nation also invested heavily in teacher training. Now, they are considering creating a new online platform to allow teachers to work together to create new technology-based lessons and course materials. Tapscott, who visited Portugal recently, says that, "There are 50 different educational programs and games inside the laptops the youngest children use. The laptops are even equipped with a control to encourage kids to finish their homework and score high marks. If they do, they get more time to play."

Summarizing what's good about the laptop classrooms he visited in Portugal, Tapscott explains:

First, it allows teachers to step off the stage and start listening and conversing instead of just lecturing. Second, the teacher can encourage students to discover for themselves, and learn a process of discovery and critical thinking instead of just memorizing the teacher's information. Third, the teacher can encourage students to collaborate among themselves and with others outside the school. Finally, the teacher can tailor the style of education to their students' individual learning styles.

He adds, "The impact on the classroom is tremendous, as I saw this spring when I toured a classroom of seven-year-olds in a public school in Lisbon. It was the most exciting, noisy, collaborative classroom I have seen in the world."

Tapscott estimates a similar U.S. effort would cost about \$1,000 per student, and he advises the nation to make the investment.

For more of Tapscott's thoughts, see [The Huffington Post](#), [Note to President Obama: Want to Fix the Schools? Look to Portugal!](#)

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