



Pokemon Phenomenon vs the Classroom: First Do No Harm

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Abstract

The 'Pokemon Phenomenon' occurred in 1997 when over 600 children were hospitalized after watching Pokemon Episode 38 (now banned). Medical research has since identified and measured a specific neurological response to particular visual light stimuli in between 3 and 10% of the population aged 5 – 15 years old. This type of response is known as photosensitivity and may have a negative effect on a student's cognition and behaviour. Symptoms can range from nausea to headache to seizure activity. These symptoms are not restricted to students diagnosed with epilepsy.

International television restrictions have been implemented to reduce stimulus material being broadcast, although incidents still happen. The colour, pattern and frequency restrictions do not currently apply to video games, the Internet or movies shown at cinemas, even though health warnings have been included in some manuals, opening credits or box office windows. However, in recent years certain large screen televisions and smartboards have included warnings regarding the risk of stroke or seizures during use.

How can teachers protect their students and safely use the technology that has become central to so many learning experiences? Part of the difficulty for teachers is that the students most at risk are those who don't yet know they are photosensitive, so classroom practices need to include everyone. As photosensitive responses may be stimulated by environmental factors such as computers and other digital media, it would be advantageous if teachers were aware of this trait and the ways in which its effects can be minimised.

Use of digital media in the classroom has extended so many learning experiences, this paper discusses how to continue the access, but decrease the stimulus for students at risk due to photosensitivity. Some suggestions are simple, practicable adjustments assembled from medical literature, suitable for all general classrooms, whilst additional adjustments are specifically tailored to support students who have been diagnosed with photosensitivity.