Response Essay: Final Draft

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Analyzing Chapter 3 from *Some New Gods That Fail* by Neil Postman

The apprehension regarding computers in education is a topic that many parents, teachers and scholars want to address. It is understandable that new techniques can bring on new worries, and incorporating new technology into the educational system is definitely unfamiliar. Experts on the topic refer to computers, tablets and online learning as technology. Critics disagree on the benefits of computers as learning devices, and many argue that they even cause damage. Although to some authorities the idea of children spending more time in front of a screen is not appealing, it is advantageous to use technology in combination with traditional learning. This type of instruction is known as blended learning. A blended learning environment is the most beneficial academic environment for students.

In chapter 3 of his book, *Some New Gods That Fail*, Neil Postman an American author, theorist and critic writes that technology challenges the traditional learning environment of traditional schools. If information can be accessed at any time, from home, then why should a child bother going to school? Computers are connected to databases all over the world, providing a massive network of information. According to Postman (1995) in a culture filled with thousands of newspapers and periodicals it is easy to become overwhelmed by information. However, access to all of this knowledge has no better place than in and institutional learning environment. By providing carefully guided lesson plans, this information can be introduced to students in small doses. The quick access to information can also save time in schools, making room for more learning and interaction. In *Blended Learning for Early Learners*, Evans, Hawkins and McCrary (experts in primary education) write that student assessments with technological devices can be less laborious than using paper and pencil exams, and can quickly determine a child’s learning level. This process can take as little as 20 minutes (Evans et al., 2014, p. 28).

Another concern that Postman explores is that technology is becoming a replacement for human interaction between children and authority figures. Dr. Diane Ravitch, a former Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education, gives an example of little Eva, who cannot sleep and spends her night learning algebra at her home-learning station. Postman points out the lack of human contact in Ravitch’s example. Why is little Eva awake and alone? He states that most children do not wake up in the middle of the night with the desire to learn algebra. To address overexposure to computers (and possible isolation), schools that use computers in the daily routine, have implemented a rotation system to control the amount of time spent in front of the screen (Evans et al., 2014). At Joan K. Mendel Elementary School, this rotation system is called “centers”, and it is less than one fourth of the pupil’s school day. Scherer, *TIME* magazine’s Washington Bureau Chief, points out that the best teachers are able to integrate computers into an active lesson, instead of simply allowing the computer to do all of the teaching (Scherer, 2014, p.38). Additionally, in the article *iPad Use and Student Engagement in the Classroom*, Oraib Mango, assistant professor of world languages and literature at California State University, observes that student participation and their interaction with each other was remarkably better when using iPads (Oraib, 2015, p.56).

Postman’s final major argument was that unlike computers, schools teach more than just information. In the early grades, children learn crucial lessons such as sharing, teamwork, and responsibility. Postman states that these lessons cannot be learned through the use of technology. However, during “centers” students (with assistance from their teacher) must come to an agreement as to who will get to use the computer lab, and who will do one of the other activities in the rotation. This not only teaches sharing, but also teamwork and responsibility. Evans, Hawkins and McCrary remind us that childhood education programs such as *Sesame Street* and *Dora the Explorer* have been successfully teaching children these lessons for years, and so can online learning modules (Evans et al., 2014, p.28).

Although Postman’s essay makes valid points, he does not provide enough facts to sustain his strong anti-computer stance. Research shows that when implemented in a careful, controlled environment, computers can enhance learning. In his article Scherer writes that programs such as word processing have been shown to improve the student quality of writing even in primary schools. Scherer adds that computer programs are responsible for a significant increase in the students’ average scores (Scherer, 2014, p.38). I agree with Scherer as well as the other opposing experts (Evans, Hawkins and McCrary) in their theory of an integrated classroom. In most cases, computers are not intended to replace schools for K-12 students. They are to be incorporated into the learning environment in order to improve instruction and foster a life-long love of education. A blended learning environment is the most beneficial academic environment for students.

References

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