Technology or Teachers?

Could technology replace classroom teachers in high-level education? Many experts would agree that technology does make students’ learning more process convenient because of efficient searching engines and databases and help students will illness, pregnancy, bullying or some issue. Others might argue that it would make students forget how to think critically and abandon their capacity of thinking deeply about words and images flitting across their screens because of information overload. In this debate, the role of teachers to help students’ learning problems in person is more important than the role of technology. Therefore, classroom teaching is irreplaceable: although they can get information through technology, it is through classroom instructions that students learn how to distinguish useful information and critical information and how to improve study efficiency when they multitask and how to understand subjects like humanity and civic education by themselves, especially since doing so makes students’ scores not being stagnant.

Debates surrounding the technology and classroom-teaching have started since 2010 in the United State. Rich Motoko, a Tokyo bureau chief for New York Times, emphasizes in the article, *Online School Enriches Affiliated Companies If Not Its Students*, “if the national movement to reform public education through vouchers, charters and privatization has a laboratory, it is Florida. It was one of the first states to undertake a program of virtual schools—charters operated online, with teachers instructing students over the Internet” (Motoko, par.1). Motoko here basically shows a picture about early vision of charter schools in Florida and its contribution. More and more businessmen and politicians try to invest in online schools. And
charter schools have free tuition, supported taxpayer and run public school independently. Even secretory of education nominee Betsy Devos supports online schools as an investor. With the help of high technology, online schools gradually come to people’s life. However, some people would question: are online schools good for students? In fact, the grades of students who study in an online charter school in Ohio State has decreased in recent two years. The school cannot provide support in person because of online tools. What’s more, more and more online learning companies buy and build for-profit online schools, but scores of students in online schools are even lower than traditional schools. Businessmen and politicians try to make money base on the online schools, but they lose the support of teachers’ unions and forget the purpose of online schools is to help students. There are many reasons that technology cannot replace classroom-teaching, but the following paragraphs would show the most important key points.

Only classroom instructions can help students of distinguishing useful information and critical information on the Internet. It’s easy for students to be distracted by advertisements when they do their researches on the Internet. And not all the information from the Internet can be directly used until it is processed by teachers. As Marcia Clemmitt, a freelance journalist, notes in her article, Digital Education, “The teacher of the future helps you navigate the ocean of information. I can go to Wikipedia to memorize historical figures’ names, but I need somebody to talk with me about power relations” (Clemmitt, par. 13). From her words, it’s obvious that Marcia looks information as sea because in the information sea, people can find all kinds of information, but teachers, not technology, can help students distinguish useless information and useful information. But, thinking it more. If students just jump into the information sea and don’t even have a direction to swim, it’s impossible to learn knowledge well. What’s more, even students could the information they need to use, sometimes it’s hard to make the good
connection between useful information and students’ arguments. At this moment, teachers could process the implicit information to their own words and make students understand better. Searching information is just the first step of doing research or learning. And with the help of technology, students can quickly find what they need when they study; however, in order to avoid improper citation and plagiarism, it’s necessary to let teachers give lessons of distinguishing information and make sources comprehensible. In a word, technology can’t replace teachers because teachers can use their own experiences to make students understand knowledge easily and help students separate distracted information from valuable information.

However, critics often take an opposing view, holding that students can learn how to distinguish information by themselves. Even students don’t distinguish information very well at the beginning, they can help each other after class and keep practicing on distinguishing skill. But this would waste students much time on studying. Matt Richtel, the noted journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner draws attention to what scientists point out “an unanticipated side effect: when people keep their brains busy with digital input, they are forfeiting downtime that could allow them to better learn and remember information, or come up with new ideas” (Richtel, par.5). Scientists basically explain that using digital devices would make students unconsciously give up their downtime and study inefficiently because it’s relaxed and comfortable for students to lie in the bed and just check their messages. Therefore, in-class teaching environment is very important because they are still supporter of those students who cannot decide whether some websites or sources are available or not. After learning, students can share their experiences with others. As a result, students could both practice by themselves and learn the right ways.

Teachers can use their own experiences to make students study much better when the subjects involve humanity and civic education, although some people may think that high
technology makes calculation fast and easier and has much more knowledge than teachers. The subjects like humanity and civic education have many solutions and results for each question.

Real-world learning like classroom teaching can make students feel how humanity and civic are in the real situations. Fang Lee, an investigative reporter, believes in his article, *How Online Learning Companies Bought America's Schools*, “such real-world learning about duties and rights helps build the knowledge, skills and attitudes students need to become active and informed citizens” (Lee, par.21). Which also means that things like duties and rights cannot easily be understood by searching relative information on the Internet. Usually, when students go and listen to a lecture about humanity and civic education, it is given by real people, like professors or experts. Feelings and experiences could be understood when students come into classroom and talk with professors. Students may misunderstand about their duties and rights because of massive information on the Internet, but teachers can guide them with their own experiences from the past. What’s more, learning subjects like humanity and civic education usually is not like one question to one answer, different people would have several ideas of one humanity question. So, the teachers would teach students ways of critical thinking and make sure they can process information to their own voice and after that students can eventually study well. Therefore, the best way of teaching subjects like humanity and civic education is teachers use their own experiences to teach students not just searching information on the Internet without processing.

On the other hand, some researchers have found that civic and humanity education can also be taught through the Internet. There are lots of people would post their experiences on every websites and student can learn from those comments. But Greenblatt Alan observes in his article, *Impact of the Internet on Thinking*, “teachers do what technology can’t, such as being a
live person who cares about you.” When students get upset about grades or friendship problem, they can totally talk to teachers and share feelings and get feedback from these elder mentors, according to Grover J. Whitehurst, director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, a centrist think tank in Washington (Alan, par.11). On the Internet, there will have so many positive and negative comments toward every civic and humanity question. When teachers help students face to face, they would quickly understand the purpose of civic and humanity education because teachers always want to spread positive and good feelings to students.

The rapid expansion of technology has failed to make a positive impact on student grades, the most important indicator of their academic performance. Technology like calculator or internet does give students very quick solutions when they can’t figure out how to do the questions at home. However, presenting the solutions without specific explanation only makes students learn nothing about questions but answers. As Shannon Doyne and Holly Epstein Ojalvo insist in their article: Are Your Tech Habits Hurting Your Grades, “the risk, they say, is that developing brains can become more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks — and less able to sustain attention” (Doyne and Ojalvo par.4). Students don’t have strong self-control as an adult has. When they are dealing with several tasks, it’s necessary for them to be focus. Young people are easier to distract and have a lot more time to text and surf the web. Students’ brains would not stay on tasks but jump to the next thing. It’s hard for students not to think about how many people would comment on their last activities even if they are on the exam. Students’ ability on focus would decrease if they get distracted by high technology; however, teachers could help students increase their focus because students think
other things, teachers would make questions to students and make sure students keep thinking. Therefore, students’ scores wouldn’t stay stagnant but improved.

High technology appears frequently in recent years. And the effect, brought by technology, seems to look great. According to Steve Lohr’s report, *Study Finds That Online Education Beats the Classroom*, “the report examined the comparative research on online versus traditional classroom teaching from 1996 to 2008. Some of it was in K-12 settings, but most of the comparative studies were done in colleges and adult continuing-education programs of various kinds, from medical training to the military” (Lohr par. 2) The study basically presents that with the help of technology, students’ scores are improved. They can figure out the solution when they do homework by searching answers on the Internet individually. However, scores are important for the study period, not for whole life. Classroom teaching makes students learn how to do teamwork, how to share with others. After students graduate from the colleges and start to work, those who only finish all the works by themselves would feel unable to integrate into the collective; instead, students who learn how to share experiences and build the teamwork would feel comfortable when they enter to the new environment. In a word, score is not all because life skills are also indispensable in the future life. And there are many things students can learn from classroom teaching.

No matter how convenient high technology is, it cannot improve students’ efficiency of studying when they have tasks to finish. It’s not a bad thing for college students to use social media. They can obtain the latest news and interesting comments on tools like Facebook or Twitter. However, Richtel claims in his article “only when the rats take a break from their exploration do they process those patterns in a way that seems to create a persistent memory of
the experience.” (Richtel, par.4). When students use computer or mobile devices to study, it’s hard for them to remember the knowledge. They would be distracted by advertisement or the latest news of fashion clothes when they want to do some research on the Internet. And after students focus too much on the digital devices, their efficiency would decrease because changing their attention frequently makes students can’t think research sources but comments on the online tools. Instead, teachers would not make this situation happen because they would make sure all the students follow the classes and most of teachers don’t allow digital devices to appear in the classes. Then students would focus only on the class learning and their study time would become much more efficiency. In a word, high technology is not good for students when they need to focus on their researches.

Recent research presents new evidence to consider. When students pay their all attention to the digital devices, focus level of students increases rapidly. They can spend whole afternoon in front of the computer and no one could disturb them. In fact, Clemmitt illustrates in the article, Digital Education “decades of research have shown that students taught under such a regime … cannot actually apply their knowledge to … understand the conceptual lay of the land in the area they are learning” (Clemmitt, par. 18). Which means, even if digital devices can make student focus for moment, it will not help students to remember and process and understand the knowledge. For instance, one student could focus on his task on the entire afternoon, but when he comes off the computer, he could only remember how amazing devices are. In a word, technology like computers may get students engaged, but it doesn’t get them engaged in an actual learning task.

Despite technology make people’s life more convenient, it still could not replace teachers. Due to the massive information on the Internet, students need the help of teachers to
learn how to distinguish useful and critical information; Owing to the subjects like humanity and civic education, teachers’ own experiences make students easily understand and process the information they received into their own voices; As a result of individual study made by technology, students need to learn how to corporate and share with others with the help of teachers for the future works; and because of convenient technology, students need to learn how to be more efficiency when they have to deal with several tasks from teachers. Perhaps, scientists would invent intelligent robot to replace teachers and these robots will appear in every school one day. But, before that, teachers and in-classroom teaching are the best ways for students to gain knowledge.

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