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The Postman Always Rings Twice: Neil Postman's Views on Education are Relevant Again in the 21st Century Classroom

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THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE: NEIL POSTMAN'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION ARE RELEVANT AGAIN IN THE 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE: NEIL POSTMAN'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION ARE RELEVANT AGAIN IN THE 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Richard Thames

The public education system in America has long been criticized for its inability to prepare students for success as adults. While some engage in a narrative of blame, others ask what can be done to solve this problem. This dissertation examines a narrative crisis in the 21st century classroom through the lens of Neil Postman, a 20th century media ecologist whose fears about television may finally be realized with the advent of the personal digital device and its impact on the educational sphere. First the past narratives that guided the American school system will be traced from colonial America through present day. Then Postman's work will be examined in its historical moment to provide context from which current educational narratives and initiatives will then be examined. Current educational trends, including technology and STEM based learning, career-focused learning, personalized learning, and using schools as public service facilities will

be examined through his lens. Finally, using Postman's philosophies as a guide, service learning, the Waldorf School model, and reconnection to a humanities narrative that includes the media ecology studies Postman called for in the 1980s will be examined as a way to balance the existing narratives guiding learning in American public schools.

DEDICATION

To Dad: You told me to go for it and I did. Wish you were here to see it.

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The Problem: A Loss of Narrative?

Criticism of the American public school system has long pervaded social, political, and educational circles. Why are our children not learning the skills they need for the jobs of this century? Why can they not keep up with their counterparts in other nations? What, if anything, can we do about it?

Social and political critics of education believe that the problem is unmotivated, unqualified, and over compensated teachers who are protected in their incompetence by powerful, evil teachers' unions. They engage in scathing rhetoric where the "consistent message is that teachers' unions are the central impediment of educational progress in the United States" (Kahlenberg, 2011-12, p.12). These professionals are viewed as over-paid babysitters who take children while their parents work and then return them for the evening with hours of homework and reading that detract from "family time." After all, how does this help them get a job, make money, become consumers, and move out of their parents' homes? How could reading books possibly prepare them for jobs as baristas, actuaries, doctors, or engineers? Parents and other social stakeholders believe schools should engage in a career and consumer based narrative here where students are cogs in a machine that produces workers to make things and consumers to buy them.

Politicians and bureaucrats also consistently seek to reform public education through legislation. They engage in a narrative of accusation and accountability where standardized tests are the answer to the question "How can we make schools (and thus teachers) accountable for student learning?" Legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) claimed to make schools and teachers more accountable for learning by "making standardized test scores the

primary measure of school quality" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 4). In fact, the now defunct NCLB has been described as "technocratic" in its approach to merely teaching techniques to pass exams and increase test scores (Ravitch, 2010, p. 5). Schools, at the encouragement and sometimes requirement of government legislators, continue to try to apply business and scientific models to teaching in an attempt to make it "better" and make its outcomes more "measureable." The reality is that, by proving teacher incompetence, they can deny funds to public schools and shift public money to private, for profit organizations owned by politically connected corporate entities who care about tapping into the vast wealth that is spent by our government to educate the next generation of Americans.

In response, school administrators demand that teachers use test scores to drive instruction. Teachers are told to teach lessons designed to address specific standards and deficiencies in student skills as identified by test scores. Administrators then require teachers to follow a model of "good teaching" by implementing standardized lesson plans where all lessons are taught in the same fashion in a formulaic methodology. Clearly this will level the playing field for students, give them the skills they need, and fix the instructional problems that are caused by these less-than-competent teachers. "Reformists insist that some new teaching methodology or organizational arrangement will transform the educational system dramatically for the better" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 3), so they tell teachers they should all teach their classes the same way despite the different learning styles in the classroom. These reformers attempt to apply a scientific model to the human art of leading others to the inquiry and discovery of the world around them and, in the process, they eliminate the narrative of why the learning is necessary in the first place.

To those outside of the classroom, this seems, on the surface, to be a good idea. Why should education not focus on the skills kids need to improve? The problem is that this pigeonholes educators into teaching only what will be addressed on the test and by the given published standards at that moment. It does not address the long-term needs of students, their communities, and ultimately society as a whole. The narrative behind this method is simply improving test scores, not helping students to develop a love of learning that lasts in the long term and providing them with the ethical base to evaluate the decisions they make and their ultimate impact on the Other.

Educational professionals believe that a systemic solution is needed. With too many students in a classroom, not enough teachers and materials, and not enough financial resources, those in the trenches of education believe that more money would be a stimulus to great reform. Representatives from teachers' unions try to collectively bargain for some of these things in their contracts, but often end up unsuccessful (Kahlenberg, 2011-12) because local schools are unable to raise the capital through local taxes and state and federal funds are spread too thinly. Teachers blame each other as well when they try to teach skills at higher grades to students who are unprepared to learn them. The high school blames the middle school teachers for not providing the skills necessary for them to teach what is required, while the middle school teachers blame the elementary schools. Elementary schools blame parents. They engage in a narrative of blame that also has not solved the problem.

For over 20 years, I have been in those trenches and have been torn as to how real reform could be possible or what it would look like if it were possible. I have spent the majority of my career believing that real reform would only come in the wake of some major sociological upheaval where parents would finally be held responsible for their children who refuse to attend

school, do homework, and engage in appropriate dialogue with both their peers and the adults in the school building. Like so many of my colleagues, I just did not get it. I saw the effects of the problem and not the problem itself.

Inspired by the ever-emerging threat of government and business who seek to eliminate public schools in favor of private schools run by businesses for profit, I decided to attend Duquesne University to earn a Ph.D. that would save all of the things for which I had worked: my house, car, and other worldly possessions. I made learning the means by which I protected my possessions and my career and not the Aristotelian end, as I should have. In the process, I realized what was wrong with my endeavors and ultimately what I was doing wrong in my classroom. I had engaged in learning for the same reason as my students and, until I embraced a new narrative of learning I was also not getting much from my educational pursuits.

For the better part of my career as an English teacher, if a student questioned why we read a certain text, my answer was a consistent, although sometimes differently worded, version of "because I said so." Whether I said it was "because it is in the curriculum" or "because it was part of a state standard" still ultimately I was telling students that it was a requirement of some bigger context than we understood or should understand. In retrospect, I was so wrong and did a terrible disservice to a generation of students who sat in my classroom because my answer was devoid of a connection to the narrative. How could they possibly be expected to engage in the material when I myself could not give them a reason to do it?

My answer now is much different. I answer with a quote and a question. I respond with the words of author Sue Monk Kidd whose character, August Boatwright, states in her novel *The Secret Life of Bees,* "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here" (Kidd, 2002, p. 107). Kidd impresses upon us here the

importance of having narrative ground and working from it. Only when we know where we come from can we realize our true potential. I then ask students what they derived from the narrative we just read so that the connection that they make is a personal one as well. The reason we read it is no longer an impersonal and irresponsible version of "because I said so" but is instead "what did you take from it and how can that lesson become a narrative from which you engage others in the world around you?" The narratives read in our classrooms show us who we were in the past, who we are now, and who we may become in the future both individually and as the human race as a whole. They require us to engage them from the perspective of the Other and to explore things outside of our own interests, beliefs, and comfort zones. Encouraging students to find a connection to the narrative ground that explains who we are, where we came from, and predict where we may go as a community has now become my educational mission in the classroom.

This was not a mission I arrived at through the adoption of technology in my classroom or from going to innumerable professional development opportunities that center on pedagogy, technology, and methodology. Obtaining this new answer did not take decades of teaching, but rather six years of learning. It was found in the work of Neil Postman. Postman believed that the real problem with American education was not its teachers. It was not the result of lazy students and apathetic parents and in no way would it be solved through increased funding or adding new digital technology, the latter of which Postman actually argues will impede positive change. Unfortunately, this answer at which I arrived and will elaborate on in this paper is not one that is shared among all educators, nor is it the one that currently drives the development of curriculum.

Postman was correct that we are in a crisis of communication. The shifted focus to the narrative of entertainment instead of education, STEM studies unbalanced by the humanities, and the use of digital technology that replaces teaching is creating a culture that is not helping us when considering how to solve these issues. Scholars maintain that, to a certain extent, it may be difficult to change the culture because people are unwilling to give up the conveniences of their phones and are afraid that their children will not know the skills to make them successful in the 21st century (Freeman, 1997). Adults have been led to believe that this digital technology is necessary to learn for their children to be successful in the 21st century. In order to make any change in the narrative, scholars suggest finding a balance (Postman, 1995 and Freeman, 1997) between what is taught in schools and the goods being promoted and protected by the community at large.

The problem here is that the wrong questions about learning are being asked, and thus, the wrong answers are being deduced leading us to the wrong foundational narrative. When considering the problems with education, it is automatically assumed that the problems are systemic. We ask questions like "How can we develop curriculum that prepares students for STEM careers?" and "How can we use data to drive instruction?" when the real questions should be "What rhetorical purpose does school serve in the 21st century?" and "How can we help students engage their world in ways that are productive, ethical, and grounded in narratives that explain purpose?" Handing students a device and providing teachers a standardized lesson will not provide the magical answer and the narrative of blame that has existed for the better part of the 20th century cannot carry us into the 21st. Only by asking these questions can we re-write the educational narratives that guide the public school system in 21st century America and effect true narrative change.

Entering the Conversation

While Postman is critical of digital technology and of the public school system, his work is more of a cautionary collection rather than a preaching of dos and don'ts. He knows that digital technology will not simply be eliminated from the curriculum of public schools. He acknowledges that "technology is here or will be; we must use it because it is there; we will become the kind of people the technology requires us to be; and whether we like it or not, we will remake our institutions to accommodate the technology" (Postman, 1995, p. 39). Pandora's box of digital technology has ben opened and all of its negative aspects have been unleashed on us, but perhaps there is a way that something good can come from this yet if we heed his warnings. Postman realizes that digital technology will not simply disappear, but he encourages educators to use it only when it is in their favor to do so, so that they are not "used by" it (1999, p. 55). Postman cautions us to be aware of the impact of the digital technology and to teach children to be aware of the ontological and epistemological impacts that digital technology has on us and the world in which we live.

The only way to reach this level of awareness is to balance multiple meta-narratives in a world where a post-modern society wants a focus on the petit narratives that are being encouraged by some of the present educational movements. Postman cautions that "we are bereft of a narrative that can provide courage and optimism; that we are facing what Vaclav Havel and others have called 'a crisis in narrative'" (Postman, 1999, p. 113). Postman defines narrative as a "moral context" that helps to identify purposefulness (Postman, 1999, p. 101). The narrative serves as a guide – not an absolute truth. To address this crisis, a balance between the traditional narratives that guided our institutions of learning and our popular social culture must be found.

Traditionally, Postman says, the public school system was used as a place to teach children how to become adults (Postman, 1982). It followed a systemic progression by which children were slowly given knowledge and skills at ages deemed appropriate for their mental capacity and maturity (Postman, 1982). While those narratives often included things that prepared students for careers or emerging technologies of the time, those were not the exclusive narratives that defined curriculum. Digital technology has, as I will examine later, begun to erode and will eventually erase the boundary between childhood and adulthood. As Postman warns us, an adult monopoly on information that is slowly released to children in the print-based world of the past does not exist in the digitally based world of the present and the future. Anyone can access information with the internet and, since much of this information exists in image form, the skill of reading and the age of the user do not prohibit access any longer.

While Postman says that the teaching of reading offered children an entrance into adulthood, that entrance was not immediate. The entrance occurred over the span of 12 years as students learned and developed through progressively more difficult curriculum (Postman, 1982). The current guiding narrative in public schools pushes children to make adult decisions before they have reached the appropriate level in the progression. They are asked what they want to be when they grow up before they have mastered the ability to read, and this question is not asked in an idealistic way that encourages children to dream. It is asked as a way to dictate what students will study in school, to put them in a track of coursework that will result in this career, and that will prohibit them from further experience with other subjects that may cause them to re-evaluate their earlier decisions. They are asked to write computer code before they can do basic math. Creativity, reverence, curiosity, and community, which are developed through the common experiences of students in public schools, are being exchanged for a

narrative that strangely combines their own petit narratives with the efficiency and progress of modernity. Computers, iPads, and other personal digital devices have enabled them to study only what they want and what they see as important, and to do so quickly, efficiently, and autonomously. Students are led to believe that they should only learn what is necessary for them to do the job they desire to do and they should not have to engage in experiences and rhetoric that ask them to go beyond their present interests. Of course, they also are pushed to decide those paths by middle school at the latest.

Any traditional narrative that used to guide our schools and that may have resulted in some of the greatest ideas in human history is being destroyed as we throw this proverbial narrative baby out with the bath water in an effort to force more efficient and faster progress, not on our machines, but on our children, as they pursue their own individual agendas. The career-focused, technologically guided, STEM curriculum that is currently being pushed in the public schools pushes students to make decisions about careers and use advanced digital technology in elementary and middle school before they can perform basic skills independently. Coupling that with a newer personalized learning initiative that provides for the fostering of each student's individual petit narrative further encourages a departure from ethics, community, and the humanities and favors a more consumer-based individual narrative.

In an effort to engage the ideas that resulted from Postman's work, this dissertation will work through the problems that Postman presented with public education in America that arose from the competition of these modern and post-modern narratives and culminate in an explication of how the curriculum of Waldorf Schools, service learning initiatives, and other lesser embraced ideas may offer solutions to some of the problems because they are more closely aligned with Postman's theories.

First, a brief history of the educational system in America, beginning with the colonial period will be examined, including the narratives that drove learning in those eras and some of the individuals and organizations that drove those narratives. Following this, Postman's work as a whole will be explored with specific attention paid to his views on education and digital technology to provide the narrative ground from which I will examine current educational initiatives. Next, I will take a look at the current initiatives in education, such as career-focused STEM education, personalized learning, and using schools as replacements for social service organizations, and evaluate them from Postman's perspective considering his scholarship in the area. The dissertation will culminate in an exploration of the possible solutions to the educational problems in America, including a look at the private Waldorf School model and service learning programs, common at the post-secondary level but virtually unused in the public school system. I will look at whether or not the philosophies that guide these methods reflect Postman's own views on education and what, if anything, from these programs could be adopted by the public school system to change the narrative. The Waldorf School model and service learning programs combined with a re-invigoration of the arts and humanities with a focus on ethical narratives may provide the educational balance that Postman believed was necessary for American students and may provide the entrance of a new trivium that enables students to engage multiple meta-narratives while still attending to the Other in a technological world. Instead of focusing strictly on a career and STEM agenda, our public schools may find greater success by adopting a new trivium that focuses on careers, but also on engagement with the community, and cultural ethics derived from a deeper humanities study in order to find the balance Postman suggests.

Chapter 2: Reviewing the American Educational Narrative

Ironically enough, Ancient Greeks looked at education as something that was engaged for entertainment, not for personal profit or gain. In fact, Postman is quick to acknowledge that the Greek word for school derives from the idea of leisure, "reflecting a characteristic Athenian belief that at leisure a civilized person would naturally spend his time thinking and learning" (1982, p. 7). The word school comes from the Latin word "scola" which is derived from the Greek word "skhole" which meant both "free time" and "discussion" at various points in Greek history (School, 2018). The Greeks designed a variety of different schools all aimed at learning, developing, and spreading aspects of Greek culture, including rhetoric, athletics, math, and reading. Plato's classical view that the trivium of rhetoric, logic, and grammar was a necessary groundwork for the study of all other subject areas was a prevailing concept. Somewhere between the ancient Greeks and 21st century America, we lost that philosophical basis that provided for dialogue, rhetoric, and concern for the Other and switched to the educational narratives that support our current public school agenda.

Before examining Postman's views on education, it is prudent to first look at the historical narrative that has guided education in America and to see where, when, and how this narrative shift occurred. This chapter will take us back to the beginnings of colonial America and trace the historical narrative that drove school organization and curriculum straight through the modern era.

Historically speaking, schools were often viewed by some as a method of managing the ideologies of the communities they served (Cremin, 1970). This concept seems to have remained constant throughout American history. While smaller individual narratives behind education have emerged and changed in response to the emerging environment in each historical

moment, the metanarrative does not seem to have changed. "Education served to unite the generations and to define one's place among 'the people'" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 10). The ultimate result of schooling in America has been and continues to be to find a place for each person, only now more so as a cog in the machine of society.

This metanarrative encourages the development of social strata based on wealth while also supporting an agenda of obedience to those in power through assimilation. Early American schools taught obedience to God and then, following the revolution, to country. Later, as industrialization and capitalism took hold, American schools taught obedience to businesses through the guise of providing skills for employment. Present day American schools teach obedience to possessions. None of these narratives promote a narrative of care for the Other or support cultural development or reflection. All of these narratives are consistent with the promoted and protected philosophical goods of each historical period. Where early American schools taught children to first protect the colonies, the church, and then the country, later schools taught students to be loyal to industry as laborers, and present day schools create consumer loyalty that drives corporate profits.

Colonial America: Building a New Polis Grounded in Faith

When the first settlers arrived in what was later termed the "New World," survival of the colony was the preeminent concern. The emerging nation entered into what we could term its phase of antiquity in America. Culture and political distinctions were developed in each developing colony and each colony had its own traditions and challenges (Rury, 2005). Since early Americans came to the New World for religious freedom, they found themselves simultaneously protecting both their church and their colonies, the colonial version of the polis.

Both were intertwined at this stage in American history and, in order for the colonies to survive and grow, faith was a guide for physical and emotional existence.

Because education was necessary for survival during this period, it was derived from individual families as parents, grandparents, and elders taught children basic skills and passed on religious and cultural narratives. It was informal, gender based, and taught from experience as the young men learned farming, hunting, and survival skills and the young women were taught sewing, housekeeping, and child rearing. These skills were necessary for the survival of each individual and also for the protection of the colony as a collective unit. Inter-colony relations had no impact on the teaching of cultural traditions at this point in history, but this would, as we will see, rapidly change as the teaching of religion was perceived as necessary for the survival of the new polis as well. Religion was the narrative that guided the teaching of morality to the young and also the narrative that allowed for the expansion of the rapidly growing individual colonies.

Beginning in the 1600s, as the Northern American colonies began to take shape and grow larger, the educational narrative shifted to one derived specifically from and in support of Christian text. The Protestant ideal of "the good society" could only be created in this New World if those who both practiced and then taught the tenants of the faith to those in the community pushed this agenda (Rury, 2005). While this was acceptable to the colonists who came to the New World from Europe, the same could not be said for the Native inhabitants of the New England areas that these immigrants now inhabited.

Prior to the American Revolution against Britain, the social agenda of the period was first to convert the Native Americans, specifically in the northeast communities, to Christianity. By doing so, the American colonists who believed they were morally, culturally, and intellectually

better than the Native Americans, thought they were bringing civilization to people who were, at least in their view, uncivilized. "English colonists sincerely believed they were bringing a superior civilization to a 'heathen' and 'uncivilized' people" (Spring, 2005, p. 9). The colonists equated the Native Americans with criminals, believing that teaching them from Biblical text and converting them from their polytheistic religion to the Christian monotheistic religion would decriminalize them in some way. The Bible was the basis for their morality and, as such, they felt that they could convey their sense of morals and values to the indigenous people if they taught them using the Bible as a foundational text. This, they were lead to believe, would help end crime, reduce poverty, and in the end unite two different peoples under one belief system (Spring, 2005). Whether this was actually accomplished is still under debate, especially since it was deemed by the colonists that their faith was the superior one.

What critics believe actually happened was that the American colonists developed schooling practices that supported the assimilation of the Native Americans into the white European culture while also teaching and supporting the beliefs of the Christian church. "What was believed and valued by those who lived on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean was by no means the same . . . [and] In the process of encounter, the beliefs and values of those separate worlds were shared and altered, but not in equal measure" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 1). Native Americans who rejected this assimilation were viewed at best as uncivilized and at worst as criminals (Spring, 2005). Early American educators believed that the Bible was a narrative of civility, so they used Biblical readings and included prayer at the start of each day to teach "civilization" to the Native Americans. Native Americans entranced with the wealth and knowledge possessed by the Anglo-Saxon world believed that they could possess those things too if they submitted to the teachings of Christianity (Spring, 2005). They saw education as a

ticket to wealth and survival in this world because the beliefs and values they had protected for so long were being challenged and replaced by the newcomers from Europe.

What is interesting about Native American education prior to the arrival of the Europeans is its similarity to the Europeans' educational narratives and practices. Both used education as a method of teaching survival skills and both relied on their elders to impress these skills on the young people. In Native American tribes, the young were expected to master certain skills, not knowledge, before their acceptance into adulthood (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Survival skills, like hunting and fishing, cooking and preparation of food, and the making of clothing were all skills required by the young, not because they were tradition or part of a protected narrative, but because they were necessary for the survival of the tribe as a whole. It was impressed upon young women and men that they had a role to play in the tribe and the skills they were taught were for the benefit of the community, not for one's own individual progress or consumption. This philosophy was not so different from the early American settlers, as previously discussed. So why then did these two groups not see the similarity in their guiding narratives instead of focusing on the one thing that differentiated them?

While their religious backgrounds were different than the Christianity brought over by the Europeans, it was no less important to their culture. Native Americans believed that the natural world and spiritual world were intertwined and understanding both was critical for the survival of their kind (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Therefore, from their earliest days, the elders taught the young the ritualistic and spiritual connections between nature and man. They were not taught in traditional schools per se, but rather by members of their families or the tribal community.

The focus on teaching from tradition, ritual, and in the name of survival is reminiscent of the focus in antiquity on the protection of the polis in ancient Greece. Education was a rhetorical act taught through orality and by example. The tribe and individual families determined the education necessary for the young members. Information was conveyed for the purpose of sustaining and protecting the tribe and assuring the survival of the tribe. "Education was not something special and separate from life; it was integral to life itself" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 4). With this in mind, the education of the early Native American youth was something done on a daily basis and was interwoven with daily activity, not separate from it. It was not something that required a visit to a special place at a special time with a teacher from outside of the family or the tribe. It was important for the survival of the tribe to protect the narratives that enabled the tribe to live into the next generation, and developing intertribal connections, or in this case connections with the European immigrants, was not of interest to the tribe unless it threatened their survival. Because the tribes were small communities in and of themselves, there was little variation to the cultural narratives so there was no need to assimilate others or include narratives from other tribes. Assimilation was instead something that the arriving Europeans required for more than just the establishment of peace and civility.

While their assimilation was important from the moral and social perspective of the early American colonists, it was also important that the Native Americans give up their land to increasing amounts of European colonists. As more colonists arrived in the New World, land became scarce in the colonies and expansion to fit these newcomers required extending the colonies into land occupied by the Native Americans. This became the driving force in the development of the early education system in America. "U.S. political leaders considered education a method for gaining Native American land" (Spring, 2005, p. 115). Public schools, as

they were developed, offered the opportunity to put forth a political agenda of incorporating Native Americans into the European culture by destroying their culture and thus usurping their land in the name of the growth of the nation.

This view continued well into the post-revolutionary period in the early 1800s with President Thomas Jefferson who was "convinced that the cultural transformation of Native Americans was key to acquiring tribal lands" (Spring, 2005, p. 116). Jefferson is recognized as the first person "to emphasize public education as an instrument for the realization of democracy and for the furthering of social reform" (Curti, 1959, p. 32). Through the school system, Native Americans were taught to appreciate white European values and texts, governed by the narrative of the Bible and the founding documents of the nation, and for the shear purpose of manipulating them out of their land. They were taught that the hunting and gathering lifestyle they had practiced for generations was no longer appropriate because new farming styles would be better for producing food for the masses. The reality here of course is that the wilderness once possessed by the Native Americans and used by them for hunting and gathering was now desired by colonial farmers, so it was in the best interest of the government at that time to teach Native Americans to assimilate and give up their tribal lands (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). If they could be taught that their way of life was outmoded and antiquated, they could be easily persuaded to surrender their land because they would deem it no longer necessary to have. They could be taught to surrender to the narrative of progress.

Colonists were also under pressure to develop a society in the New World that was reflective of strong values and morals and that was safe and ultimately viewed as a beacon for those back in Europe: a place to which they wanted to move to start a new and better life. Prospective colonists would be discouraged from coming to the New World if they felt that their

lives were threatened or their values were under siege. This was established early on by Puritan leader John Winthrop who told his people that their colony was a "city upon a hill . . . [with] the eyes of all people . . . upon us" (Cremin, 1970, p. 15). This pressure from the homeland to create a New World where religion served as a guide to an orderly society resulted in the development of a school system that supported this agenda. Regardless of wealth or status, colonies in the New World embraced a Biblical narrative based on the Christian faiths of their founders that provided a narrative of peace and morality that was positively portrayed back in the homeland so that more Europeans would continue to arrive to set up new lives in the colonies.

Where formal schools did exist in early America, they were divided into two types. The first was for children of the socially elite families while the second was for those in poorer communities. Both the Northern and Southern colonies focused their education on reading and writing, specifically related to religious and classic texts, but those in the Northern colonies focused on educating more of the masses than those in Southern colonies. In the Southern colonies, like Virginia for example, the educational system focused more on private schooling for the wealthy and little or no education for the poor (Spring, 2005). The wealthy were provided opportunities to learn both in the colonies and back in Europe while the poor were often provided basic communication skills while on the job as apprentices.

Teachers during this period were mostly men who were college graduates or current students who were waiting for opportunities to arise in other vocational areas. Teachers were not trained in methodologies and pedagogies of teaching, but were rather trained in other content areas such as religion or Latin (Spring, 2005). By the late 1700s, women began to teach the youngest children in what became known as "Dame Schools." These schools were often operated out of the woman's home and provided teaching of basic communication skills. Even

at this point in history, teaching as a vocation was viewed as a low-level enterprise undertaken by those who were ill-suited for other occupations or who were waiting for other opportunities to arise (Rury, 2005). People did not engage in higher education to become teachers. Teaching was a default. In short, those who couldn't do other things became teachers because those who could do other things earned more money doing those things than they would as teachers. This may possibly be from where the adage "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach" arose.

Although education was largely available to the masses in the Northern colonies, the children of the elite families attended dame schools that were private while children of poorer families attended town schools that focused on minimal education (Spring, 2005). A greater separation occurred once children neared working age. Those of the poorer families tended to end their education with an apprenticeship or simply by going to work, while those of the wealthiest elite families continued to grammar school and then later to college (Merle, 1959). Reading and writing schools were the simplest of the schools and provided the minimal education required to function and contribute to a civilized society. These children were taught to obey the laws and rules established in the community that were largely based on the Protestant religious views and texts. The grammar schools taught more advanced level skills and enabled students of the wealthy families to study philosophy, Latin, and other higher order subjects while developing critical thinking skills that would be helpful in positions of leadership. It was deemed unnecessary for poorer children to learn these things because they were not necessary for their role in the community.

Regardless of their social status, the youngest children were taught in schools that promoted a religious and moral agenda because "education was considered essential to maintaining religious piety and social stability" (Spring, 2005, p. 14). In order to require this

level of education of its subjects, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed what is likely the earliest educational law in American history: the Massachusetts Law of 1642. This law addressed an open neglect by parents who did not appropriately teach their children to "read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the country" (Spring, 2005, p. 14). This was an early attempt at government to force social and religious morals and ethics on its constituents so as to create a society that reflected the positive image required of those leading both in the colonies and back in Europe.

Ironically, much of early American education was aimed at doing similar things as the Native Americans. As the colonies developed, they each had their own cultural and religious narratives to protect. "Most people in colonial America did not view schooling as a route to higher social status or economic improvement. Rather, the purpose of formal education was simply to augment the development of reading and reasoning abilities necessary for active participation in the life of a society governed by religious values" (Rury, 2005, p. 33). Individuals did not view schooling as an economic endeavor, but more of a political endeavor intended to spread morality and order as dictated by Christian religions, more specifically Protestants.

While their religions were predominately Christian, the colonies were developed with focuses on Puritanism, Quakerism, or one of the many other Protestant faiths prominent at the time. Their educational focus was centered on "fostering and preserving a rigidly homogenous or 'tribal' way of life" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 16). Their educational pursuits tended to focus on conserving and protecting the values and beliefs of their specific town or colony and not on development of new ideas or progress. They sought to pass on the ways of their forefathers and the beliefs of their faith as passed down through generations. While all of these may have

been different from the Native Americans, the narrative behind why they did this was the same. They sought to protect and promote their culture and their heritage and to conserve their ways of life as new groups continued to arrive in the New World, bringing with them their own cultures and heritages.

The Puritans originally came from Europe to the New World because they felt that their religious beliefs and customs were being threatened by the Catholic Church. Once in the New World, they again began to believe that their way of life was again under siege. To solve this problem, they realized that the spreading and strengthening of their faith could be done best through the development of schools that would teach this agenda. The New England area of the country seemed to drive the development of public schools in America. While the South had its values and morals, "its institutions and mores were set aside as being deviations that had to be overcome before America could finally realize its true self and live up to its New England legacy" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 16). Furthering the Puritan educational agenda became so important to the New England colonies that they passed the "Old Deluder Satan Act" in Massachusetts in 1647 (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). The purpose of this act was to require communities to take on a major role in the educational process by requiring education for young people. Instead of parents being solely responsible for their own child's education, communities were now being held responsible for education as well. Costs could be shared amongst the families, but if the provisions were not made, the towns, not the families, were fined. The act required towns with 50 or more families to assure that their children were educated at least in the areas of reading and writing. After all, reading and writing were the skills that gave Protestants access to the Scriptures (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Towns with 100 or more families were required to establish grammar schools to prepare boys to attend Harvard, the main college for the

training of ministers and political leaders of the time. Harvard was the ultimate educational goal for the New England community who sought to develop "cultured men" who "could ultimately make all the difference between civilization and barbarism as well as between heaven and hell" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 52). Education was viewed as necessary for the masses to the certain extent that it furthered the communal religious and moral agenda, but it was not necessary for all of the young men, or women really at all, to attend college. College was a place reserved for the culturally elite and the wealthy.

Although college was still viewed as a place for the elite by many during the period, in 1786, University of Pennsylvania professor and signer of the Declaration of Independence Benjamin Rush wrote an essay called *A Plan For Establishing Public Schools in Pennsylvania and for Conducting Education Agreeable to a Republican Form of* Government, in which he discussed his belief that education should be homogenous and available to the masses. He believed that all students should receive basic knowledge and skills that are the same in order for the U.S. to thrive and for the democracy of the U.S. to survive. In 1786, he "We shall never restore public credit, regulate our militia, build a navy, or revive our commerce, until we remove the ignorance and prejudices, and change the habits of our citizens, and this can never be done 'till we inspire them with federal principles, which can only be effected by our young men meeting and spending two or three years together in a national university" (Rush, 1914, p.154). Rush pointed out in this essay that many people supported the view that the new nation should establish and build its military, pay its debts, and extend its commerce and trade. They suggested putting a focus on funding a public education system on hold and viewed education as a leisure activity more so than a political and economic one.

Rush's suggestion here is that none of those accomplishments can be made effectively without education and that a public education system that included national universities would actually further these agendas better than if each agenda would be tackled by the government on its own. He suggested that these national universities be located in cities like Philadelphia, Carlisle, and Pittsburgh, and would work with schools in the other PA townships to develop a system that would be paid for by government funds but would ultimately be repaid in the success of the nation as a whole (Rush, 1914). In addition, Rush pointed out that lawyers, doctors, and other professions required specific schooling and degrees in order to obtain those jobs and yet the officials of the government required no formal university experience. A national system and federal universities, he argued, could not only solve the problems relating to the national military, social, and trade issues, but it could also be a primary influence on the development of future leaders of states and the nation. Although it was a good idea on paper, Rush's idea still has not come to fruition.

The Tenets of America in the Late 1600s to the Mid-1800s: First God, Then Country

Once the United States established itself as a nation independent from Great Britain, this new country engaged in a rhetoric of nationalism. After the American Revolution resulted in our separation from Great Britain, schools were further developed in order to serve he public more so than the individual. Major debates in the post-Revolutionary period focused on whether it was the school's job to create citizens with morals and values that consistently support the nationalism of the country and therefore the government's agenda, or if the school's job was to provide the tools and knowledge for the citizens to find these things on their own. This is the point in history when the government of our nation determined it was important to foster a public school system in order to spread a nationalist agenda more so than a religious one. While the

metanarrative of finding a place for everyone was still in place after the American Revolution, a smaller narrative was imposed upon schools that were now being used to "build nationalism, to shape the good citizen, and to reform society" (Spring, 2005, p. 41). The use of education to foster local interests and religious beliefs was no longer a sustainable practice in the larger nation as it developed (Rury, 2005). Even in these early days of the country we can start to see the early signs of standardization and accountability that drive today's educational narrative.

The idea of building a school "system" with uniformity, organization, and hierarchy was really born in this period as leaders of this new democratic system of government sought to strengthen it and help it grow in the face of opposition in Europe who felt that democracy was a doomed experiment. "For many Americans, the balance of freedom and order was to be achieved through education" (Spring, 2005, p.45). Religion as a focus in schools began to wane as the economic and social interests of the new nation began to change. The desire to develop "united" states that shared common values and interests became a driving force in the development of school curricula and the traditional Puritan values of the early colonial years could no longer be sustained (Rury, 2005). Once again, schools were used to assimilate, but this time the narrative was freedom and democracy instead of religion, at least on the surface.

Freedom was *allowed* for those who were deemed *virtuous* and public schools provided the opportunity to teach the socially accepted communal virtues. Some of the major problems that the post-revolutionary government faced were creating nationalism and loyalty to the new American government, the controlling of freedom through morality so as to not create anarchy in the new democracy, the reduction of crime, the lessening of poverty, and the melding of multiple cultures into one (Spring, 2005). Government officials and other community leaders at both the state and federal levels realized that a common public school system could be used to create the

national narrative of patriotism, loyalty, and morality that they sought and that would ultimately lead to the success of their new nation. There are several specific people and movements that helped to create this educational narrative, and while they are just a sampling, they were significant in the development of the public school system even as it exists today. This is by no means a totally comprehensive exploration here, but it is poignant at this point to review just a few nonetheless to gain some perspective.

Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

The Founding Fathers as they are known (Jefferson, Franklin, and others) helped significantly shape the public school system. They had two positions that serve as the narrative behind a need for public schools: 1) to shape political opinions for free market ideas so that individuals can form their own political views and 2) to create one single view to form what the society views as correct political views. Schools were a place to create future leaders who ruled based on their ability and knowledge, not on their pedigree as it was in Europe. Although this was the ideal, it was not immediately achieved.

Even at this point in history, we see the beginnings of the influence of capitalism on education, although be it ever so slight. The economic interest of the nation began to take over as a major catalyst in the development of the public school system and, as we will see later, continues to be a driving force in the changes taking place today. In his own autobiography, founding father Ben Franklin reflects on morals and values that should be taught, including the historical Protestant work ethic. In addition, many of his values also supported learning for "economic utility and its promise of material success" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 61). Having been influential to the development of the first libraries in the United States, it is also noteworthy that, in his own book collection, Franklin did not include religious or theological works,

choosing instead to focus on philosophy, current events, and classic fiction (Cremin, 1970). Franklin also suggested learning for the betterment of self and society, much like what he reflected in his own practices as reported in his *Autobiography*, and not just for personal economic gain. He believed that the educational system should develop secondary schools that broke from the traditional studies of the previous generations and instead focus on "service to self and society" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 63). Franklin saw education as more than just a social institution. He truly believed in the Rationalist concepts of self-examination and self-improvement and had a genuine desire to make himself a better person. He believed in learning for the sake of learning and was intrinsically motivated to read and study for his own personal gain; however, as much as he believed this, he also knew that improvements in every individual would make the community better as a whole, one person at a time.

While it was expected that leadership of the nation would rise to a certain level of higher education, there was significant debate as to how much education should be provided to the population at large (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Thomas Jefferson believed that the wealthy should not have an advantage just because they were born with wealth. The playing field should be opened to all of those with the talent to become successful leaders in America (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). This again helped to establish the idea that rulers were not just those born from a certain pedigree or lineage. In Jefferson and Franklin's views, one need not have a father who was wealthy or prominent in order to become a community leader (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). This belief was at the core of the development of the American Dream that serves as the beacon of light for so many who still come to America today to achieve it.

Jefferson's dedication to the development of an educational system was most felt in his home state of Virginia in 1779 where he first proposed the *Bill for the More General Diffusion of*

Knowledge to foster the development of elementary schools in the districts that were in walking distance of the homes in that community. He believed that by providing public education to all, a natural aristocracy would arise from the populace both the poor and the wealthy alike (Rury, 2005). This natural aristocracy would be made up of the most hardworking and the most talented men in the community rather than just those who inherited the position. Students in the community could attend three years for free and then subsequent years as their parents could afford (Conant, 1963). He suggested the development of a grammar school as well that would house selected students in a residential setting with visiting scholars as teachers. In order to attend this school, parents must pay tuition; however, a select number of lower class, financially poor boys were chosen by the schoolmaster to attend. Jefferson went to great lengths in his proposal to define how the schoolmaster would choose these boys for appointment so that competition would be fierce. Even once the boys were chosen to attend, their spaces were not guaranteed for the duration of their schooling. Jefferson's proposal provided that "of those who shall have been there two years, all shall be discontinued save one only the best in genius and disposition, who shall be at liberty to continue there" (Jefferson, 1779/1963, p. 88). While Jefferson supported giving educational opportunities to the poorest children so that they may become active contributors to the community at large, only the best and the brightest should be, in his view, permitted to reach a level of education that would allow them to lead. Despite Jefferson's detailed plan to offer education to those other than the wealthy elite, this plan and subsequent others that he wrote well into the 1800s never came to fruition. He did, however, manage to establish the University of Virginia prior to his death in 1826.

The Common School Movement.

Common School Movement supported traditional Protestant Anglo-American views and helped to support the number of immigrants coming into the nation by enabling them to assimilate by learning American language, customs, regulations, etc. Common School also helped prepare children for work in industry, specifically for work at the large factories being built in the large cities in the US.

Beginning in the 1830s, the Common School Movement, driven largely by individuals and organizations in the New England area, became the driving ideology for what would come to be known as the public school system. Supporters of this movement were largely people who believed government should be active in the school system so that education was standardized and centralized to support communal economic and social success in the nation as a whole. Ironically enough, the Whigs supported this government control while the Democrats believed in less government involvement in schools. Views switched in the middle of the 20th century when the Republicans wanted less interference of the government in education and supported privatization of the public school system while the Democrats viewed public education as the great economic equalizer that would help those in poverty attain more wealth.

The Common School movement was "more political and organizational than pedagogical or curricular" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 113). Because of great increases in school enrollment just prior to this period, the Common School movement offered a better way to educate these large numbers of students with the least amount of staff, supplies, and ultimately money, as possible.

Common Schools were supported by local property taxes and were more reliant on and loyal to larger communities rather than small towns. Funding of Common Schools through taxes

was a controversial practice as is similar to that which exists today. People who did not have children or whose children were grown did not believe that they should be accountable for paying for these institutions, but educational reformers like Horace Mann promoted the narrative that Common Schools existed for the benefit of the common good of all members of the community, not for the individual (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Educational curriculum and directives were established for local schools by the states and local areas had Boards of Directors to help facilitate these districts from a communal standpoint. The Common School system allowed students to be educated free of tuition and was considered to be "universal," meaning that it was open to all students. This term, however, was not as inclusive as it implied since it did not include black students or students with "strange" religious views, like Irish Catholics and other immigrant populations (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). While Common Schools were purported to be for the benefit of all, some were still excluded from them based on their ethnicity or religious backgrounds.

Curriculum, while focused on reading, writing, and other basic skills, tended to use the teaching of these skills as a way to incorporate moral teachings. Moral lessons "were the most important aspect of teaching in the antebellum common school" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 113). The McGuffey Readers, popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were the preferred choice of the Common Schools because of their inclusion of readings that supported the moral bases desired by the states and the smaller communities that the schools served. Each book in the series was arranged by "grade" which also supported the Common School perspective of dividing students into classes by their age groups.

Southern schools.

Even though the Common School Movement was gaining popularity in the northern states, the southern states were reluctant to adopt this path to education for the masses. The Common School Movement may have helped to support the culture and way of life in the north of the country where urban areas were filling with citizens who wanted and needed education, educating everyone was more of a threat to the culture and way of life to the people in the south. Education provided opportunities for those working menial jobs for very cheap wages on farms and plantations across the south to leave those jobs in search of better employment. Southern communities, especially in the years preceding the Civil War, were reluctant to provide a free public education to all (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). They tended instead to support voluntary schooling for children whose parents wanted and could afford to pay for education.

Private academies were available for middle and upper class children. Some were religious in nature and included the teaching of religious tenants, some were established by organizations like the Freemasons, and others were operated by businesses or private corporations. At any rate, these schools served the agendas of those who provided the funding to support them. They also helped to keep a very strict class division in the south as well by providing the best opportunities for those with wealth (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). By denying education to the poor and the non-white, the upper class families could assure that their children and grandchildren would inherit their status in society and continue to maintain the future of white privilege in the south. They also preserved the poorer class as an inexpensive workforce for the wealthy plantation owners.

Limiting access to schooling, and more specifically to the ability to read, became increasingly more important as we entered the 1830s. Reading and knowledge became the key

to freedom for both slaves and free blacks and the white aristocracy felt increasingly threatened by their access to education. Never was this more apparent than when African Americans were denied access to the cultural narratives and the knowledge required to participate in government and civic opportunities because they could not read them. In order to try to gain some access to the skill and to the knowledge that came with it, many African Americans, freed and slave, attended Sunday School where they could at least get access to scripture (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). In addition to African Americans, poor children also found access to free education in the south via Sunday Schools. Because children from poor families worked during the regular school week, they did not attend regular schooling. Sunday was the only day they were not required to work and those concerned about the lack of education and moral behavior of the poor took this opportunity to provide those children with at least a basic moral education based on Christian narratives (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). This was also a less objectionable opportunity for the wealthy classes as well. Since the churches were providing the teaching, it was religiously grounded, and they were not required to pay for it, they found this method of providing schooling to the poor more acceptable than paying taxes for mass public education.

Looking for the ladies: Where did female students fit in this education plan?

Early American women were largely educated in the home prior to the Revolutionary War and, sadly, for a significant period of time after the war ended. Formal education was limited largely to male students who were being trained to lead the nation either through the church, the government, or the businesses that began to establish themselves after the break with Great Britain. Many of the founding fathers, including Thomas Jefferson, never gave thought to girls and women participating in the formal educational opportunities being provided, but they did feel that girls should receive some education. Jefferson did advocate girls learning to dance,

draw, practice music if she was capable and had natural talent in that area, and reading mostly nonfiction texts (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). It was Benjamin Rush who finally suggested that girls receive a more formal education, but even then, not the same education as the boys. He believed that there were significant advantages to educating women. First, he believed that to deny women education was similar to denying education to the poor or to certain other subsets of society and therefore it was inappropriate (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Second, women, he felt, were more obedient and easier to control than an educated woman because "a weak and ignorant woman will always be governed with the greatest difficulty" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 97). Rush's views here are interesting as well because he implies that education, even its early days, could be used to indoctrinate others to a politically or socially supported mindset instead of fostering a love of the learning process. Women like Abigail Adams, Mercy Warren, and others who believed that women had more to contribute to society than just raising children and keeping house also supported this view.

Eleazar Wheelock started one of the earliest schools that allowed girls. Wheelock felt that educating Native Americans was a positive step toward ending wars with the many tribes that surrounded the early American colonies. In the process of trying to educate the Native Americans, Wheelock started Moor's Charity School to provide classical and religious education to the Natives. Wheelock also enrolled women in beginning in 1761. Wheelock believed that education was an important part in the "civilization" of the Natives and believes that eliminating Native American women and girls from the process counterproductive to his efforts. (Spring, 2005). Even though its ultimate goal was assimilation of the Natives, Wheelock's school did offer girls an opportunity to engage in the language, customs, and the Christian faith, which was more than many of the colonial girls received at that time.

Regular opportunities for communal education were finally offered for girls during the Common School Movement in the 1830s. In Common Schools, girls were educated in the same rooms as boys while also using the same curriculum. Common Schools were viewed as an extension of the family unit largely because so many of the teachers in the younger grades were women (Urban &Wagoner, 2009). Women were nurturers and thus possessed a natural temperament that made them excellent elementary grade teachers. As a result, it was deemed necessary that they have an education so that they could work as teachers. It is interesting to note as well, however, that even though women made up a large portion of the teachers in the lower grades, school administration was still predominantly male so that the female influence would not be too powerful (Urban &Wagoner, 2009). With male superiors, women could be kept in check and men could consistently monitor the curriculum and teaching of each female teacher to assure that she taught lessons consistent with the school's agenda.

Perhaps the most influential woman on the field of education was Catharine Beecher. Beecher opened the Hartford Female Seminary and the Western Female Institute, which were both schools that stressed the sciences and the classics. Despite the fact that her schools still prepared girls for careers in the "domestic arts," her approach to teaching with an academic rather than a social focus was innovative for the period (Urban &Wagoner, 2009). Beecher saw the traditional roles of mothers and wives to be limited by social constructs. She believed that women had more to offer than just cooking and child-rearing. With men increasingly more absent in the household because of their jobs, women managed multiple roles in the home for which an academic basis better prepared them.

The industrial era also helped to shift the participation of young girls in secondary education. In 1872, girls made up 53% of the high school population and by 1900 they made up

59% (Urban &Wagoner, 2009). This difference was even larger in the inner cities were girls were 75% of the high school population (Urban &Wagoner, 2009). These numbers largely reflect the narrative of the period. Industrialization brought with it thousands of well-paying solid jobs for men who had the physical and technical abilities to work there. The male students left the public school system because it was deemed unnecessary for them to earn a living. Girls also found secondary school intellectually rewarding and were more interested in the intrinsic value of learning than having learning end with a monetary reward (Urban &Wagoner, 2009). Parents largely supported this concept and preferred that their daughters stay in school rather than going into the large urban areas to look for work that they may not find or may not be able to do. Education gave them an opportunity to stay in their familial homes and busy while they waited to marry and start families of their own. Additionally, having girls stay in high school also fostered their training so that they could be elementary teachers as well if they chose to pursue that path until marriage.

As the industrial period progressed, the curriculum in Common schools changed to reflect the changing roles of women. Since the assembly line technology enabled the mass production of things, including our food supply and the means to prepare it, the role of women in the home changed. Instead of being producers of food, clothing, and other domestic goods, women now became consumers of them (Spring, 2005). School curriculum in the domestic arts, now commonly referred to as home economics, reflected the female role as a “manager” of the house rather than a cook, maid, or childcare provider (Spring, 2005). Women were required to make decisions regarding purchases of products, including large ticket items and new domestic technology like machine washers and refrigerators. School curriculum attempted to make this more attractive, sophisticated, and professional for young girls so that they embraced the

stereotypical female roles with more enthusiasm. Regardless of the period, ultimately until the mid-point of the 20th century, girls were largely educated for the purpose of either becoming teachers or for engaging in the "domestic sciences," as they were called (Spring, 2005). It was not until well into the later half of the 20th century that girls and women were viewed as real contributors to the public and economic workforce.

Noah Webster and his textbooks.

Textbook writer, Noah Webster, was also influential in the development of the educational narrative at the turn of the 18th century and his methods are still influential today. Webster's texts fostered the educational view that education should be used to create and support nationalism and patriotism in America. "The word 'American' became indispensable in all textbook titles; all vied in patriotic eloquence" (Warfel, 1936, p.335). His three-text series, *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* was responsible for helping young students learn to read, write, and spell on the surface; however, a more covert narrative that underwrote the text was its generation of patriotism and focus on American values and assimilation. Webster's texts did not focus on archaic writings and language and traditional rules that were handed down, largely from our British ancestors. Instead, he focused on the language as it was presently spoken and written. He effectively re-wrote the rules of spelling and grammar handed down from generations of Europeans in favor of a new American version that was taught to students, many who were now immigrating to the nation from Ireland and Germany in Europe and several nations in Asia.

Webster's *American Spelling Book*, the first book in the trilogy, overtly taught students the rules of grammar and spelling but covertly taught order, obedience to rules, and structure

while assimilating students to American culture. Webster believed that the best way to teach language was through the "correctness and uniformity" of the text (1831/1962, p. 18). Webster used charts to show students the correct pronunciation of vowels and consonants to teach them the rules of grammar to demonstrate the importance and significance of following rules. He changed the spelling of words that were traditionally spelled with "re" or "our" ending to "er" or an "or," separating the American version of English from that spoken by European countries. He used spelling and grammar to promote a Nationalist agenda. By educating students in this fashion, Webster believed that "the labor bestowed upon this work, in correcting and improving the system, will render it still more acceptable to the public, by facilitating the education of youth, and enabling teachers to instill into their minds, with the first rudiments of the language, some just ideas of religion, morals, and domestic economy" (Webster, 1831/1962, p.18). Webster's texts fostered the idea of standardized education by standardizing the language that was the foundation for the educational narrative in that historical moment.

Through the teaching of grammar and spelling, Webster's text also helped assimilate students of different economic backgrounds to make them more civilized and moral through education and taught discipline and order to those migrating from other nations that were presently in turmoil. "The driving force in Webster . . . was nationalism" (Commager, 1958, p.5). This uniformity in spelling and grammar forced a narrative of assimilation and opposed a narrative of diversity. By teaching everyone to write and speak the same way, the nationalistic agenda could be forged as the nation's inhabitants became more diversified. Their diversity was eliminated and their cultures eroded when they entered the public school system and were taught using Webster's texts.

In addition to the methodology he used to teach grammar and spelling, Webster's reader, the third book in his *Grammar* trilogy, included readings that specifically spoke to the nationalist narrative. While he included the traditional Shakespeare and Plutarch, Webster also felt that it was important to include significant contributions made by American writers. The "American past lacked . . . antiquity, and antiquity, like tradition, could be manufactured" (Commager, 1958, p. 10). Webster's reader was pivotal in creating an antiquity for America. It provided excerpts from *The Crisis* by Thomas Paine and essays by other prominent Americans. These readings helped to establish a common sense of past for the nation's youth and to build nationalism (Commager, 1958, p. 9). This America first agenda was created by the public school system and remained an influential part of the system well into the 20th century.

In addition to this text trilogy, Webster is probably most noted historically for the development of his dictionary. Because of this, Webster "contributed more than any other single person to a uniform American Speech, and to the avoidance of those differences in accent and vocabulary that might proclaim differences in background, in class, or in region" (Commager, 1958, p. 4). The dictionaries he produced were always listed as American dictionaries with spellings and rules that were strictly American in their form and use. Webster was a Federalist and believed that education was necessary for a democratic country, but he worried that too much knowledge would lead to anarchy. Instead he believed that education should create knowledgeable citizens that were submissive to the authority of the government and schools should be used to promote order and loyalty to the government. As a teacher, he realized the important position that public schools were in as disseminators of information to the young. He used his texts promote uniformity of and thus obedience to the national authority in a country

whose culture was becoming increasingly more diverse. Webster promoted a nationalist, America first agenda and used the public schools as a method of dissemination.

While this is just a sampling of those who influenced the public school system in its early days, it is obvious that the public school agenda was one that promoted patriotism and morality, despite a lack of focus on a specific religion. Fiction was used to teach morality in much the same way that Biblical tales were used in religious schools. Nonfiction pieces helped to portray the early founders of the nation as heroic and patriotic to give students a more truthful if somewhat slanted view of the nation's beginnings. Grammar and spelling were even manipulated in order to truly separate the nation from its British roots and to establish it as an independent nation worthy of its own language, so to speak. In the next section, we will see how this nationalistic agenda begins to be combined with a capitalistic one that will turn students into worker bees necessary for the growing industrial complex.

Industrialization Creates a Need for a More Modern View of Learning

As the nation entered the industrial era of the 1800s, the narrative guiding education began to shift because the modern narratives of progress, efficiency, and individual autonomy (Arnett, Fritz & Holba, 2007) became the driving forces in curricular decision-making. Unbridled capitalism drove the social narrative of the time, and schools, instead of providing a counterpoint, once again fell in line with the promoted social narrative and were driven to support the capitalist views that emerged. Large American cities now needed efficient and cost-effective ways to educate the mass numbers of students headed toward the industries located there. The technological changes caused by industrialization "required new work habits, and close attention to organization and efficiency" (Rury, 2005, p. 7). Industry looked to the public school system to teach these new habits and to once again instill a level of obedience, but this

time the obedience was to the industrial complex instead of the country. Workers were expected to show at a specifically designated time, eat at an assigned time, do certain assigned and regulated tasks all day, and then finish at a certain time. It is obvious to those who have gone through the public school system that this regimented world created by the development of the assembly line is absolutely reflected in schools. With their bells to mark the end of work periods, their rows of work desks, and their hierarchy of authoritarian control, schools became a microcosm of the adult world that students would enter once they learned how to follow the rules and complete the tasks required of them. Schools were one of the many organizations tasked with creating "social amity" in the close quarters of an urban environment that would, many feared, run amok without discipline (Rury, 2005). This obedience was necessary in the new urbanized world because of the sheer amount of people that flooded the cities in search of work in the industries located in the major cities, particularly in the east. Schools were the starting point where behavior, morals, and values were taught that would ultimately lead to inner city crowd control.

Industrialized workers began to realize that education was key to their children's futures. Only through schooling would they not be oppressed by the industrial complex that their parents were forced to endure. They realized that "Knowledge was power in the evolving modern industrial setting, and workers did not want to be kept from that source of power" (Spring, 2005, p.99). Industrialized workers wanted education to keep them from being exploited by their management, not because of any socialized or communal reason or to further some national agenda. To them, knowledge was power. To the rest of society, education was a way to teach a moral or political agenda. Both schools of theory though equally supported the creation and financial support of public schools despite their differing foundational narratives.

Industrialization created a bigger gap between the haves and have nots that people like educational reformer Horace Mann, who will be covered later, believed could be helped by the idea of a common public school curriculum.

While previous periods saw the waning of religion as a foundation in schools, battles over schooling between religious and ethnic groups began once again in the early to mid 1800s and increased as the period of industrialization brought mass immigration from new countries with differing religions and traditions. Catholics, especially immigrants from Ireland who came to the US in droves, wanted the public schools to address their moral and religious agendas as they were already addressing those of the Protestants who founded them. Irish immigrants fleeing Ireland as a result of the famine and poverty present in the nation at that time were refusing to attend public schools in America because they felt that the Protestant teachings were anti-Catholic.

Government officials feared that the Irish, without education, would become a burden on the American taxpayers. In response, New York Governor William Seward proposed legislation that would enable Catholic schools to receive public funds, not only so that the large number of Irish could be educated in schools that offered them the security of their faith but also because they would assimilate them to American culture, specifically the language and customs that would make them productive, working American citizens (Spring, 2005). A large system of Catholic schools in the US developed as a result of the battle between Protestants and Catholics. This was the result of a decree from the Catholic Church, out of the Third Plenary Council in 1884, that said that all Catholic Churches were required to house a school in their church and patrons of the church should send their children there (Spring, 2005). The Catholic School system as we know it was born.

McGuffey's contribution.

One of the major criticisms of the public school system from Neil Postman's view is that public schools should offer a cultural counterpoint that provides balance and encourages a look at multiple views. In some cases, texts were incorporated into the curriculum of public schools that attempted to help bridge the divide between religions and solve the battle over which faith should be taught in the public schools, at least on the surface.

The McGuffey reader was written in the late half of the 1800s as America came to grips with an increasingly more industrialized world. Written by William McGuffey, a teacher in Ohio near Cincinnati, The McGuffey Reader was actually a series of texts that provided foundational readings for the classroom and continued to be popular into the industrial period as well (Spring, 2005). While some religious readings were still included, a shift is notable in the content of the texts. Where the Biblical narrative once served as a foundation for learning, there is a clear shift in these texts to a thematic narrative that is not based on Biblical tales. Instead, stories were presented that included characters whose conflicts were moral or social in nature but that were devoid of reference to specific religious characters or events from the Bible (Spring, 2005). For example, some stories in the texts included themes of tidiness, where the stories taught primarily that young girls should always be neat and organized in their appearances and their homes. Relationships between the self and nature are also explored as well as the importance of charity work, caring for the poor, and other narratives that were used to teach young children the importance of morals and values from a more non-religious stance. Biblical pieces that were included in texts during this period shifted to more non-denominational readings that were not supportive of one particular religion over another.

While on the surface, this textual contribution seems totally positive, there are critics that believe that McGuffey's texts provided justification for income inequality in the industrial age (Spring, 2005). Some of the stories in McGuffey's texts were used to teach the narrative that poor people were poor because they were uneducated or unskilled, but that this was not necessarily a negative thing. For example, in one of the stories published in his text titled "The Poor Boy," the main character discusses how happy he is because God made him poor. It implies that, through the poor boy's eyes, the rich have so many problems that poor people just would not understand and it is better to avoid being wealthy so as to not have those problems (McGuffey, 1843). As long as the poor boy engages in good behavior and is virtuous, he is happy even without wealth. This story, in conjunction with others in the text, teaches the readers that one should just accept one's lot in life and not reach for something greater because to have this greater wealth will come with greater problems. As long as the poor boy was good and "free of the burdens and responsibilities of the wealthy," he would not strive to become wealthy. He would accept his place willingly and would not engage in behaviors that were criminal or immoral. He would merely sustain and maintain the status of his parents before him.

While a faction of society was, at that historical moment, still trying to preserve a Christian, Biblically-based, narrative foundation of the education system in America, McGuffey and his readers offered a counterpoint that attempted to bring the masses together under a unified curriculum without a focus on a specific Christian faith, even if he did support and justify economic class divisions in his texts. His texts pretty accurately display the division between the religious narrative and the modern narrative by virtually eliminating texts that were Biblical in nature and replacing them with texts that supported the class divisions that were necessary in

order for the modern agenda of progress, efficiency, and individual autonomy (Arnett, R., Fritz, J.H. & Holba, A.M., 2007) to thrive.

Horace Mann's contribution.

Horace Mann believed in a free system of public education because he was born into a family that would have benefited from the system. Growing up in a small town in Massachusetts, Mann lived a life of poverty and only went to school eight to ten weeks per year. It was his ability to read, once he learned how, that enabled him to rise to the role of public servant as one of the first school board members in the nation. Much of his learning took place in the Franklin town library on his own without the benefit of teacher. Mann's educational experiences caused him to see the need for strong public schools and were influential in the development of the system.

Horace Mann had so much hope in the public education system that he believed that "the school teacher, who, by educating children so that they would not transgress the law, would replace the police" (Spring 2005, p. 79). His faith in the public school system to change the course of individuals and of society as a whole was notable during this period and helped to contribute to the focus on nationalism that was the underlayment of the common public school curricula.

Mann, like some of his other contemporaries, knew that only through a solid system of education could a republican government flourish. Knowledge increased each individual's power and that power could be used for great things, but also for immoral and illegal things. It was through the public school system that Mann believed future generations could be taught to self govern and to appropriately participate in their democracy (Mann 1845/1957). He believed that childhood was an "apprenticeship" during which children learned how to engage the

democratic adult world (Mann 1845/1957). The public school system offered an opportunity to provide not only knowledge to students, but also a foundation of morals and ethics that were consistent with national goals and supportive of a free and orderly society (Cremin, 1957). "Mann understood well the integral relationship between freedom, popular education, and republican government" (Cremin, 1957, p. 7). Once he was put in a position where he could effectively impact the public school system, Mann sought a communal philosophy that would guide the development of public school curricula.

He realized the importance of incorporating literature into the public school curricula as a way to provide a moral ground because "without literature men are savages, cut off from the wisdom of the past and subject to the merciless vicissitudes of fortune" (Cremin, 1957, p. 9). He believed in the importance of active learning where the student was performing the work in the classroom and that, although children learn to speak in whole words, that a study of phonics was also important when learning to read unfamiliar words. Language and rhetorical studies were the "gateway to the subjects of the common school curriculum" (Cremin, 1957, p. 10). They enabled the study of other subjects that required the reading of narratives. Mann believed literature to be an art in itself and knew the importance of studying contemporary and ancient texts, poetry, novels, and all literary art forms (Mann, 1838/1957). He also ascribed to the theory that the narratives must be connected to something larger than just the skill of learning to read. When students critically analyze text and discuss the meanings and purposes behind the writing of text, then "reading becomes the noblest instrument of wisdom" (Mann, 1838/1957, p. 43). Without this connection, texts become worthless at best and, at worst, misused and misinterpreted by others who seek to use them for their own gain against those who have not read them.

While many education critics of the period were upset that children could not spell or follow grammar rules, Mann was more upset at their disinterest in reading. He was a critic of those who would not read and openly stated that language was not just necessary for communication, but it also was necessary for rationality (Mann, 1838/1957). He understood the importance of thinking about language beyond its utilitarian purposes. Language, he believed, was how we gained knowledge. Words, he explained, can both follow and precede experiences. They can be used to describe what we have seen or done and they can also describe what we have not experienced and in what we may have an interest (Mann, 1838/1957). This focus on language goes beyond the utilitarian rules that are taught to show the skill of using language and require a focus on why things occur. Schools must instill in children the importance of "never using the organs of speech, by themselves, and as an apparatus, detached from, and independent of, the mind" (Mann, 1838/1957, p. 37). In Mann's estimation, it is wonderful to have the ability to use language, but if one has nothing of importance to say, describe, or share, the language is useless. Mann supported a public school curriculum that fostered this narrative to teach the importance of understanding the meaning behind language, not just the language itself.

Knowledge was not something that young people should be left to just go and retrieve for themselves. Instead, knowledge was something to be given under guidance so that students understood its meaning in context and were not left to interpret it in such a way that it would negatively impact the community. Knowledge was to be the "great equalizer" that enabled the poor to participate in society in the same manner as the wealthy and that provided opportunities for everyone to find success (Mann, 1848/1957, p. 87). Providing free education to all was, in Mann's view, a way to level the playing field between the poor and the wealthy. The poor gained a free education that enabled them to provide for their families, obtain better paying jobs,

and participate in their democracy. The wealthy hoped common schools would cause a reduction in crime and poverty and an increase in the safety and security in their communities and workplaces. Arguments were made to support the further development of common schools like this so as to promote the mixing of the poor and the wealthy. Although meant to be helpful, free common schools helped deepen the divide between the rich and the poor. The rich still went to private schools that, with their money, had the advantage of being able to purchase better equipment, better facilities, and more qualified teachers.

Additionally, although strange for his time, Mann also supported the study of health and physical education, specifically of all things relating to hygiene. Health and hygiene supported the moral and ethical basis. Mann stressed the need for physical education and health in his *Twelfth Annual Report* in 1848 when he suggested that the health and hygiene of each person impacts the community as a whole. Mann pointed toward the science of the day that suggested that the health of each individual was partially within his or her control. Mann believed that the public school system could support the spread of what he called "sanitary intelligence" (Mann 1838/1957). There were things that modern science suggested each person could do to be healthier that included appropriate amounts of exercise and sleep and improved eating habits.

Mann believed that the public schools should teach this information to children at a young age so that, if they put these habits into their daily routines while they were young, they could in turn live better and longer lives than their parents (Mann, 1848/1957). In addition, they would better contribute to their communities and the workforce because they would avoid health problems and long-term illnesses that rendered them incapacitated and caused them to be burdens on others. They would learn "temperance and moderation" and not be swayed by the social fashions of the moment, but instead have their behaviors driven by their obedience to laws

established by the community and based on the science of the day (Mann, 1848/1957, p. 83). This establishment and teaching of a health code in the Common School would help to eliminate the stench of poverty and again level the playing field between the poor and the wealthy who had better access to medicine and better living conditions.

Mann also saw the importance of incorporating the arts beyond the study of literature, specifically the study of music, into the public school curriculum. Music, he felt, had significant health benefits, helped in the teaching of math, and increased overall intellectual ability (Cremin, 1957). Mann reported on behalf of the Massachusetts School Board in 1844 that music instruction had many benefits and was a largely successful implementation in the curriculum of the Common Schools in that state (Mark, 1982). He based his conclusion on the improvement of students' learning of morality, intellect, and health (Mann, 1891, pp. 445-463). Music was a way to provide students with a release from the academic rigor of their core studies, helped to teach math through the use of rhythm and beat, and provided a way to promote self-reflection and independent thought.

In regards to the subject of religion, Mann spent considerable time addressing and weighing in on the teaching of religion in the public schools. While Mann acknowledged that the Christian narrative was one that served the people well because it contained lessons that supported strong morals and values, he also recognized that forcing a religion upon students in a public school system would be a controversial endeavor. He believed that the best way to approach the religious narrative was at home rather than in the public school. The best method of addressing this issue was "Free Schools for all, and the right of very parent to determine the religious education of his children" (Mann, 1848/1957, p. 110). By doing this, Mann believed that he was protecting the religious freedom of every family and also not allowing the public

schools system to become exclusive or elitist by supporting one religion over another. Although controversial at the time, Mann's views on the exclusion of religion in the public education system proved to be practical in the long term and this practice is still in existence.

John Lancaster's contribution.

Schools were called upon to fill the moral void created by the lack of a knowledgeable and moral parental figure at home. One such system that some believed could help students become moral contributors to society instead of criminals was The Lancasterian System, also referred to as the Monitorial System. Developed by Joseph Lancaster, this method, in true modern style, emerged as an efficient and inexpensive way to educate poor youth so that they would develop into morally grounded adults that would obey rules and authority. Lancaster developed this method in England and, in the early 1800s, traveled to America to promote his vision of a morally grounded school system that could be implemented inexpensively for the masses. Promoted by the Catholic Church of England, this system's mission statement identified one of the major social problems of the day that it sought to solve. It said that the conditions poor children live in are "deplorable indeed; [Children are] reared up by parents who . . . become either indifferent to the best interests of their offspring, or, through intemperate lives, are rendered unable to defray the expense of their instruction" (Spring, 2005, p. 56). With this failure of the family, Lancaster believed that his method would adequately train poor youth to embrace the narrative of obedience necessary for them to function in an industrial workplace.

In this method, older monitors instead of trained education professionals taught students. His motto, "*Qui docet, discit*" or "He who teaches, learns" was the impetus for the development of his learning model. He believed that the best method of learning was in fact for the students to teach each other and that by using this method he was creating a group of students with

leadership capabilities. Although this method did allow for student leaders to emerge, it also kept labor costs down by employing less formally trained educators who would require higher wages, which some believe was a bigger driving force in the popularity of the method. Students at these schools were grouped according to their reading and mathematical ability and educated in rooms designed to foster obedience. Students were seated in rows hierarchically with the teacher's desk at the front, establishing him as the authority in the classroom. Lancaster publicly decried corporal punishment, but students who misbehaved in his schools were often corrected by locking them in stocks or other similar methods of public punishment (Vogler, 2015). It was this behavior that eventually drove Lancaster from public favor and caused his outing from the school system.

The Lancasterian system was likened by critics to a factory where learning was treated like an industrious endeavor – students lined in rows receive instruction in a format much like an assembly line. "A student's submission to this factory system of education was supposed to lead to a sense of orderliness and obedience" (Spring 2005, p. 59). Before grades were created, Lancaster devised a system of badges that was used to reward students for their efforts and their mastery of skills and knowledge. Earning badges allowed students to eventually become teaching monitors. Students were kept engaged by not being allowed moments of idleness because, as they finished one badge, they moved on to the next. There was no downtime between the completion of badges because the class was waiting for slower students to finish before everyone could move on together.

While Lancaster's methods were controversial, they did become the template for what eventually became the New York Public School system in New York City (Spring, 2005). The desired progress created by the industrial revolution proved too powerful a narrative for the

school system to avoid and Lancaster's method promoted fast, inexpensive way to educate the masses that were converging in the largest US cities. Although Lancaster ultimately did not see all of his methods survive, some of his theories still survive in the public school system today.

John Dewey' contribution.

John Dewey was critical of the educational models in the early industrial period and instead offered a different approach to the educational narrative in the early 1900s. Dewey was a pragmatist who believed that learning was best done through engagement and experience (Dewey, 1902). Dewey believed that a central problem to the modern educational system was that, in its quest to provide an efficient means of educating the masses, it sacrificed the philosophical connections between subjects and skills. Facts and skills that were memorized and learned were being segregated from experience and narrative. By disconnecting facts and skills from the philosophical narrative behind their learning, children learn in the abstract and the learning has no meaning for them (Dewey, 1902). Because schools study individual subjects without showing their interconnectedness, Dewey says that learning becomes "fractionized" and therefore less effective for the students (Dewey, 1902). This fractionizing causes students to not retain what they have learned.

Our continued desire to attach science to the art of human learning supports this system. We seek to organize the learning rather than let it be intertwined because allowing it to be intertwined makes it messy and requires a much more broad knowledge base to teach. We teach students skills and "let the child proceed step by step to master each one of these separate parts, and at last he will have covered the entire ground" (Dewey, 1902, p.8). The ground is covered, as Dewey says, but the material may never be absorbed fully because it is not connected to other narratives of purpose and meaning. Classification and order are used to pigeonhole students into

learning environments that keep them from ultimately learning why they are learning. For example, studying literature independent from the historical narrative in place when it was written does not allow the student to understand why the piece was written and, in effect, why they are reading it in the first place. Dewey was critical of the educational system organized by age and subject that was in place, and is still in place, for this reason.

Part of the reason that schools were organized this way, according to Dewey, was because "guidance and control" were deemed necessary in both the school environment and in the democratic society (Dewey, 1902). Students were being taught obedience to authority covertly through the structure of their school day. According to Dewey, a teacher is "not concerned with adding new facts to the science he teaches . . . He is concerned with the subject-matter of the science as representing a given stage and phase of the development of experience" (Dewey, 1902, p. 23). Teachers do not spend time contributing to the knowledge and scope of their fields but rather learn only the amount of information necessary to teach their students at a particular age in a particular moment and subject area. This leads them to memorization of old facts and information and leaves their areas of specialization lacking fresh new ideas and theories. Information and knowledge become stagnant.

This disconnect leads to three specific problems in learning according to Dewey. First, learning the material becomes completely symbolic for the student instead of being meaningful (Dewey, 1902). The symbolism is derived from their completion of a particular course or grade rather than from a connection to the information. The information, Dewey says, is left "dead and barren" (Dewey, 1902, p. 24). The second problem with this educational philosophy is that it creates a lack of motivation in the students (Dewey, 1902). Students do not feel the need to continue to study something that they feel that they have already mastered. They are not driven

to further explore the subject nor are they motivated to contribute new ideas to the subject area. The final problem created by this disconnect caused by the public system of schooling is that in the process of making the material accessible to students, the most valuable pieces of the material are often lost (Dewey, 1902). Material is presented as if its only purpose is to be memorized in that moment. It is not presented as material that is alive, still growing, and to which the students may and should contribute. Thus, students learn it in the moment and leave it as soon as that moment passes.

Although Dewey was critical of the systemic model of public education in the early 1900s, he was not critical of the underlying social narrative of the period. Like others, Dewey felt that a strong public school system was necessary for the individual students and for the community as a whole. As citizens, he believed that we should want the same for all children as we did for our own individual children. "Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy. . . Here individualism and socialism are at one" (Dewey, 1900, p. 7). Dewey believed that, like the individual subjects being taught in school, the philosophical narrative behind learning was also one of several intertwined. The individual should learn for himself and his own benefit, but by providing him the tools to do this through a public school system, society also benefits from the accomplishments of the individual.

Dewey was also critical of the narrative behind the public school model at this time. The narrative driving the curriculum at the time was one that focused mostly on preparing students for careers. Students were given a choice between the collegiate track and the business track and chose courses appropriate for their vocations instead of their interests. This shift created a difference in the tone and significance of the public school. "The difference that appears when occupations are made the articulating centers of school life is not easy to describe in words; it is

a difference in motive, of spirit and atmosphere . . . The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness" (Dewey, 1900, p. 15). This modern view of education as a path to individual autonomy does not support the original narrative of learning as providing a social benefit to all of society. Not only does this support a personalized, selfish agenda, but also it creates a competitive narrative that drives the learning. Students learn in competition with each other so that they can accomplish more, better, and faster than their peers and to achieve a success that is perceived to be greater than their peers. Dewey's thoughts here are representative of what was to come as the post-industrialized era led us to a post-modern narrative of personalization.

Dewey does not suggest that we do not teach students skills that are useful for their futures, but he does suggest that the reason for teaching them the skills cannot just be career based. He provides an example of the teaching of sewing to young students in middle or high school as part of the required curriculum (Dewey, 1900). The modern focus on this lesson is utilitarian. Students are taught how to sew, period. Instead he suggests that they should be learning about the development of a product from raw materials to finished product. They should discuss the reason for choosing one type of fabric over another. They should research the historical significance of the process and the technology used in the process and explore the scientific makeup of the raw materials chosen. Studying in this fashion he believes will enable students to "see within his daily work all there is in it of large and human significance" (Dewey, 1900, p. 24). This broader focus that is driven by more than just a career in sewing enables the student to see his or her part in the process, to understand the reason behind the process, and to develop a connection to the process and to the final product. The student takes pride in the final product produced because he or she has a connection to it, having developed the product from

start to finish. The student has the ability to create and use his or her imagination to develop something in a world that forces uniformity in manufacturing.

The Impact of Multiculturalism

The public school system, as established earlier in this chapter, has often been the place where people from different cultures were assimilated into American society, or more commonly, white society. This process, which educational policy expert, Joel Spring, calls deculturalization, "destroy(s) a people's culture and replace(s) it with a new culture" (2005, p. 183), was not just used on different religious groups as mentioned earlier. It has also been used on Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and others as they attempted to accomplish the American Dream. This assimilation was supported by the 19th century concept of Manifest Destiny, which encouraged the expansion of American ideals and concepts to the west coast and beyond. This "rested on a belief in the superiority of Protestant Anglo-American culture" (Spring, 2005, pp. 183-84). This false sense of superiority gave schools the exclusive ability to teach materials that supported the Protestant Anglo-American agenda and to ignore the emerging mix of cultures that were melting in the pot known as America.

Racial segregation of schools became an issue beginning in the 18th century. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, slaves were stolen from their African countries and brought to America at a rate that enabled them to quickly outnumber Anglo-Americans in some parts of the country (Spring, 2005). These slaves refused to be Europeanized in all respects – religious, cultural, linguistic and, since schools were allowed to segregate students based on their racial backgrounds until the Supreme Court ruled in the Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas case in 1954, they were not engaged in the common narrative of the public school

system. The segregation of schools, while denying the African Americans the right to a free quality education, also denied Anglo-Americans access to the narrative of the African American culture (Spring, 2005). Anglo-American students were denied the ability to learn about the plight of the slaves and thus did not appreciate or understand their struggles. This prohibited them from seeing them as anything other than possessions or property instead of as human beings. Segregated schools were unequally funded and therefore went against the original narrative of the Founding Fathers who believed that the public school system would level the playing field between social classes. They helped keep African Americans poor and subservient to the Anglo-Americans long after slavery ended, and some say this inequality still exists in the 21st century.

When African Americans were given an opportunity for education, this education was not only unequal to that of whites, but also supported the current agenda of what African Americans should be expected to contribute to the industrial community. The curriculum in their schools continued to support their already existent roles as farmers or housemaids. As Bullock (1970) explains,

> The industrial curriculum to which many Negro children were exposed, supposedly designed to meet their needs, reflected the life that accompanied their status at that time. They had always farmed. The curriculum aimed to make them better farmers. . . The industrial curriculum was designed to change this only in so far that Negroes were trained to perform these services better. (p. 88)

While African Americans were being offered an education, so to speak, they were not being offered one that provided opportunity for social mobility. They were being given an education that would help them continue to serve white society in the capacity in which they always had.

They remained powerless and subservient. The role of the school was to "efficiently reproduce the existing social division of labor, not eradicate it" (Rury, 2005, p. 175). Simply put, it was not the job of the school system to change the roles of African Americans, women, or any minority or ethnic group for that matter. It was the school's job to efficiently educate them to step into the roles they were destined to take in the first place. Attending school was not about upward mobility for minority groups. It was about teaching those groups their place in a society dominated by white men. It supported the socially accepted roles of the period and did not seek to find real balance. It was not until the 1960s that social changes caused politicians and corporate leaders in America to re-evaluate the public school system and to encourage its use as an agent of change regarding social mobility (Rury, 2005). At this point, historically, we begin to see the greater inclusion of minority groups in the public school system, access to equitable quality teachers, facilities, and curricula, and a belief that schools could be agents of social change that would provide upward economic mobility for these groups.

The Impact of the Failure of Social Institutions

Where previous historical periods saw the use of the family as the teachers of youth, in the 1800s, the failure of the family structure was already an issue at this point. Families lacked moral training that led to crime and other moral violations within the community. Parents worked in factories where, in the absence of labor laws and unions, they were forced to work long and often erratic hours. "A 60-hour work week was commonplace, and workers had no recourse if they were injured or laid off" (Rury, 2005, p. 143). When adults were absent from the home for this long of a period each week, the young were left to fend for themselves financially, physically, and emotionally. Often older children worked as well and younger children were left to their own devices or in the care of the eldest child at home at the time. Vast

movements to urban areas left parents in this era without the social tools necessary to teach their children how to survive in this different world. "This relocation process put great stress on traditional family structures, which, in turn, had a direct impact on the nation's school legislation" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, 186). Families that had traditionally been farmers were now displaced from their land due to a lack of funds to continue this work or because corporate America invaded these lands to remove the natural resources now necessary for industrialized production. The gap between the wealthy and the poor became exponentially larger in this era and without appropriate adult guidance and without money to buy food or other necessities, poor children often engaged in immoral and criminal behavior.

Schools attempted to stifle this failure in part by implementing courses in home economics that helped establish the role of the parents in homemaking and provide, specifically women, with power to make better consumer-based decisions when at home. "Wishing to professionalize the role of the housewife, home economist experts characterized the new woman as a household manager who was mainly responsible for maintaining household budgets and buying goods for the home" (Spring, 2005, p. 211). This supposed attempt to improve the family unit that was being destroyed by the narratives of industrialization taught homemaking as a science in itself that had established rules for the conduct of the mother and virtues that determined what should be purchased in order to keep a clean and orderly home and to send clean and obedient children off into the world.

The addition of home economics to school curricula in the early 1900s gave women the illusion that they somehow had control over the household and its output. It attempted to make household chores look fun and engaging, much like digital technology does to learning today, and to make the work less like work and more like a social contribution. "Science and

technology would be the key to eliminating household drudgery" (Spring, 2005, p. 212) because women would no longer simply cook and clean like servants. They would engage in decision-making, calorie counting, budget making, and most importantly consumer spending. They would purchase products for the house that made their jobs easier, like washing machines and new ovens that did not require cleaning. These products, produced by the industrial complex, would make their lives easier and provide them more time for leisure. During this leisure time, the women could then engage in educational activities, like reading or study. With these well-educated and well-read women at home, children returned from school to an environment that supported learning and encouraged them to participate in the school curriculum and that taught them the moral and ethical virtues necessary to keep order in an industrialized society.

Poor parents were also unlikely to be able to provide their children with social skills, communication skills, and academic skills that were necessary for success in this modern world. Busy with work and often uneducated or sparsely educated themselves, these parents simply were not equipped to provide their children with the necessary skills at home. In response, schools were responsible for "compensating individuals who lacked social and cultural capital by enabling them to acquire these abilities and to learn the requisite forms of behavior" (Rury, 2005, p. 203). The school environment provided the children with discipline, communication skills, and other soft skills that would be necessary for assimilation into the work environment. "Schooling would provide poor children with information and skills that their families and communities could not" (Rury, 2005, p. 2003). Without the school's interference here, a generation of unskilled and undisciplined workers would be delivered to a system that was not capable of handling it and may have crumbled as a result. Even though this role of schools as a supplement to the American family began prior to the 1950s, it was not until the 1970s that we

see it become a more "cradle-to-grave" enterprise (Rury, 2005) with the development of Head Start programs, after school programs, and even adult education programs.

Perhaps the largest impact on the public school system in this age was the implementation of compulsory education laws. No longer would attending school be a choice for young people and their parents. By 1918, schools in all of the 48 states that existed at that time enacted laws that compelled children to attend school to a certain age. These laws emerged first, to no one's surprise, in the Northeast, the Midwest, and California where large urban areas saw the development of large-scale manufacturing and an increase in migrant workers from different countries that needed to learn English and other communication skills in addition to their work-related skills (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Fearful of the breakdown in the family unit and the possibility of "hordes of uncontrolled children running free in the city streets" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 197), politicians wasted no time in putting the burden of care of these young people on the public school system. Teachers kept these young people all day while their parents worked and taught them the social and academic skills necessary to participate in this modern work environment. It was a win-win situation for everyone. Parents needed their children to be raised with certain skills and knowledge, but were forced to work long hours and could not handle this burden themselves. Corporations needed obedient workers who would blindly follow the rules they established, complete the work required, and ultimately not question the system that enabled the corporate owners to become wealthy off the backs of their poorer laborers. Politicians wanted a reduction in crimes being committed by the rising immigrant population and the young and to keep them off of the streets: out of sight, out of mind. Schools would provide everything that the family could not. The modern public school was born.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it is important to note that the American education agenda was always the social agenda of American culture. The view of the educational system was that it was *our* system so it should reflect our views as a collective community (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). Few dared to encourage a departure from these views. The early colonies in the New World needed to survive and used an educational system, although not public at this point, that would help support their survival in a physically harsh and uncivilized world. It enabled those early Americans to create civilization and to protect the values and the faith they brought with them to this New World. As their communities survived and grew, they used their now-developing public school system to spread their faith and their values. They allowed students from other cultures to enter their system to further this agenda by assimilating them into American culture and deculturalizing them (Spring, 2005). They further purported that the education provided by the public school system would enable poor youth to have a stepping stone to the American Dream that enticed so many of these multi-cultured youth to arrive on American shores in the first place. They taught the skills and the demeanor necessary to be obedient to authority in the modern industrialized world. Now, as we have the first part of the 21st century under our belts, we will see in the coming chapters how the post-modern narrative of individualism is impacting our culture and how Postman's fears about technology have come to fruition. In the coming chapters, we will examine Postman's historical moment where post-modern views that begin to rear their heads to contrast with modern views and look at how it is impacting the educational landscape before moving on to an application of Postman's views to current educational trends.

Chapter 3: Postman and His Historical Moment

Neil Postman was born in New York City in 1931. He spent most of his life in his native New York where he studied at the University of New York and Columbia University. Postman has many claims to fame, including writer, educator, media ecologist, and founder of the Media Ecology Department at New York University. In 1958, Postman began teaching English at San Francisco State University and later transferred to work in the School of Education at New York University where he stayed for the remainder of his academic career. He died in 2003.

Postman's passion was media ecology, a term he coined in 1968. He did most of his research in this field from the 1960s through the 1990s, a period of great technological change in America. He studied the effects of technology on culture by exploring areas including education, religion, the home, and journalism. In his writings, Postman argued, some might say accurately, that the world would become a place much like that in Aldus Huxley's dystopian novel *Brave New World*, where man would not have his freedoms taken from him by a totalitarian regime, but rather would surrender them freely and willingly in an effort to maintain his own pleasure and amusement (Postman, 1985). In his work, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman details how "people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think," much like the world Huxley described (Postman, 1985). He criticizes media, and television specifically, for disguising serious topics and newsworthy items as entertainment so as to make them more palatable for members of a community who have no interest in them otherwise.

It is important to note how Postman defines both medium and technology here because he sees them as two separate things. Technology is the machinery used to complete a particular action – a physical object that is used by man to complete a task. A medium is a use for the

technology. He clearly states that the technology itself is "merely a machine" but a medium is "the social and intellectual environment a machine creates" (Postman, 1985, p. 84). It is not lost here that Postman, heavily influenced by the work of Marshall McLuhan, defines medium in much the same way as McLuhan did. McLuhan's famous adage "The medium is the message" (1964) implies that the medium impacts the delivery of information so much that it actually creates a relationship between it and the message it is being used to deliver. Postman supports that view as well, separating the environment created by the medium from the actual technological device used to create it.

In two of his works, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* and *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Postman describes how technology has changed culture, specifically American culture, because America is primed for the development of the Technopoly that Postman describes more than any other nation. Postman defines Technopoly as "the submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology" (Postman, 1992, p. 52). He cites four specific reasons that America is more primed for this than other nations, including 1) the nature of American character that drives us toward progress, 2) the capitalists of the 19th and 20th centuries, 3) the ability of the technologies created in the 20th century to provide Americans with "convenience, comfort, speed, hygiene, and abundance," and 4) the questioning of old belief systems by Americans as a result of technological progress in the 20th century (Postman, 1992, pp. 53-54). As Americans, it is in our nature to want more, and to want it better and faster than we did in previous generations, as we strive to achieve the always-elusive American Dream.

Although this essay specifically focuses on Postman's views of the American educational system, it is important to note some of the criticisms that Postman makes on other areas of our

social fabric that directly impact his views on education. Postman, along with Weingartner, wrote that, in order to change schools, the communities in which the schools reside must change (1969). Those individual communities can only change in the digital world when national and global issues are acknowledged through communicative practices. He identifies the decline of the Age of Typography as the Age of Television rises to take its place and discusses the many Faustian bargains that humanity will make as people trade text for images. We will choose, in true Huxleyan fashion, to trade long-term genuine knowledge for temporal emotivist entertainment.

One of the issues Postman tackles in his work that is a national and global issue is the news media. The media is one of the critical areas that Postman believes is creating more news than is necessary and that is turning that news into entertainment in order to make money and gain ratings. This is not the first time that a philosopher has criticized the reporting of news. Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau in the mid-1800s said philosophers believe that "all news, as it is called, is gossip and they who edit and read it are old women over their tea" (1854, p. 104-105). To Thoreau, reporting the death of one person or the corruption of one politician or entertainer was enough. Any further reporting of those things, even if they were details of a different person, was simply reporting the same thing for the sake of professing the information. To a philosopher, this was not a proliferation and discussion of ideas, but instead a dissemination of information that could be worthless at best and scandalous at worst. It did not further a philosophical idea or inspire an ethical conversation.

Postman takes this one step further as he evaluates the dissemination of this gossip via image instead of simple text. By incorporating video and photo into news reporting, the news media disguise information as entertainment. Postman says that the best and most harmless

material on television is what viewers would consider its "junk" simply because viewers were aware that it was merely entertainment (Postman, 1985, p. 16). Viewers never expected it to teach them or provide them with information that was both useful and truthful. The news, however, is supposed to provide them with both and instead it disguises its content as entertainment and its opinion as "news" that is taken by the uneducated viewer as accurate and unbiased.

This criticism directly impacts Postman's educational views because this overabundance of information delivered in a 24-hour news cycle demands constant delivery of content. If events of the utmost importance effecting the lives of every viewer have not happened, the news media simply portray the information they have as of utmost importance. They create what Daniel Boorstin called a pseudo-event – an event created strictly for the purpose of gaining the attention of the media (1961). Postman criticized the transition from one piece of worthless "news" to another as the anchor announced it with the words "Now . . . This" (Postman, 1985). These words promised new and engaging content and viable information that was different than the previous. It encouraged viewers to stay tuned to the channel as the story was delivered and continued to develop before their eyes with both an oral recounting of the reporter and video footage, often from the scene of the event. Today, Postman would probably be critical of the words "breaking news" that consistently promise a similar situation for viewers. This barrage of information confuses the viewers and often engages them propagandistically because they do not have the critical tools or the media ecology background to understand the impact of the medium on the messages they receive. Viewers believe the information presented because of the credibility of the journalist revealing it (Postman, 1985). Television itself has created, to use Aristotle's word, an ethos for the anchors on programs. Merely being chosen to be on television

is enough to establish credibility. Whether the journalist has done his or her proverbial homework and investigated the details of the report is of no consequence because the information itself does not have an impact here.

The information itself is brief due the viewers' lack of interest in the specifics of it. It has "no intention of suggesting that any story has any implications" to the viewers (Postman, 1985, p. 103). This, Postman points out, would require the viewers to engage it critically and analytically. They must think about the information, which they may not choose to do or simply may not have time to do as the anchor leads to the next piece with the famous words "Now . . . This." The information lacks substance and a connection to the larger narrative or it is simply one of Boorstin's pseudo-events in the making (1961). It is discussed in a vacuum without narrative ground. It is punctuated with music and other audio-visual bells and whistles to create mood, not because they are necessary for the delivery of the information (Postman, 1985). They are part of the entertainment package created in the same vain as a Hollywood film with actors (in this case journalists, also referred to as "talent" in the field), directors, scripts, and a crew. As a result, the news engages in "anticommunication" whose discourse is Nihilistic, contradictory, and void of logic and reason (Postman, 1985). The result of this, according to Postman is Americans are the most entertained but the least informed people in the developed world (1985). This, Postman believes, is the reason we need to teach and study media ecology in our schools.

Postman also criticizes what media, specifically television, has done to religion. He believes that it undermines faith by making the digital technology and the image Gods in and of themselves (Postman, 1985). Viewers worship the images of the televangelist as he or she presents a religious narrative in the vacuum of information that Postman warns us of in his scholarship. The religious narrative, presented in traditional churches, is one that provides many

with moral and ethical ground. From the stories presented in the text and interpreted by the priest or pastor, those in the congregation are assisted in developing morals and ethics consistent with those of their faith. While present in the church, they engage in a community of learners similar to that of a school environment. They listen to the pastor or priest, like they would a teacher as information is presented. They engage this information with a group of others who are also present in that moment. Discourse takes place as it would in a classroom.

On television, Postman believes viewers engage this information in an isolated environment without the benefit of discourse with others. He cites evangelist Billy Graham who says that television is an extremely powerful tool because it allows for the presentation and spread of the faith to millions of people in multiple locations, effectively breaking down the walls of the church; that he can "preach to millions more than Christ did in his lifetime" (Postman, 1985, p. 118). Foregoing a commentary on the brashness of Graham's comparison of himself to Christ here, I'll instead focus on Postman's belief that this is nothing more than "gross technological naiveté" (Postman, 1985, 118). The delivery of this information, its receipt, its impact on the audience, and thus its message are completely different than they would be if the sermon were delivered and received in person.

In addition, Postman criticizes the message here as well. In church, the message is delivered directly from the text provided and studied by both the pastor or priest and the congregation. It is not, as Postman points out, influenced by the medium of television. The nature of television, and visual media as he views it, necessitates that the information delivered is what the viewer wants, not what the viewer necessarily needs (Postman, 1985). Viewers who are uninspired and not entertained will not tune in to watch. When physically attending church, parishioners would not choose to leave if they were bored for fear that others would chastise

them or scorn their behavior. At home, no other viewers are aware when bored "churchgoers" simply change the channel. Postman criticizes this delivery of religious text in a similar way to that of the delivery of Shakespeare via film and questions whether or not we are destroying a necessary cultural element by doing so, once again reaffirming a need for the study of text over image.

Finally, Postman's views of the influence of television and the image on politics is also noteworthy, especially considering the current climate of "fake news" being perpetrated in today's culture. Postman reflects on his time in the early 1980s when the major politician at the time was President Ronald Reagan. Before Reagan was a governor of California or President of the United States, Postman is quick to point out that he was an actor. Politics, in Postman's view, was another area in which television as a media impacted our choices, in this case, for those who govern our communities and direct our interaction with the world on a global scale. This is especially interesting to note in light of today's political situation where our current president was once a reality television star whose claim to fame was telling individuals on his show that they were fired. Because politics has become entertainment, Postman says that politicians do not need to pursue excellence or to actually be honest; they just must appear to be so (1985). Donald Trump and Ronald Reagan before him both entered their respective political races with performance backgrounds. They knew how to entertain the masses of Americans who were disillusioned with boring, old, stuffy politicians. Their background as entertainers enabled them to get elected in a digital world that requires, not intelligence, but the appearance of it, not experience, but the ability to engage through entertainment.

He is also critical of politics in the digital era because they have become commercialized. The person who wins the election is the one who is the most visible and who has the most

television commercials or, in today's case, the most Twitter followers, Facebook friends, or YouTube clips. Postman says that in 1980s America, "The fundamental metaphor for political discourse is the television commercial" (1985, p. 126). Because money is needed to pay for advertising to get elected, politicians become commodities: products to be bought and sold to the highest bidder instead of men and women working for the betterment of their constituents. Because of television, digital media, and ultimately the prevalence of the image over text, the person who gets elected to public office is not the most qualified but instead the most photogenic, the person who appears to be likable, and ultimately the person who is painted in the greatest light because of his or her entertainment value on the digital media.

Postman calls upon us once again in this social realm to be aware of the impact of media on politics. Television is, as are all current digital media, present centered (Postman, 1985). What happens on it occurs in the moment and is detached from history and future implication. It is about the now. For this reason as well, Postman is critical of our educational system that supports these media without the balance of historical study, literary study, and ethical study. He argues that the image-based technologies actually create the Orwellian Ministry of Culture, which he believes is more Huxleyan in reality because we do not fight its adoption as Orwell suggested we would (Postman, 1985). We are encouraged to watch and to be distracted from the real issues at hand and we embrace it rather than argue with it. We sacrifice real knowledge of politics, history, and ultimately the actions of our politicians for our own entertainment. Postman believes that our educational system could offer a balance to this as well that would enable the next generation to engage the world with a smarter world view – a way that makes them wade through the distractions and the show to find the ultimate truth from which they can make educated decisions and participate in real discourse.

Postman's Educational Views

As the digital age began in the 1960s, Postman initially embraced using digital technology, especially in the classroom. He believed that teaching with new and emerging media was important within the school system so that students learned how to use the new technologies and to see their educational value (Postman, 1961). Schools would be doing a disservice to students if they did not incorporate emerging technologies. In his book, *Television and the Teaching of English,* he adopted the ideas of Marshall McLuhan and Edmund Carpenter who called media studies "the new languages" (Carpenter & McLuhan, 1960). He continued developing these ideas in subsequent works, including the development of a textbook series that helped junior and senior high school teachers teach the concept of media literacy during the large movement toward educational reform in the 1960s.

As a trained educator with a doctorate in education, Postman was critical of the influence of media on several aspects of American culture, one of which was education. With television as an emerging media in the 1960s, many, including Postman at the time, believed that this new form of media would be a positive addition to American culture. Educational theorists rushed to encourage curriculum development that would incorporate this new medium and teach children how to engage it. Postman was one of those theorists. In one of his early works, *Teaching as a Subversive* Activity, he encouraged schools to embrace change as the "constant, accelerating, ubiquitous [and] . . . most striking characteristic of the world we live in" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. xiii). He believed that change was unavoidable and that the best thing public schools could do was to embrace it and be on the forefront of it. Students were clearly being left behind because schools were using antiquated methods and technology that were inferior as we approached the 21st century. If they were taught to deal with this change and these

emerging technologies, like television, then students could be better off as they attempted to survive in the modern world (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). If schools did not evolve and embrace these changes, they could not adequately prepare their students to adapt in a rapidly changing technological state. Schools would quickly make themselves irrelevant in the changing world because of their failure to adapt.

Postman's criticism of schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s was not limited to the structure or the curriculum. He was also extremely critical of teachers, which is ironic considering his position. In his book, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, with Charles Weingartner, Postman wrote a list of 16 proposal statements that, in his view at that moment, would enable schools to weed out the old fashioned teachers who were not capable of engaging students with the new "language" of visual media. Among the list, two are noteworthy considering the stance he took later in life. He suggested that teachers should be tested and classified by their abilities and that their classifications be made public (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). This is a directly opposite view of what he says in the later 1970s and 80s about teachers and about standardized testing as a whole. In addition, he wrote that all classes should be electives and teachers should only be paid if their classes are interesting enough to students that they show up. This, too, is the opposite of his later stance on education as entertainment. It would seem that the teachers who would have the largest classes of present students would be those who were most entertaining and who taught the subjects that were of most interest to and least work for students.

He was also openly supportive of the use of digital technology in the classroom. He states, "We'd use all – or whatever is relevant at any particular juncture – of the emerging 'educational technology,' but only to help learners learn strategies for survival in a changing

world" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). He referred to this view and the others listed here previously, at that time, as the "new education" because it incorporated new technologies, methodologies, and pedagogies. He felt that this movement was necessary for students to be successful in the "nuclear space age" that was upon them. He advocated for a more skill-based curriculum that taught students concepts necessary for the work world, which was also contrary to his later philosophies.

Finally, Postman looked at the inner city schools of the 1960s and 70s as places where the problems of the inner city could potentially be corrected. He was critical of inner city schools that merely put students in rows to develop discipline and promote order. He suggested that schools produce clothing, food, and décor that could be sold or "otherwise distributed – in the community" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 158). He suggested that the schools take on social roles that would "minimize the continuation of bureaucratic agencies" that were presently responsible for dealing with social problems like hunger, lack of clothing, or lack of economic funds on the part of parents (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p.159). These failures of the family, at that point in American history, were largely taken care of by government agencies or community churches who stepped up to provide the necessary services and materials. He states "A school system of this type has the potential for becoming one of the most useful social-political instruments possible for dealing fruitfully with the problems of the city as they presently exist and as it seems they will probably develop in the future" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p.159). Postman openly suggests that the school become a social service agency to supplement the government agencies that were handling the failure of the most important social organization in America: the family. Postman radically departs from this view later, as I will discuss in the upcoming sections.

Changing Direction: Technology and the Erosion of Childhood

Postman's views changed in the late 1970s and early 1980s when he came to the realization that television and other emerging media were being used so much at home that it was not necessary to "teach" them in school or even necessarily to use them in teaching at all. After two decades of supporting the inclusion of media into the English classroom and becoming, along with his colleagues like McLuhan and Carpenter, one of the foremost experts in the field, Postman shifted his views, calling for a more culturally protective curriculum (Postman, 1985, 1992). The number of televisions in each household had increased and children were spending much more time in front of the screens with programming developed specifically for them.

Since children were watching so much television at home, he believed educators needed to focus more on classical education in content, pedagogy, and methodology to preserve both the knowledge of the humanities and the skills of reading and writing. In his works *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* and *The Disappearance of Childhood,* both published in the early 1980s, Postman shows how "television reveals the secrets we previously had kept from children as they sat, sequestered in the schoolroom; in revealing all, he argued that television blurs the distinction between childhood and adulthood characteristic of print culture" (Strate, 2003-2004, p. 346). The line between childhood and adulthood was eroding and it was up to schools to stop the erosion. Schools, he argued, should help preserve the cultural elements reserved strictly for children that are not shown in the programs they watch on television. By doing this, they would effectively save childhood from the onslaught of adult information that was being hurled at children through image-centered media.

Postman argued that curriculum centered on imaged-based technology, specifically on television at that time, was attention-centered, nonpunitive, affect-centered, present-centered,

image-centered, nonhierarchical, and isolating (Postman, 1979; Strate, 2014). In his book, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity,* Postman called for schools to engage learning from a thermostatic view so that they could "adjust themselves in such a way as to restore balance to a culture" (Strate, 2014, 33). This required schools to create curriculum that was counterproductive to the current social and political agendas of the nation. People expected children to use emerging media in their classrooms, and corporations and politicians jumped on the bandwagon to provide content and funding for programs like Christopher Whittle's Channel One that debuted in high schools in the early part of 1990. Postman disagreed with all of these practices and saw them supporting a cultural shift that continued to deprive children of childhood by forcing adulthood on them too soon while also substituting entertainment for real education.

Postman is critical of the public school system because, in part, he believes it is helping to bring an end to childhood when it is one of the only places in society specifically geared to supporting the growth and nurturing of the concept (1982). In other areas of society, for example, behavior, language, and clothing, the difference between children and adults has basically become nil. Children dress as risqué as their adult counterparts by wearing make-up before they reach the age of ten and speak to inappropriately to adults, often calling them by their first names as if they were contemporaries instead of their elders who deserve respect. Compulsory public education in this country has the ability to counter the social issues that seek to destroy childhood by offering a safe place for kids to be kids and yet once again the school system has chosen to engage the narrative of society and push children to grow up faster by constantly pushing a vocational curriculum where students are encouraged to decide what they want to do when they grow up as early as elementary school.

Postman believes that childhood is a creation of culture – a result of nurture, not nature. There is no biological necessity for childhood. It is a construct of our culture that divides information and action appropriate for the young and the old that is based largely on access to information via printed material. Childhood is "analogous to language learning" (Postman, 1982, p. 144). It is the act of learning to read that helps propel children into adulthood. The biological basis for childhood, specifically the process of puberty, has no realization unless the social construct brings it forth and nurtures it (Postman, 1982). Otherwise, it happens with little social regard. "If a culture is dominated by a medium that requires the segregation of the young in order that they learn unnatural, specialized and complex skills and attitudes, then childhood, in one form or another, will emerge, articulate, and indispensable" (Postman, 1982, p. 144). Childhood emerged as a direct result of the limitation of information by adults specifically because they could limit it. When children could not read it, they could not have access to it. As children learned to read, they were gradually introduced to more information as it was deemed appropriate by the adults in their lives. Learning to read, for young children, was the key to a treasure trove of narratives that helped them to cross over from youth to adulthood. It was a rite of passage. Visual media, according to Postman, has changed this. Because the information is shown visually and discussed orally on television and the internet, reading is no longer the key to unlocking this information. The treasure trove is unlocked, the lid is open, and the visual information is available for the taking with little recourse for adults who may still attempt to keep it from them. The line between adulthood and childhood is blurred here.

Childhood was, in a large part, created by the concept of literacy. Becoming literate was a step into the world of adulthood where all of the secrets kept by adults were at once revealed to children who were now able to decode them once they learned how to read. During the Middle

Ages, there was little difference between children and adults because literacy was not yet taught to all through schools. "For somewhat similar reasons the adult-child is emerging as normal in our own culture" because literacy is no longer necessary to learn those secrets (Postman, 1982, p. 99). Postman refers to this as the "adultification" of youth and blames emerging visual technologies on its progress (1982). He also refers to the "childification of adults" as another problem created by technology. Because materials presented on visual media are not challenging and do not engage the mind the same way text does, a lack of reading challenging texts written on an adult reading level keeps adults from reaching the appropriate critical skill level that enables them to engage their world in an analytical way.

How does this impact the public school system then? Postman believes that "As the distinction between childhood and adulthood becomes less marked, as children less and less have to *earn* adulthood, as less and less is there anything for them to *become*, the compulsory nature of schooling begins to appear arbitrary" (1982, p. 140). Children will not be expected to work to earn their place in an adult society. They will lack moral and ethical goals and instead become focused only on learning the necessities required to earn a living and take their place in the consumer-driven world. It will be unnecessary for them to attend school because they will have all of the same information available to them that is available to adults. There will be no demarcation between children and adults and all can operate in the same informational space.

The media today promotes "the unseating of childhood through their form and context" and reflects "its decline in their content" (Postman, 1982, p.120). When asked to read difficult materials in high school, students are often incapable of doing so or they refuse to do so because it is too hard. Many lack the vocabulary and the syntactical skill to decode the author's words. Moreover, a lifetime of exposure to more screens than text has caused their ability to read

beyond the literal to be eroded at best, destroyed at worst. "Language is an abstraction about experience, whereas pictures are concrete representations of experience" (Postman, 1982, p. 73). Language requires a different level of engagement and interpretation that pictures do not. Instead, they seek to not read at all because it becomes too hard, and thus too time consuming. Reading requires interpretation, analysis, and criticism to understand and enjoy. Television and the Internet do not. If they do read, they choose to engage in texts that are of a less challenging reading level and often at the elementary level. Even adults, who should seek more sophisticated pieces, are drawn to the Young Adult category of fiction, enjoying the ease of reading popular texts like Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* instead of the more challenging and thought provoking *1984* by George Orwell, *A Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, or *Brave New World* by Aldus Huxley. Those texts require a careful read by a disciplined and critical mind, and while Collins' work, written to sound like a screenplay for a film, is entertaining, it provides little challenge for the unlearned mind.

Put simply, a focus on images has given our children access to information they should not have while at the same time dumbing down the information that our adults should have. When there is no boundary, there is no reason for children to think they need to go to school or to learn anything they do not wish to learn. Postman cites Cicero, Descartes, Bacon, and others who believe that education should be used as a "defense against culture" (Postman, 1988, p. 22). While his approach is not new, the necessity of hearing its call may be more important now than ever, as the emerging media slowly erases the boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

Postman believes that the classical trivium created by medieval educators was created for the purpose of teaching students how to think and learn in a general sense and that they clearly understood the importance of language to all disciplines. All subjects are discourse and "almost

all education is language education" (Postman, 1988, p. 23). In order for a student to be successful in any subject, that student must learn the language used to converse in that subject in order for discourse about the subject to take place. If one does not know the terminology used in a chemistry class, one cannot engage in effective discussion on the subject. Identifying words and definitions that are key terms in the subject offer an entrance into the conversation and serve as a method for decoding and ultimately learning about the subject, according to Postman (1988). Education is a rhetorical act that must be done in an environment where one can engage in conversation with others.

Postman supports education as a communicative act done in a communicative environment. Learning is what takes place in the space between the student, his or her peers, and the teacher where dialogue leads to discovery. Postman's views on the importance of media ecology study, which he also refers to as enabling students to develop a strong "crap detector" in a world full of information (1969) are not lost here when we consider education a communicative act. Postman defines media ecology as "the study of transactions among people, their messages, and their message systems" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 139). It is simply the study of the communication technology environment and, in a world of excess information, students are often lost in the communicative milieu, making the integration of media ecology in curriculum more valuable. The teacher in this course becomes the compass necessary to direct students to the information they both want and need.

As a result of Postman's belief in McLuhan's statement that "the medium is the message" (1964), he spent the majority of his career advocating for the development of media ecology programs that would help students understand the impact of media on culture. Without the knowledge of each medium's action on its users and their messages, Postman believed that

students were entering into a world largely unarmed and vulnerable to the media and its impact (Postman, 1988, p. 33). Not only would the message be impacted by the medium, but also the audience would be significantly impacted by the way the message was delivered. This was Postman's belief and fear as he watched the public school system, what he believed to be the last place that could preserve and protect culture, buckle beneath the weight of the technological world.

As he worked to suggest elements of a comprehensive media ecology curriculum, Postman expressed that we must abandon our "Futile attempts to make children intelligent, and concentrate our attention on helping them avoid being stupid" (Postman, 1988, p. 87). We must treat stupidity much like a doctor teaches us how to avoid the common cold. A focus on media ecology in the school system becomes the vitamin C, the preventative hygiene, and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle that enables students to avoid the illness of stupidity like the aforementioned helps us avoid getting a cold. The teacher prescribes the method, much like a doctor. Stupidity, in Postman's view, is a behavior that is avoidable through work, study, and discipline. Stupidity "is not something we have; it is something that we do" (Postman, 1988, p. 88). Technology is not the medicine that will cure the illness of disengagement in schools as believed by those in the education profession. It may in fact help the spread of the disease of ignorance by encouraging apathy, creating less challenging ways of engaging subject material, and ultimately not requiring the reading of challenging text that will develop critical and analytical thinking skills.

Postman believes that changes arising from imaged-based and digital technologies have aided in the disappearance of childhood because the image is becoming more powerful a medium than the printed word. The printed world kept many things in terms of language and content

deemed inappropriate for children away from them. Printed words "had a monopoly on both attention and intellect, there being no other means, besides the oral tradition, to have access to public knowledge" (Postman, 1985, p. 60). Unless children could read, they were denied access into this adult world of text, and even when they were taught how to read, the complexity of the text was only revealed to them gradually as they learned more and more difficult words. Children were taught more complex words as they aged and were introduced to different topics through text when the adults believed they were ready to handle them intellectually and emotionally. Reading becomes a key needed to access the door to adulthood.

This is not true for the visual media. Visual media needs no teaching to decode it. It has no filter, and, unless adults take the visual media from children, there are no other ways to stop them from gaining access to information that, in previous generations, would have been considered inappropriate. Watching television not only requires no skills but also develops no skills. As Damerall points out, 'No child or adult becomes better at watching television by doing more of it. What skills are required are so elemental that we have yet to hear of a television viewing disability" (Postman, 1982, p. 79). Similar commentary could be made about the Internet and personal computer devices today. Children as young as one can successfully operate an iPad, or other tablet, or a smart phone. While they may not be able to use the keyboard to type literate text, they can touch the pictures that represent the apps on the phone, unlock the phone, make a call, and Facetime or Skype, since understanding text is not required for these actions. In his era, Postman claimed that "Everything is for everybody" because of television (1982, p. 79). The same can be said in the 21st century where images created in the world of television have been taken to the next level on computers, personal devices, and the Internet.

Postman's Views on Digital Media

Postman was extremely critical of the children's program *Sesame Street* because he felt that it, along with news programs like 60 minutes, were the most dangerous programs on television (1985). *Sesame Street*, he believed, was the beginning point where the line between education and entertainment began to blur. When "education" was put on television in a visual medium, the "students" were taught that all learning should be done under the guise of fun with little effort and reflection on their part. *Sesame Street* "does not encourage children to love school or anything about school. It encourages them to love television" (Postman, 1985, p. 144).

Postman was also critical of the program because parents used it to justify leaving small children in front of the screen for hours on end, often unattended. The television became a babysitter that used visuals to disguise entertainment as engagement and not provide any opportunity for dialogue. Parents were, in Postman's words, "relieved" from the "responsibility of teaching their pre-school children how to read" (1985, p. 142). Ironically enough, while the television was given the responsibility of teaching children because unwilling parents wanted to attend to their own tasks instead of teaching their children, today's popular medium, the Internet, has convinced parents that they are unable to teach their children as effectively as the digital technology. The Internet offers access to every ounce of information ever produced and countless applications that, in the form of games, can teach children far more skills in a shorter time than parents ever could. It neglects, however, to teach children that some of that information is inappropriate, unnecessary, superfluous, or false. It also neglects to evaluate whether the children are learning knowledge or skills or merely mastering the concepts of the game. Postman expressed this view early on in his scholarship as well when he wrote that we should be wary of gaming because of "the heavy emphasis often placed on winning, which may

mislead the player as to the real objectives of learning" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 191). Players become caught up in the short-term action of winning instead of the long-term action of learning.

While programs like *Sesame Street* were supposedly teaching children to love learning and to engage them in the art of learning, what Postman says it was really teaching them was to love learning only if it comes in the form of entertainment (1985). Traditional classrooms offer the opportunity to engage in conversation about topics. They, by nature, require their inhabitants to engage the thoughts and ideas of the Other. Educational television and programs online do not require students to attend to outside narratives, nor do they encourage students to engage with anyone outside of the room, if at all.

The result of this type of learning was sporadic knowledge. "'Knowing' the facts took on a new meaning, for it did not imply that one understood implications, backgrounds, or connections . . . [It meant] knowing *of* lots of things, not knowing *about* them" (Postman, 1985, 71). Children grew up having heard of historical people and knowing some historical facts, but because they were merely mentioned in a fleeting moment on video, they did not have any real depth of knowledge about any of them. They had a familiarity with the subject, but they were unsure how they were connected to other concepts or the implications of these concepts on other situations. For example, they knew the Civil War happened and they knew Robert E. Lee was involved, but they lacked the depth of knowledge of the subject to see how Lee impacted the war effort and what the implications of the war were for both the north and the south at that time and in the future. They only skimmed the surface of knowledge on the subject and they lack the connective information that brings these events, people, and ultimately the repercussions of the actions involved together in a way that is valuable in the long-term to the creation of narrative.

Postman believes that television itself is a curriculum, but albeit a dangerous one. He warns us of, what he calls, the commandments of a television curriculum. First, television requires no prerequisites (Postman, 1985). No prior knowledge is necessary for "students" to understand what is being presented on television. Each television episode operates as its own individual educational package and does not, in most cases, connect to information in prior episodes or will be necessary for future episodes. It does not require attendance nor does it result in the giving of a grade or any other evaluative measure to assure that students have gained the knowledge or skills presented.

The second commandment, which Postman calls "Thou shalt introduce no perplexity," reminds us of the simple presentations given on television (1985, p. 147). No difficult or terribly critical information can be presented in this entertainment format because, when difficult material is presented, it cannot be presented as fun or entertaining. If the "student" is challenged too much, he or she will simply change the channel because they are not forced to attend to something that is simply too hard for them to learn without serious intellectual work. The perception of work seriously impedes one's ability to have fun and is avoided at all costs in the digital environment.

Finally, Postman's third commandment of a television curriculum is that they "avoid exposition like the ten plagues visited upon Egypt" (Postman, 1985, p. 148). Television programs, if they wish to continue to earn ratings, must avoid using any of the traditional methods of "reasoned discourse" like discussions or arguments. These forms of discourse are not entertaining and do not require the level of theatrical engagement that television supports. Exposition requires too much time and too much effort and does not produce the immediate gratification that appeals to television watchers.

While Postman is critical of television and media use in the classroom, he does not deny that they are educational. He merely shows how television has "a curriculum and agenda of its own, one that runs counter to the curriculum of traditional schooling, a curriculum without prerequisites, perplexity, or exposition" (Strate, 2014, p. 126). Postman supports the concept that learning is something that takes place over time and requires the building of both knowledge and skills in order to achieve. Learning is not done in a vacuum and it requires prior knowledge, or what Umberto Eco referred to as "background books" (Eco, 1998). Without these background books, this prior knowledge and experience, students cannot connect to prior learning and understand new information. They do not see how learning any one subject is important to the study of others so that they can understand its implications and limitations. Material that is delivered in a digital environment is packaged so as to not require contextualization. Programs on television, or in the case of current trends, apps on an iPad or laptop, often do not require prior knowledge. They are episodic in nature and can be engaged without doing the episode before, offering students a quicker view of the information at the cost of depth of knowledge. Lessons are designed to stand alone and offer instant gratification for students who cannot attend to any one task for a long period of time, especially when that task is perceived as work.

Postman criticized this extensively when he discussed the "dangers" of viewing *Sesame Street* because it allowed parents to "justify allowing a four- or five-year-old to sit transfixed in front of a television screen for unnatural periods of time" (Postman, 1985, p 142). The implication that all learning can and in fact should be fun at all times changed the way public schools operate because, in Postman's view, it caused children and their parents to expect entertainment in order to engage in learning. Postman was critical of *Sesame Street* because it tricked adults into believing that it was good for children to watch because the content was

"educational." The problem with this logic according to Postman is that, by allowing their children to watch this program, parents unwittingly changed the way their children learned. Children left their fun, entertaining, mostly short, and not interconnected lessons provided by singing puppets like Elmo and Big Bird to arrive at schools taught by real people who asked them to engage in reading, writing, and other more challenging tasks that required significantly more work. This was the point where children really began to disengage from public schools as we know them.

Postman calls the classroom a "space for social interaction" and calls education through the use of digital technology on video screens a "private reserve" (Postman, 1985, p. 143). By providing students with devices in the classroom, including tablets, laptops, and other visual devices, the classroom space changes. Instead of interacting with peers and teachers, students work alone, focusing on screens in front of them. When watching educational material on the screen, "the viewer develops a personal space, a cocoon surrounding the screen and the individual" in which "the viewer created their own sense of place wherever they are watching a screen" (Hardenbergh, 2010, p. 174). In this sense, learning becomes an act of autonomy instead of one of plurality. This is ironic in a sense because proponents of digital technology in the classroom claim that this technology breaks down the walls of the classroom and enables students to go anywhere in the world at any time to interact with others in different parts of the globe. The reality is that digital technology cannot really take the students there. It merely gives the illusion that students and teachers are in control of their locality when in reality they are not.

Conclusion

Postman was critical and evaluative of his own work and was not above correcting his views if he saw fit. As evidenced by his early scholarship of the 60s and 70s, Postman embraced

digital and image-based technologies, much like many of us have done when the newest things are revealed to us. He was blinded by the allure of the new media that enabled so much information to be delivered to so many places so quickly and that helped us to see places and experience them even if we could not physically be there. At first, these technologies entice us by making us believe that they can do the jobs we do faster, better, and ultimately more efficiently than we can alone. They give us the illusion that they are showing us things and giving us experiences that may not otherwise be possible for us due to cost, time, or distance. It is only after time for reflection and analysis that we can see the Faustian bargains that Postman tells us we make. Postman became aware of those bargains in the later 1970s and 80s and revisited his philosophical views to reflect this new level of enlightenment based on his experiences in the classroom and his social observations. As I move into the next section, Postman's views will again be visited as I look at some of the current educational trends that, based on his scholarship, he may feel are counterproductive to the balanced view of education that he supports.

Chapter 4: Digital Technology and the Invasion of the Post-Modern Narrative

Free public schools were developed originally in part to help train young people to read, write, and learn basic math as languages through which they engaged the world as competent members of a democratic society. As society changed with the advent of industrialization, that narrative changed and became more limited to the preparation of students for careers. Postman believes that this narrative shift occurred as a result of modernity in the 19th century (Postman, 1999) as schools attempted to more efficiently train students and focus on their progress. Schools became places to train workers so that they could ultimately get jobs as cogs in the machine of the American Industrial Complex. Classical philosophy and the reading of literature, and the humanities in general, were not necessary for this new role of American youths, so they were lessened at best and abandoned at worst (Postman, 1999). Kids needed math and science because those disciplines taught them what we could make and build and how to do it. The humanities just taught students why they should or should not do things and enabled them to analyze and criticize how the things they did impacted them and their fellow man. This was deemed unnecessary. Corporations and politicians could guide the efforts of the nation in these respects. It was not necessary for mere workers to know why or to evaluate the benefits of their actions. They should blindly trust and obey the powers that be and the public school system supported this mindset. What really mattered in the industrial age was whether or not we could do it, and if we could, then we should (Postman, 1999). Unfortunately, this narrative has changed only slightly since then and it has not changed for the better.

That change occurred in the mid to later half of the 20th century. After WWII, schools that were originally supposed to focus on the values and narratives of their local states and municipalities became increasingly more focused on a federal agenda. The federal government,

as a result of the Cold War, began pushing a national academic agenda, focusing specifically on science and math, that would help to propel the United States to the forefront of the weapons race with the Soviets (Spring 2005). Additionally, in the decades following the launching of Sputnik by the Soviets, American children were also encouraged to take up the sciences so that America could launch its own satellites and eventually astronauts to the moon and beyond. Only through a national education agenda could our nation accomplish these lofty tasks. This agenda was an effective one for both students and the nation until the early to mid 1980s when the job market began to change.

This time, students were encouraged to take courses that would train them for college where they would ultimately study to earn professionalized degrees that would earn them more money while also serving the national needs for scientists, mathematicians, and engineers. Industrial jobs, specifically those in manufacturing and steel production, were moving to other countries and professional jobs were the ones where students could expect to earn a living wage. Education was still the means to the end of a career, but the type of career available had changed requiring a slight change in the educational narrative.

In *The End of Education*, Postman criticizes political leaders of that period because they helped to drive the movement that students should be taught to read and write "exclusively for the purpose of increasing their economic productivity," a concept he believes directly opposed the views of our founding fathers (1995, p.13). While students could, in the earlier part of the 20th century, be expected to gain a financial edge over their peers without a high school and/or college diploma, those benefits were rapidly coming to an end as we approached the new millennium.

Creating Consumers in 20th Century America: A focus on the "Earning" in Learning

Students have traditionally been sold a bill of goods by the educational system that, if they studied hard and did their homework, they too could get a job to earn enough money to purchase all of the expensive things they desired. Of course, through the purchase of these material possessions, they would ultimately find enlightenment and self-worth, thus exemplifying Baudrillard's theory that "whatever it is that man lacks is invested in the object" (1996, p. 82). These material possessions became symbols of the power and status of their owners (Baudrillard, 1996). This narrative of consumerism becomes the end for students who now begin to see school as a means to the end of buying things that make them seem wealthy or important or that provide them with the feeling of superiority to others.

It becomes easier to appear to be successful by showing off the material things that one purchases instead of looking at the hard work one has done. The world of objects and commodities should be something that stands separate from the self (Lasch, 1984). Space should exist between what we purchase and who we are, but as Lasch points out, objects take "the appearance of a mirror of the self" (Lasch, 1984). As a result, we look at our possessions as reflections of who we are and we judge others by what they own not what they do. One is now deemed successful because of what one has purchased, not because of what one has learned or accomplished through hard work. The purpose for going to school, in this example, "is to prepare the young for competent entry into the economic life of a community so that they will continue to be devoted consumers" (Postman, 1999, p. 126). This narrative is shortsighted because it only provides a reward in the short term, as long as those material possessions last. They have no value once they are consumed and they have no meaning to subsequent generations who may receive them at a later date (Baudrillard, 1996). Once the possessions are

no longer in style or useful, new possessions must be purchased to replace them, which will require another monetary investment. This continues to feed the machine of consumerism and requires young people to have jobs that make increasingly more money so that they can afford to continuously consume goods.

Postman believed that "education is supposed to free the young from the bondage of crude materialism" (Postman, 1995, p. 35), not help them to participate in it. It is through education in school that students should learn how to avoid a focus on the self and on materialism and instead focus on how to cohesively exist with and for the other as we work together to improve the world around us. Unfortunately, the 20th century college-based narrative that supported public school learning cannot be supported by the 21st century world. It is no longer possible to promise students that a solid education will lead them to high paying jobs. Postman believes that "modern information technologies have rendered schools entirely irrelevant" (1995, p. 38). The career narrative no longer provides a reason to go to school when schooling is not required for all jobs, when many jobs provide career training as part of the employment process, and when digital technology has enabled students to merely look up information they want or need to know in the moment by using Google.

The biggest problem with this is that students have now become disengaged with the public school system because, in their view, it can no longer deliver on its promise to prepare them for economic wealth and, since that was the only narrative that provided a reason for their education, they feel abandoned. They question why they work so hard in all Advanced Placement classes when their peers play sports or drop out to become pop stars and earn more money in less time with less perceived work than they do. They view this as a broken promise

on the part of the American education system that offered them social mobility and a shot at the American Dream if they studied hard and performed well academically.

A study in the early part of the new millennium questioned participants about their perceptions on going to school. While many agreed that the purpose was to "increase people's happiness and enrich their lives culturally and intellectually" four out of five also agreed that it was more important for public schools to provide students the "tools they need to improve their status" and to become financially independent (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004, p. 13). For this reason, schools are often viewed as "failing" because they have not provided the skills necessary for all students to achieve independent wealth and financial success. Schools are evaluated based on their ability to connect students to jobs or to further schooling that will lead to better paying jobs. They are not evaluated on whether or not their students become good parents, good citizens, or good people, for that cannot be measured by a standardized test.

Students in the public school system are viewed as markets in and of themselves because the purpose of their education is to turn them in to consumers. For this reason, Postman says, children as young as middle school age "have inflicted upon them what is called 'career training,' a clear symptom of the idea that they are merely miniature adults" (1999, p. 125). A focus strictly on career training short changes students because the career training replaces activities that encourage creativity, problem solving, moral and ethical debates, and multi-disciplinary studies that help students become adaptable life-long members of a democratic society. It also pushes students into making more adult decisions earlier than they should. Instead of enjoying their youth and having romanticized dreams of becoming firefighters and astronauts when they grow up, they are doing aptitude and interest evaluations that push them to study to be engineers and doctors. These careers may or may not be of interest to the student and

they may also not be realistic. Not all students have the same aptitudes nor do they have the same level of academic work ethic. Just because a standardized test indicates a student has an aptitude for medicine does not mean that the student has the stomach to work with blood and body parts, the appropriate demeanor for a patient's bedside, or the work ethic to spend years dedicated to the study of the craft that is necessary to obtain medical licensure. Again, these are things that cannot be measured by a test and are, incidentally, taught through and encouraged by more humanities-based curriculum.

The Emergence of a New Narrative – Post-Modernity Emerges

In post-modern America, the petit-narrative is king. Each person has his or her own personal agenda that they believe is important and independent of the agendas of everyone else they engage in a daily basis. They have little knowledge or appreciation for the narrative of others and they do not believe that they should be required to participate in anything that does not immediately interest or benefit them in some way. This narrative that guides daily behavior is not being resisted by our public school system. In fact, the narrative is being supported to dangerous levels that at best will produce citizens that have no knowledge of things that do not interest them. At worst, it will produce selfish citizens who have complete disregard for the Other and who operate in a world where the Augustinian concept of being their brothers' keepers is ignored and repulsed.

These petit narratives combined with the emerging technologies being used by our public schools have created the perfect storm to support the emotivism of 21st century youth whose desire for instant gratification needs to be met on a daily, if not minute-by-minute basis. Technological philosophers in support of these emerging technologies in the classroom view the problems with today's schools as rhetorical. Today's practicing educators are told that they are

"digital immigrants" who are just learning the emerging technologies while their students are "digital natives" who have grown up with this technology and can, in most cases use it better than their immigrant teachers (Prensky, 2001). If this is true, then the reason that students are not learning in today's public schools is because they speak a different language than their teachers. So how then can teachers learn to speak this language and, if they do, will it better serve their students?

Unfortunately, this view is beginning to expire and ultimately prove erroneous as we look toward the 2020s. Marc Prensky, the man who coined the terms "digital native" and "digital immigrant" did so as we began the 21st century. At that point, many of the nation's educators to whom Prensky referred as "digital immigrants" were on the cusp of retirement, having served 30 or more years in the classroom. Prensky defined "digital natives" as those who grew up watching *Sesame Street* and music videos on MTV in the days when the Buggles told us that "Video Killed the Radio Star," and playing video games in the early days of Nintendo.

Those "natives," including me and the majority of my colleagues, are now the veteran teachers in our classrooms and are speaking the language with our students daily, yet this has not changed motivation, engagement, or levels of academic success. Students have been given devices to use in the classroom and at home, they are being encouraged to engage in social media as a method of learning to effectively communicate through writing, and they are making student films and video game projects instead of writing lengthy research compositions, but in many cases students still are not engaged. Coursework is still void of foundational narrative, as Postman pointed out years ago, and despite the entertainment value of the technology being incorporated, it has proven no more engaging in the classroom than many previous strategies.

One could argue that Prensky's term "digital native" does not even accurately describe today's 21st century public school students. "Digital natives" grew up surrounded by digital technology so they are comfortable using technology and making it fit their needs. They carefully choose the device or the program that best suits a given task at hand. While they embrace digital technology, they ultimately see it as having a place in their world but not necessarily being the only thing to use and they do not view all digital technologies the same way. They recognize that sometimes a text message is better than an email, but that sometimes the opposite is true. They know how to make technology fit their task and they embrace it reflectively. Digital technology is a tool that they use for productivity – to get a job done. It is a Microsoft Word program that enables them to write a paper more efficiently or a laptop that helps to process video and audio for a film. Digital natives may have engaged television as a curriculum in itself, as Postman stated (1985), but it was one that nonetheless required people to gather round about it and at least watch the same thing while seated in the same room. The conversation during and after the program was about the shared experience of everyone in the room watching the same program. This provided an opportunity for communal reflection of, to use Postman's word, the "curriculum" television provided and required viewers to be present in that rhetorical moment to engage it. While digital natives may be impacted by digital technology and have different philosophical views related to it when compared to their digital immigrant parents, they still for the most part make the technology work for them and are capable of engaging and evaluating the technology in a way that calls to mind the media ecology studies that Postman promoted. They are also able to engage the world without technology when a situation warrants.

Today's students are more like digital servants. Where digital natives found a use *for* the technology, digital servants are used *by* the technology, seemingly without their awareness. They lack the critical ability to discern that the digital technology is impacting them. Postman feared that television would enable this to occur, but in fact, the rise of personal digital devices has fed this trend far more than television ever could. Television's impact was limited by its lack of portability and its one-way communicative properties. Personal digital devices, like iPads and Smartphones, are the appendages, or what MIT Professor Sherry Turkle calls "a phantom limb" (2017), of digital servants who believe in the illusion of global connectivity that they provide. The mere existence of the digital technology drives the actions of the digital servant who may engage in activities and behaviors that they otherwise would not just because they have the digital technology in their hands at every moment. The devices become their primary method of communication and they flood the world with a barrage of useless information in the Huxleyan fashion that Postman feared (1985). What would have been termed as "gossip" by digital immigrants and even digital natives becomes "news" to the digital servant who waits patiently glued to her Smartphone to see the latest video posted by a Kardashian on Instagram. Then, after viewing it, she immediately engages this "information" and acts upon it by examining the fashions and behaviors and attempting to emulate them. She then posts a video of herself wearing the same outfit, attempting to become "famous" or at least noticeable to her "followers" who she mistakes for people who actually care about her. The personal digital device she has in her possession commands this type of action and this action becomes the digital servant's way of communicating with the world. The digital servant provides the content instead of having the content provided for her.

Digital servants engage in a task simply because they have the digital technology on hand to do it without considering consequence. They hastily videotape a fistfight they witness on the street with their phones and post it online before actually doing anything to help the victim, if they help the victim at all. The digital technology drives their action and makes them believe that it is more important for the world to see this event via the web than it is to reach out and help their fellow man. Once again the servant provides the content to the world and assumes that the viewers in the digital world will immediately find it useful. Where the digital native asks the question, "I have a task that needs done, what digital technology can I use to complete it efficiently and effectively?" the digital servant says, "I have digital technology, so what can I do with it?" These digital servants become voyeurs of their world instead of participants in it because they only way they know how to engage others is through their digital devices. The devices create a necessity for constant content that the digital servants are only too eager to provide.

Postman saw this trend coming in the late 1970s as a result of the incorporation of television in every room of the household. Drawing on McLuhan's "the medium is the message" philosophy, Postman says, "Just as language itself creates culture in its own image, each new medium of communication re-creates or modifies culture in *its* image" (Postman, 1988, p. 33). The field of education is undergoing a major shift that exemplifies this re-creation as districts change the educational model, shifting toward personalization and individualized learning using online platforms that are reflective of the social media platforms students are using socially. Schools are not just teaching the new media. They are replicating it in their instruction without teaching the ramifications of using it.

In this section, I will look at several current initiatives in education that are being driven by the post-modern petit-narrative that attempt to engage students in different ways. The first initiative, using standardized testing to create data to drive instruction, is not a new initiative, but its continued presence in public education has helped to drive the creation of other new initiatives. Two of these initiatives, the career focused STEM education movement and Personalized Learning movement, attempt to speak the new language of 21st century students by offering them only what interests them and by helping to lead them to career-based skills, and that is supplemented by or completely immersed in digital technology. Both of these initiatives will have a significant impact on the educational system in the United States if implemented without the balance that Postman discusses. Another narrative embraced by public schools, the use of schools to provide social services, does not require technology per se, but as Postman indicated in the mid-1980s, is not what schools are trained to do, and its value is often being placed above the value of the academic services that schools are supposed to provide. According to Postman, this initiative, combined with the others, distracts public school administrators and teachers from their original purpose: to educate our young people.

Data-driven Instruction: The Problem Child of Standardized Testing

In *Technopoly*, Postman puts a current spin on Maslow's hammer commentary that to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Postman adds, "to a man with a computer, everything looks like data" (1992). The public school system has long offered students the ability to take standardized tests to see how they ranked in various subjects in comparison to others their age across the nation. They were traditionally used as a way for students to own their own progress and for parents to use as a guide to determine if students needed extra help. They were tools for the student and the parent who were considered active participants in the

academic development of the child. The public school system did not depend on these tests as a foundational narrative that drove instruction or curriculum development, but as I will discuss further, a continued focus on teacher accountability combined with available digital technologies that better support data-gathering have enabled standardized testing results to be used efficiently for the development of curriculum and changed the foundational narrative for taking the tests in the first place. Whether or not they have been used effectively is still up for debate.

In the world of standardized testing, curriculum is directed strictly toward the acquisition of skills, not toward an ethical narrative that explains the why and the how. It does not incorporate critical thought or evaluation of these skills. For this reason, Postman says, "God is not dead" as Nietzsche believed. "He survives as Technique" (Postman, 1979, p. 99). This quest for skills and achievement on standardized tests becomes the driving narrative by which curriculum is written and courses are taught.

The major shift of views on the use of data in public schools began early in the new millennium with the arrival of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), an act passed under the administration of President George W. Bush, remained in effect from 2002 through 2015, at which time the Obama Administration replaced it with the Every Student Succeeds Act. NCLB ushered in a new era for educators by creating a guiding educational narrative focused on test scores and data. NCLB made the use of data to drive instruction commonplace in the field of education (Abbot & Wren, 2016). The goal of the act, at least from the perspective of those who supported it, was to level the playing field for minority students and students who were economically disadvantaged, disabled, or who did not speak English as their native language. The field would be leveled by this act, at least in theory, by holding teachers accountable for student learning in schools and forcing them to bolster the test

scores of their schools and districts of face consequences. Subgroups of students with special needs, ethnic minorities, and English Language Learners (ELL) were specifically identified and targeted through these tests to assure that they were learning like all of the regular education, English speaking, white students. Test scores were used in a punitive fashion, to punish teachers and schools who were viewed as underperforming. Schools could also fail in regards to a subgroup, even if, mathematically, the subgroup was an extremely small percentage of their overall school population. Those failing schools were denied funding, taken over by government agencies, saw their staffs fired, and in some cases they were permanently closed (Lee, 2015). Data was being used to assess staff rather than to assess students so that testing became a game of high stakes where schools and teachers would do anything to win, including sacrificing their professional integrity to cheat if necessary.

One of the major problems with this act was that it actually hurt those that it sought to help. The high-level academic requirements of the tests hit special needs students with IEPs especially hard, especially when they were not allowed to have all of the accommodations to the test that they had been using in their classrooms. Since the act required 95% of subgroups, including special needs students, to be tested, a disability did not automatically exempt a student from testing (Lee, 2015). The purpose of providing a student with an IEP is supposed to be to level the playing field for that student: to provide adaptations to the regular education curriculum that enable the child to be successful. Students are given adaptations that include the elimination of answer choices on multiple choice tests, the simplification of essays, the ability to not have grammar and spelling errors count against them, and countless other adaptations that in many cases are not reciprocated on the standardized tests. In short, for their entire academic careers, school officials tell these students that they will adapt their work and the evaluation of it

so they can be successful and then, specifically in grades 10, 11, and 12, these same students are told to take the standardized tests just like everyone else and pass them at the same level. They are held to a standard that is virtually impossible and for which they have been set up to fail. In addition, the test does not prove that these students have not benefitted from their time in public school classrooms. It merely shows that they do not achieve at the same level as their peers: something already known anyway the day their IEPs were written.

This act could not have been passed and maintained if it were not for the development of digital technology that provided for the efficient gathering and analysis of standardized test data. Data management systems like PowerSchool, Skysoft, EdInsight, Frontline, and countless others combined with standardized test development done by Harcourt Educational Measurement, CTB McGraw-Hill, and Riverside Publishing and the scoring capabilities of NCS Pearson and others enabled school districts to give the tests, have them scored, and manage the data necessary to prove Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as required by the act. With this testing technology in place, NCLB not only supported the existing testing market, but also helped it balloon to an over $400 million industry (The testing industry, 2002). Viewing the numbers in this fashion, it seems as though the act was far more important for industry leaders and their pockets than it was for the students in our classrooms.

This strategy of using standardized test data to develop curriculum has continued to evolve into what education professionals now call data-driven instruction. Data driven instruction is based on a theory that, by collecting data and analyzing that data, teachers and other school personnel can design instruction that will help improve student achievement. This data, once collected and reviewed, can "highlight individual students' strengths while working on their weaknesses, which can lead to greater student learning" (Neuman, 2016, p. 25).

Teachers are now required to spend their professional development time analyzing data and using it to guide curriculum to a more skill-based approach so that instruction is more effective and efficient.

Proponents of data-driven instruction believe that it helps to better direct scant financial resources in schools by better directing classroom time, schedules, and use of staff. The results of standardized tests, specifically in math, reading, and science, when plugged in to specialized software, can be used to identify weaknesses in curriculum and in student learning that clearly no human teacher could. Ironically, these same proponents also use data to support their use of data, stating that research shows that when teachers use data, especially from locally designed assessments, to guide instruction, students achieve higher test scores (Abbot & Wren, 2016). So in short: data shows that when data is used to guide teaching, data improves?

Critics believe that data driven instruction is ruining the public school system for multiple reasons. First, time, a commodity for any teacher, is focused more on the analysis of the data and discussion of its meanings and not on actually development of curriculum that will cause an increase in student achievement. Additionally, time is also wasted on professional development for staff members to show them how to use digitally based technological tools that provide spreadsheets of data that will be analyzed and discussed. Instead, this time could be better spent reviewing curriculum and discussing ways to incorporate new content or further develop existing content that would serve as a better foundational narrative for learning. Data driven instruction has largely resulted in "an instructional regime that's bereft of content and meaningful instruction" (Neuman, 2016, p. 27). Data-driven instruction, by design, was created to assess the skills of students, not their actual content knowledge. This is what Postman meant when he criticized learning devoid of a foundational narrative. Students may be learning how to do

things, but they are not learning why they are doing them or connecting them to any specific content whatsoever.

Data-driven instruction may also hurt students who are not excelling in the first place in one of the most critical areas: reading. Data driven instruction can "distort the way reading is taught" and harm low performing at risk students (Neuman, 2016, p. 25). When instruction is driven by data, it becomes entirely skill-based instruction devoid of narrative. Students are given worksheets to teach vocabulary instead of learning it in context because the data shows that they struggle with vocabulary skills. When they finish one task, they are given more worksheets that address other deficient skills (Neuman, 2016). The goal is to make them score better on the standardized exam from which the data was taken instead of making connections between the vocabulary and the context in which it is used.

Ironically enough, in many cases, the students will not take the exam again unless they do not pass the exam. In that case, most states require students to remediate and re-take the exam until they pass. In some cases, if students still do not pass, they may be offered a project to complete or a course to take as a substitute for passing the exam. The data, however, is still being used to drive instruction, which is problematic and unreliable because data for one group is being used to drive instruction for another. For example, Pennsylvanian students in grade 10 take the Keystone Literature Exam in grade 10 at the end of the course. The data that results from that test is given to districts in July of that year and is then used to drive instruction the following year with a new group of 10th graders. This data in no way helps the students who have taken the test and are now in grade 11. It is driving instruction for a group of students who may have different needs, strengths, and deficiencies that are not being addressed because there is no data on them at that point.

Strangely enough as well, that data is used to evaluate the 11th grade teacher who has not even taught the students before the test is taken. It becomes part of the school district's School Performance Profile (SPP) Score that is used by politicians and the public to rate schools both across the state of Pennsylvania and in respect to their national counterparts. The SPP score in Pennsylvania also becomes a component in the professional evaluation of every teacher and administrator. As a result of this, teachers are held accountable for the performance of students that they never taught or that they had not taught prior to the exam and in subjects that they do not teach simply because the data has enabled the state to do so.

Susan Neuman, education policy maker and literacy expert from New York University, suggests that part of the problem with data is our definition of it. We define data as numbers and other information that can be recorded or systematically gathered and used. She suggests broadening our definition of data to include the "softer side" by including observable behaviors (2016, p. 28). This suggestion is by far a more humanities-based approach to data that asks teachers to record what they see on the faces of the students and in the language of their bodies if they are alert or asleep, engaged or unfocused. This "data" as she calls it, could prove more important and a better indicator of student investment in learning. Providing a student another vocabulary worksheet to review definitions and parts of speech just because test data shows his low scores in that area will not, in her estimation, prove as valuable as providing a more content-rich experience that connects the student to challenging vocabulary through context. Once again, the answer to an increase in student achievement is narrative rather than mathematical or technological.

Neuman also suggests that we let data inform our instruction and not drive it (2016). If the data is gathered from testing at the beginning of the year, teachers can use the information as

a guide for instruction, but should not use it to completely drive their teaching. She points out that teachers should provide data-informed instruction, "recognizing that the purpose of monitoring student progress is to fine-tune instruction" (Neuman, 2016, p. 28). In a world driven by digital technology, it is not feasible to go back to the days before test scores were used strictly for student benefit, but Neuman's work asks us to view it from a Postmanian perspective and find a balance by realizing that the data is not the end-all-be-all. It is merely a one-time snapshot of what one student did in one moment in time and should not be used to determine a course of action for an entire semester's or school year's worth of a course.

Many schools and their teachers also try to use the data from test scores to motivate students to improve their scores. They provide the students with results showing their deficiencies and strengths believing that, it the students see these results, they will be intrinsically motivated to improve. This has proven ineffective as well because "Struggling readers know they're struggling readers. They do not need it confirmed every day" (Neuman, 2016, p. 27). Students perceive the data as something that indicates their ability to perform on that specific test or that specific task. They do not see the data as reflective of their overall achievement or abilities; therefore, providing the data to students to use as a motivator for improvement is a moot point. They find no reason to use the data as a guide to direct their learning because it is not reflective of their actual knowledge and the test content does not support the career-based narrative for their learning either. They see no value in the test scores because they know how much time and effort they put in to preparing for them and taking them. Sometimes that is no effort at all for some students who put their names on the test booklets and then close them without answering a single question. All this data proves to them is that either

they do not possess skills that are tested on this test or that perhaps they have just mastered the art of taking the test.

Postman tells us that the creators of a given technology are always the winners but that they engage in a campaign to make the losers in this bargain believe they are winning (1992, 1996). In this scenario, schools and students are led to believe they will be the winners when it comes to standardized testing. Teachers will receive valuable data that they and their schools can use to improve student learning. Students will receive instruction that will enable them to succeed and reach their full potential. The reality is that both schools and students are the losers here. Teachers and schools receive data that is irrelevant and often skewed by students who have no vested interest in taking the test and students receive a better education only when considering the skills that are tested on the test. The only winners, it seems, are those organizations paid by the states to produce and score the exams and those who sell remediation programs to schools that are only too eager to pay so that their students may improve on the test.

Additionally, data driven instruction may hurt those at the top of the learning scale: those that are already advanced or gifted. The current legislation focuses on student progress. Teachers are forced to use standardized test results to prove that all students have improved under their tutelage. While this sounds good to those outside the profession, those in the profession are concerned that this will encourage teachers who, fearing the loss of their own jobs, will hold advanced students back from achieving by not pushing them to work ahead or by providing them more complicated tasks to challenge them. When a student scores at an advanced level on a standardized test, it is very difficult to show growth and progress. They are already advanced. There is no level above advanced. Just because their test scores do not go up,

does this mean they are not learning or progressing? Also, just because they have mastered the exam, do they really have the knowledge of the subjects necessary for post-secondary study?

Just like other strategies employed in the public sector, standardized testing has become another misused result of digital technology. Computers and specially designed software platforms have made it easy to gather information from standardized tests and identify students' specific needs and strengths that can then be used to help the individual student. To those outside of the profession, this sounds like a positive step. Why would schools not want to have information to better direct their academic efforts to teach every student? Unfortunately, we must look at this through Postman's view and consider the Faustian bargain in this situation as well. While we may get information to help students improve their skills, we sacrifice content knowledge and narrative that would help students connect those skills to something real. Those skills may not be transferrable to the jobs of the future when they are devoid of context and meaning and they do not indicate any given student's adaptability to the skills that will be necessary as digital technology continues to progress.

Digital Technology in the Classroom: What is gained? What is lost?

Some scholars believe that, in order to educate students today, we must change our methods of instruction in order to meet their needs by incorporating digital technology in the classroom. Research suggests that children's brains have actually changed in their thinking and processing capabilities as a result of digital technology (Prensky, 2001). This research concludes that the brain has "neuroplasticity" that enables it to change and mold itself as a result of the way it is engaged in the act of learning. It also suggests the possibility that this neuroplasticity is maintained for life (Caine & Caine, 1991). While the research in this area is relatively new, it brings concerns of whether or not this malleability will last for life or if, at some point in brain

development, the brain ceases to be malleable at which point there will be no change and we will be stuck with the brain capacities digital technology has impacted.

As discussed earlier, educational consultant and theorist Mark Prensky, refers to modern day students as "Digital Natives" because they were born in a time of connectivity to such a degree that they do not know what the world was like before digital technology. He suggests that their teachers, "Digital Immigrants" as he calls them, must work hard and fast to change the way that they teach because these "Digital Natives" cannot learn using old methods. These digital natives' brains "have physically changed" and "think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors" as a result (Prensky, 2001, p. 4). He alludes to this being a rhetorical problem as a result of these "Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language . . . struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language" (Prensky, 2001, p. 5). This language, he suggests, is one created by the digital environment where graphics and hypertext are preferred over organized textually based materials. They need intensive and instant gratification that comes from the immediacy of the digital world rather than the delayed gratification that comes from reading a text that takes hours or days instead of minutes. They prefer to play games rather than do the "serious work" required in our public school system (Prensky, 2001). Like Postman, Prensky cites the environment created by MTV and *Sesame Street* for these changes. Stations and programs like these speak the language that digital natives require.

Prensky believes that it is "highly unlikely the 'Digital Natives' will go backward" (Prensky, 2001, p. 7). He believes that, not only does going backward present a challenge because they have no desire to learn in the old ways, but also that it may not be possible for them to learn this way because their brains are wired differently (Prensky, 2001). We must, he

suggests, update both our methods and our content in order to educate these "Digital Natives." He divides content into two areas: legacy content, which is the old content like math, reading, writing, and logic, and future content, which includes all digital and technological content (Prensky, 2001). While this digital and technological content includes the STEM fields that are currently popular as an educational trend, he also notes that ethics, sociology, language, and other humanities must also be taught in tandem with these future content subjects.

If Prensky is correct that this is a problem of teachers not speaking the language of their young students, than we must teach our students to be bilingual. Taking Postman's view, school must provide the balance between learning and culture by providing students with the opportunity to learn the language of digital technology and the textually based language of the humanities and culture so that they can function in this world of hybridity. If social culture is encouraging them and requiring them to use digital technologies, it is up to the schools to provide the cultural balance through reading text and engaging others through oral presentation so that they will become bilingual and have opportunities to see how those languages intertwine. Digital technology is wonderful when a strong foundational narrative of intent guides it. It is the job of the public schools to show where these two languages meet and to help students become reflective learners that can engage, evaluate, and analyze both languages and their impacts on the world around them. Only then will students be well rounded, adaptable, and able to embrace new digital technologies that are sure to emerge in the vastly changing digital landscape.

Unfortunately, in the area of educational balance, where Prensky and Postman would agree, our school system has not taken heed. Evidence that the school system has engaged in the Faustian bargain is abound as humanities programs are cut in favor of the national STEM agenda. Music and art faculty are cut to pay for iPads and Chrome Books. Woodshop, where

traditionally less academically engaged students would actually engage creatively, is being replaced by "maker spaces" and engineering courses that require use of the digital technology to create products. These courses, once inhabited by students who had little interest in academics and often struggled to pass their academic courses, are no longer accessible to those kids. Those students engaged the world with their hands – molding and shaping their creative endeavors using traditional tools like saws and hammers. They have little to no interest in learning how to use the digital tools necessary to participate in these new classes and often struggle to engage these digital technologies when they make the attempt.

Critics of Prensky are also quick to point out that Prensky has a distinct bias when it comes to the incorporation of digital technology into the classroom. Prensky, along with Charles Fadel and Bernie Trilling, two other staunch supporters of new digitally centered teaching pedagogies, all have strong ties to the computer and business industries that would profit most from sales of digital technology hardware and software (Greenlaw, 2015). Trilling and Fadel have both worked for Oracle, Hewlett Packard, and Cisco Systems respectively (Greenlaw, 2015) while Prensky touts on his website that he is the CEO and founder of a software game development company. All three also represent special interest groups that support the integration of digital technology into various sectors of American culture and are now furthering their agenda throughout Europe and various other nations as well. Prensky even proposed the requirement that "students make use of as many different technologies as possible over the course of a semester or a school year" (2010, p. 102). He does not indicate that digital technology should be used *if* and *where* it is appropriate. He indicates a *mandate* for using it. Students should use it because it is available and they can, not because they should. This is another example of what Postman would say is using a tool because we can, not because we

should. Postman's work argues vehemently against actions like these because they are not grounded in a narrative of intention.

Prensky suggests that computer gaming may be a way to teach these old concepts in new ways that would be appealing to "Digital Natives" (2001). He cites the example of *The Monkey Wrench Conspiracy,* a game created by a group of professors and students that helps to teach a specific type of CAD software. Instead of professors teaching through lecture, the game engaged students by providing them with a first-person shooter type game with a guiding narrative and thirty tasks that require the use of the CAD software to win. Students used the CAD software to build tools and weapons to ultimately defeat the enemy and win the game. To facetiously engage in the educational data game, one must pose the following: While Prensky touts the overwhelming success in creating the game and completely eliminating "any language that even smacked of education" (2001, p. 10) so as to disguise this learning as a game, he does not cite any data, empirical or otherwise, that proves that the game worked in teaching what the professors desired. He also does not indicate what actual content was being taught. The game was ultimately being used to teach the skills of using the software and to test how the skills were being learned. The game as he described it really had no connection to content at all. It is another example of education done in a vacuum devoid of narrative of which Postman warns us.

While the game may have taught the skill of how to use the software, it shows no evidence of teaching the philosophy behind why these skills are necessary. He also offered no data on the long-term retention or transition of the skills taught through this game. Just because the students used the CAD software in this scenario did not mean that they could transfer those skills for use in any other scenario or that they would know which scenarios in fact required the use of these skills at all. Ultimately we must question: did the students learn the skills or did

they simply just master the game? If they just mastered the game, the skillset required to master the game may not be transferrable to other situations. In addition, in order for the student to win the game and reach a specified outcome, a specified type of task must be completed in a certain way. While this may be disguised as a game, it hardly teaches students to think outside of the box when problem solving. Students must complete the tasks in the manner established by the program in order for the game to be won. There is little room for interpretation or dialogue here. We must remember that learning is a rhetorical act that takes place in the space between the learner and the Other through rhetoric. There is no dialogue in the space between the learner and the computer program. There is no reflection or evaluation. There is only process and procedure that leads to an established result.

Additionally, research also suggests that the digital environment is eroding communication skills that are still necessary for success in the digital world. The importance of having students be rhetorically bilingual by having both traditional and digital skills in this world is also not lost. Despite the necessity for digital technology skills that are required, communication skills are required as well because "people will always live in a world in which they will meet friends, date, have families, go on job interviews, and interact in the traditional face-to-face way. However, those who are most fit in these social skills will have an adaptive advantage" (Small & Vorgan, 2011, p. 94). Note that the researchers have used the words "adaptive advantage" here. The ability to communicate is what will make today's graduates adaptable in a constantly changing 21st century environment. The digital technology may change. iPads and Chrome Books, the major classroom technology of today, will give way to something new by the time our current first graders enter college, but their ability to

communicate will not change. Whether written, spoken, or read, the human voice will never be outmoded or become obsolete and only when it is shared, does real learning occur.

Research suggests that early intervention with young students may stave off some of the long-term impact of technology on social skills. "Prolonged technological exposure of a young brain may in some cases never be reversed, but early brain alterations can be managed, social skills learned and honed, and the brain gap bridged" (Small & Vorgan, 2011, p. 95). Schools can offer this intervention by providing a balance through curriculum that incorporates traditional speaking, writing, and reading skills that are taught independently of technology instead of trying to engage students strictly through their own methods of texting, blogging, instant messaging, and social media.

Traditional methods of communication require those that engage in it to slow down, think critically, engage in reflection, and attend to the needs of the other in real time and space. They challenge our emotions and require us to be present and to deal with the emotions of others. Our ideas may be challenged or outright rejected by the Other and may require our defense in that moment in the face of the challenger. Digital environments do not offer this attention to the physical presence of the Other and give the users the option to avoid challenges and rejection. They give the user an out. Instead of requiring our students to learn how to attend to these situations in the last place that requires our attendance, the public school, we have adopted an "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" attitude that incorporates and in some cases replaces altogether the curriculum that requires presence and attentiveness.

Unfortunately, without regular use of these skills, "the pathways for human interaction and communication weaken as customary one-on-one people skills atrophy" (Small & Vorgan, 2011, p. 96). Postman warned us of this in *Technopoly*, when he said that humanity engages in a

Faustian bargain when it uses any form of technology (1993). He believes that all technological change is a Faustian bargain because for every benefit the technology provides to humanity, humanity must also sacrifice something or succumb to some disadvantage that results (1993, 1996). While research suggests that we may gain IQ points and the ability to multitask (Small & Vorgan, 2011), we sacrifice the ability to speak to others and to communicate using our natural abilities. Once again, technology is viewed as being superior to nature.

The ability to read and ultimately get in touch with the narratives that guide our past, present, and future as human beings, is one of the most critically endangered of the communication skills when it is done using digital media and using the Internet. Technology and culture theorist and author, Nicholas Carr, describes the impact of digital technology on reading as problematic at best and culturally destructive at worst. From a McLuhanesque perspective, Carr reminds us that the Internet is a medium and that, like television did in its early days, it absorbs a medium and "re-creates that medium in its own image" (Carr, 2011, p. 90). When text and even video are put on the Internet, designers of websites change the text and video to make it more visually appealing to users while also incorporating links and data of its sponsors. Content is broken into chunks that are more manageable for Internet savvy readers who desire information in short, quick bursts and that content is interspersed with links to advertisers content and to other pages. Those links then encourage readers to stop reading the information they originally sought and to click on them, taking the readers to another page of information without having finished reading the content on the first page (Carr, 2011). Readers do not take in the whole of any work. They only take bits and pieces of information that lack connection to larger issues.

Carr likens this new style of reading digitally online to watersports in his book *The Shallows*. He says that he once read books and other printed texts like a deep-sea diver – taking in every word of text and exploring its context deeply (Carr, 2011). This type of reading allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the content and also requires critical thinking in order to understand the bigger context. Reading text in printed media requires a type of attentiveness and focus that reading online and on digital platforms does not require and in fact actually discourages. Now, he claims to read more like a jet skier – skimming across the top of the water and not really getting that wet with metaphorical information (Carr, 2011). As a result, writers online are encouraged to keep their work short and to trim articles to make them easier to read. In fact, Carr uses the term "scanning" to describe what readers are really doing when online and using digital devices (Carr, 2011, p. 95). Reading full text articles as was done in the days of print is now considered a waste of time and inefficient when all that is really needed is just a small taste of the information in order to get the gist of what is happening.

Carr reminds us that, "the book retains some compelling advantages over the computer" (Carr, 2011, p. 99). Aside from their convenient portability to the beach and the fact that no one cares if they get sand on a printed novel, which he points out, they are cost effective for the consumer at a fraction of what a Nook or an iPad costs, not to mention the additional cost of downloading the texts to the devices. They do not require software or Wi-Fi to operate. They do not require site licenses that must be renewed each year in order to open their covers and they certainly will not be affected if the power goes out.

Carr also points out though that there are some advantages of digital books. He points out the capacity of an eReader to hold hundreds of books on one device so that our carry-on luggage may be lighter than if we carried two books with us on vacation (Carr, 2011). More

recently, it is notable that digital books are often available before the printed ones, giving fans access to the works of their favorite authors days or weeks before they are available in retail stores or before they can be shipped via Amazon or other outlets. Additionally, new authors that previously would have required contracts with publishers in order to get their materials printed can now distribute their previously unpublished materials online for readers and sell their works directly to the consumer without a publisher middleman. This gives readers access to the works of up-and-coming authors they may never otherwise have been able to read.

Other sources point out that some people do prefer digitally reading their texts, news, and even books for pleasure reading rather than picking up bulky books. Some states like California and Florida, are requiring texts be available to students digitally either in tandem with print or exclusively (Alexander & Singer, 2017). Books slow down the reading progress and some students are far too busy to engage in the activity if they cannot attend to it more quickly. Perhaps more of them will read the assignments given by their professors if they can do it more quickly. But alas, we need to remember that just because students may prefer to read online or digital texts does not mean that they will learn more from them. In fact, studies suggest that the act of scrolling to read digital text is actually disruptive to the process of comprehension. In these studies, it was determined that readers who read digital texts believed they had better knowledge of the text and they did have good general comprehension of the basic thesis of the material read, when it came to answering specific questions about the text, they did not answer them as well as students who read a printed version (Alexander & Singer, 2017). This reconnects to Carr's aforementioned jet skier metaphor. The digital reader skimmed the basic ideas but did not go deeply into the text and take any wealth or expertise of knowledge from it

nor did the digital reader come away with ideas that he or she could critically analyze and challenge.

Although these advantages are acknowledged by Carr and others who have studied the emerging world of digital publishing, Postman's words about the Faustian bargains of technology must still ring in our ears as we consider what we give up by engaging text digitally. Carr believes that what we give up is deep reading that requires critical thinking and contextualization, as mentioned earlier, but he also believes that as a result of reading this way, our brains are actually changing and these changes may or may not be reversible. Educational theorists believe that these brain changes are the reason why schools must adapt and change by incorporating new digital technologies into the classroom because, only then will teachers speak a language that is understandable by 21st century digital learners.

The world of printed material encouraged the development of an ordered and focused brain. As we learned to read text from left to right, line by line, our brains became disciplined and learned how to process information. Print required us to attend to information slowly: to think about it and process it in a way that is vastly different than digital text. Carr explains that the brain has "neuroplasticity" or the ability to be malleable and change (2011), much like the Play-doh we molded as children. What is put into the brain changes it and shapes it and molds it in such a way that it can respond and process what it is given. There is no determination as of yet if this molding and shaping goes on consistently throughout one's life or if any misshaping of the brain can be undone.

When printed information is introduced into the brain, it slows the brain down and forces the brain to process it in an orderly fashion. It requires the brain to attend to every word and sentence in order as the eye sees it in order to contextualize meaning and process the work as a

whole. Printed text created an ethic and "intellectual tradition of solitary, single-minded concentration" (Carr, 2011, p. 114). Printed information created a culture that, as of yet, is not irrelevant as a result of the digital technology available in the 21st century.

When digital information is introduced into the brain, it does not require the same attention. Online, multiple senses are engaged simultaneously as text is combined with video and audio at it is done at a speed far greater than print could provide (Carr, 2011). While it would seem that greater speed would provide readers with greater amounts of information, what readers are provided with is really a whole lot of very little. They may derive one fact about many topics rather than knowing many facts about one or two topics. Online and digital texts encourage readers to become experts in nothing. We must at that point question what it is that we really *know* as opposed to with what we are merely *familiar*.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend that Carr alludes to in his work is the underlying cultural narrative against education. Learning is something that can be done easily and with little to no cost via the Internet, but unfortunately some view it as largely unnecessary. Some spurn learning as if the work needed to do it should be avoided like the plague. Carr calls this a "fundamental shift" in the cultural tone toward intellectual achievement (Carr, 2011, p. 112). This anti-intellectualistic attitude then supports the use of digital technology that increases the speed by which academic work is completed. Time is more of the essence here than the process of learning that is often time consuming and labor intensive. This enables those who support the shift to which Carr alludes to "convince themselves that surfing the Web is a suitable, even superior, substitute for deep reading and other forms of calm and attentive thought" (Carr, 2001, p. 112). Those that do not feel the need to acquire knowledge or those who just do not want to spend the time obtaining it, digital technologies offer the ability to learn a whole lot of a little bit

in a very short period of time, but do not offer the opportunity to engage these topics deeply so as to connect them to a larger narrative.

With this in mind, it becomes concerning then that students in our public schools are being asked to read mostly online sources including eBooks, eTexts, and on Internet based platforms. Postman's work cautions us that this narrow-sighted view of curriculum may leave students "perpetually unfit to live amid the conditions of their own culture" (1979, p. 21). Ultimately children will be left behind, not because they cannot use the digital technology, but because they do not have the reflective and analytical skills to determine why they are using them and when and if another tool is better suited for the job. They have not been conditioned to be adaptable problem solvers. They have been conditioned to play the game. They have a broad skill base but little knowledge base from which to consider alternatives when faced with a problem to solve. We taught them to love playing the game instead of teaching them to love learning and instilling in them a desire to be inquisitive.

Finally, Postman also points out another problem with significant incorporation of digital technology in classroom that should be of concern to administrators and the general public that is critical of teachers. Technology, he claims, makes it easier for educators to become lackadaisical in their work and for no one to notice the trend. Technology tricks administrators and other educational stakeholders as it covers up the incompetence of professors and teachers who do not have knowledge of their subject material. Those that have "run out of ideas" are now able to "get by without their deficiency being noticed" (Postman, 1999, p. 57). The technology they use becomes a way to disguise the fact that they actually have little content knowledge or that the content knowledge that they have is superficial and devoid of depth, analysis, or connection to the larger pictures of study within the discipline. The technological bells and whistles of a lesson

make it appear that the teacher is on the "cutting edge" of teaching in a student-centered environment when what is really going on is that students are sent off to use the technology to find the information on their own because the supposedly trained subject area expert does not have the content knowledge to teach them. The students become the teachers and the teachers in this scenario are reminiscent of the Sophists criticized by Plato. They knew the skills of rhetoric and not the truth of the content of which they spoke. These teachers know the skills of technology but not the content of their fields.

Because of the general narrative of distrust of the educational system and the teachers' competence in the classroom (Strate, 2014, p. 131), technology is introduced into the classroom, not just as an additional tool, but also as a methodology in itself. While the social view of teachers may be poor, it appears that technology is trusted to "guarantee equality of pedagogical quality, and to make education more entertaining in order to increase student engagement (Strate, 2014, p. 131). So in this scenario, we tell parents not to worry because, even if the child has a "bad" teacher, the child will still have the same technology as the other students and the technology will save them. The technology once again is the great equalizer that can be trusted as it scores another win for students in the classroom.

STEM Education – A narrative of progress and invention

STEM programs, or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics programs, focus specifically on the development of skills and the learning of knowledge specifically related to these fields. These programs do not foster the study of science or the other subjects to stimulate thinking and engagement in conversation about the subjects in an exploratory way. They encourage students to engage these fields strictly because they need these skills to obtain jobs or to develop things that will ultimately benefit mankind in some positive way devoid of

corporate profit. They do not support learning them because of their curiosity or for the betterment of humanity.

Science used to be something one engaged in to help his fellow man. For example, when he accepted an appointment at the University of Pittsburgh Medical School in the late 1940s, Dr. Jonas Salk set out to engage science to develop a vaccine for polio. He did not do it for profit or personal gain. He believed that studying medicine to develop a vaccination and cure for polio was a "moral commitment" (Jacobs, 2015). When asked if he wanted to patent his invention so he could make substantial monetary profit for himself, he responded with a question: "Would you patent the sun?" (Jacobs, 2015). This interest in using the STEM fields for the betterment of humanity is not what the current STEM education programs are teaching students because they are teaching the skills and techniques behind the subjects devoid of a humanities narrative that connects the science to a human purpose rather than a monetary one. Students learn to do these things because they can, but these subjects do not give them the reflective ability to determine whether or not they should engage in these things.

So what exactly is STEM and from where did this agenda emerge? STEM as we know it today, emerged from a meeting of the National Science Foundation in the 1990s (Bybee, 2013). The original acronym was to be SMET, but those creating the term felt that this term was too close to SMUT, which would develop a negative connotation for the fields (Bybee, 2013; Marrero, Gunning & Germain-Williams, 2014). The goal of STEM, at least originally, was to enhance literacy in the science and technology fields and to promote the fields socially and culturally. As STEM continued to develop as a movement, national organizations established specific standards and criteria that were used in public education, colleges, and in state and national organizations to establish requirements for study in those fields (Bybee, 2013). These

standards were created to develop consistent programs that would result in innovation and progress in all of the established STEM fields.

The origins of STEM, however, date back further than the 1990s. The launch of Sputnik in the 1950s plunged the US into the beginnings of an arms race with Russia that would go on to define the national education agenda from that point forward. This moment, which Arendt refers to as "second in importance to no other" (1958, p. 1), was a pivotal moment in, not just American history, but in the history of humanity. While Arendt and other philosophers questioned why man felt the necessity to create technology that was "a step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth" (Arendt, 1958, p. 1), Americans felt threatened and emboldened to act.

In true American fashion, our nation responded to this scientific development as an emergency that required immediate response. Sputnik "has come to symbolize reform of STEM education and a response to a perceived national crisis" (Bybee, 2013, p. 13). Americans viewed this as a threat to our nation's safety and security to which a response must be made by our own scientific community. That response, it was deemed, would be for us to put a man on the moon. In order for this response to be made, our nation would have to have the technology to make this happen. Technological progress was necessary for our space program to develop and for us to be able to leave this planet. The only way for this progress to occur was for our schools to focus on developing the scientific talent of our youth via our public school system. The public school system immediately responded by expanding their course offerings in physics, chemistry, engineering, and other science and technology fields.

Currently, STEM as a field is a career-focused path of study because "the demand for STEM workers is an explosive phase" (Marrero, Gunning & Germain-Williams, 2014, p. 2).

Students in public schools and post-secondary institutions are encouraged to pursue these fields in order to continue working both privately through corporations or through work at the university level so that their work results in innovation in the medical, technical, engineering or other scientific fields that moves the U.S. forward. While the original goal of STEM was to provide a way to integrate the fields of science, technology, math, and engineering, there are few programs that have successfully integrated them at either the public school or the university levels (Marrero, Gunning & Germain-Williams, 2014, p. 2). While the full integration of STEM has yet to be realized, schools at both levels continue to work toward this goal.

STEM enables the United States to participate in what Bybee calls a "knowledge economy" (2013). These studies will make businesses and corporations in America competitive with those in other nations. Mastering the STEM fields will enable the United States to become the epitome of the capitalist world by controlling the fields by which global progress occurs. An agenda was established by which the nation's public schools would increase the abilities of their science and math teachers and recruit additional ones that were at the top of their fields, provide professional content development that would strengthen Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs in the science and math fields, and establish tougher general math and science standards that would all propel American students to the top (Bybee, 2013). Providing excellent foundational education in these areas would make the United States competitive on the global front and would give the nation a monopoly in the knowledge economy that was beginning to emerge.

STEM studies are ultimately more skill-based than knowledge based. While some content knowledge is necessary, STEM by nature involves more rote memorization and skill building than the humanities, which will be discussed more later. This skill-based movement

was spawned mostly by corporations and big business in America (Greenlaw, 2015). Corporations like Microsoft, Google, and Apple encourage the public school system to teach the STEM fields using their technology (Greenlaw, 2015). Often, these companies capitalize on the STEM agenda by offering public schools the ability to purchase their technology at a lower cost so that their students can have access to the best, most high-tech materials in the classroom. Postman tells us to be wary of "those who have control over the workings of a particular technology" because those organizations "accumulate power and inevitably form a kind of conspiracy against those who have no access" to the technologies they control (1993, p. 9). The STEM focus purposefully puts these organizations in positions of power where they can exercise the ability to prey on public schools that are constantly scrambling to provide their students with an education that will enable their students to work for these organizations. They have no choice but to engage in the practices that make them and thus their students attractive to these corporations.

American students would clearly be the winners here. Because so many jobs existed in these emerging fields, students with these skills and knowledge would be able to get the best jobs that paid the most money. The continued development of these programs at the public school level would make these fields accessible and appropriate for all learners (Marrero, Gunning & Germain-Williams, 2014), even those who traditionally came from lower income families or who had learning difficulties. These students could access this education free through our public school system and they could finally achieve the American Dream of wealth and prosperity that eluded their parents who did not have access to these fields.

A STEM curricular focus may seem like the way to make public schools into the great equalizer that they were supposed to be. In the early part of the 20th century, it was believed both

socially and politically that public schools would be the place where the gap between the rich and the poor was bridged. Unfortunately, the STEM agenda being pushed by both corporate and political players in the US right now has widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. "The culture of poverty is beginning to perpetuate itself under the pressures of modern technology. As technology increase, so do educational requirements for occupations. . . the poor are increasingly left behind, and it becomes more difficult for them to move up in the social structure" (Spring, 2005, p. 390). Public schools believe that they can solve this problem too by providing devices for students to take home. These one-to-one initiatives provide students with access to devices without someone to guide them and monitor their use. They also often give students the idea that learning on their own at home is a better option than being forced to engage in learning with their peers. Thus, a new trend in at-home learning emerged.

Cyber School – A Step Toward Personalization

Until the early 1980s, the "essence of the education" was the physical classroom; "the place to which students bring back the lessons they have acquired in books, for confirmation, clarification, and elaboration" (Levinson, 2003, p. 216). That changed with the advent of computers and the Internet. Online education is not a recent development, but rather one that has grown exponentially in popularity and offerings since the early 1980s. One of the earliest online programs dates back to 1982, when the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute created a 2-year program for busy executives that provided seminars in leadership and business for the bargain price of $25,000. Other colleges and organizations, eager to play on the corporate desire for upward mobility and knowing that workers could not quit their jobs for educational opportunities, followed suit by offering graduate level work (Levinson, 2003). By the early 1990s, organizations like the Electronic University Network and CALCampus developed

partnerships with American Online, CompuServe and other online providers to bring online learning options to learners, either as stand alone programs or as additions to the traditional classroom. Most of these programs, however, were limited more to the collegiate realm than to the public school system, at least until the late 1990s when legislation paved the way for their expansion.

What really enabled Cyber school programs to become enormously popular was the development of charter school laws at the state level that enabled groups to establish charter schools that are considered public schools but that are independent of the public schools in the local communities. For example, the state of Pennsylvania originally enacted a charter school law permitting the establishment of said schools in 1949, but the state revised the law in 1997 for the purposes of allowing the expansion of cyber schools under the law (Public School Code, 1997). For-profit businesses were not permitted to operate the schools, but the schools were able to accept public money. In fact, while they are all advertised on television as "tuition free" to parents, that tuition is actually paid by the local school district where the student lives. The cyber program bills the school district for each student from the district that attends its charter school, usually at a higher rate than that of the per-pupil spending of the physical school district and can operate independently of teachers' unions and many of the PA state school laws regarding the spending of money, development of curriculum and adherence to state testing requirements.

Supporters of online education insist that it is equally as good, if not better, than the traditional classes offered by the public system. Online education requires students to sharpen their writing skills by participating in discussion boards that support discussion and allow for questioning and dialogue (Levinson, 2003). It overcomes the natural obstacles of geography and

time and allows for education to be delivered to places in the world that it otherwise could not reach. Those with physical disabilities and young children are availed the opportunity to learn without needing special transportation or babysitters.

They also acknowledge the Faustian bargains here as well. Online learning will not solve all of the problems that exist in education. Postman agrees with this as well when he says that any problems that existed in the classroom before technology will still exist after its adoption (1985). Students who do not desire to be engaged in the act of learning before enrolling in online courses will not engage the learning in the online environment either (Levinson, 2003), especially if they are left at home and unattended by an adult who is pushing them to be accountable and active in the online environment. Like traditional schools, reading, writing, and thinking are still required to learn in the online environment and so it is impossible to succeed in the online environment without those activities. Writing is the most important skill required for online learning regardless of subject (Levinson, 2003). In a medium devoid of orality, the written mode is required as the primary method for engagement, but it is often engaged in blog fashion or is lacking academic evidence or specificity. It also does not provide for real-time critical engagement of the responses given.

A secondary problem for cyber programs is that every subject cannot be taught online. Courses largely grounded in theory, like the humanities, and the sciences to a small extent, except where laboratory study is required, can be taught online; however, those subjects that require hands-on learning, like medicine, art, the trades, and other similar subjects require in-person learning that cannot be adequately addressed online.

An additional criticism of the cyber school programs, specifically from a rhetorical standpoint, is there lack of connection to the Other. Because they engage in learning from their

homes often without physically seeing their instructors or their peers, the students are usually not engaging in discussions in real time. Materials may be posted in online discussion forums today and not receive a response from teachers or peers for a day or two. By the time responses are given, the original educational moment is lost. The "Ah ha!" moment, as teachers call it, where the student finally "gets it" occurs in a different temporal space. For example, students choosing to watch a lecture online cannot interact with the professor or their classmates in the same way as they would when attending class in a physical space at a given moment in time. In the case of a very dynamic professor who offers lectures that are engaging, interactive, and discursive, students will lose these elements by not being physically present in the space, much like listening to a recorded version of a song instead of attending a live performance by the band (Pandolfi, 2007). Additionally, when viewing the lecture online, it becomes very easy for any student to choose to mentally "check out," of the virtual classroom space and instead engage their social media or text on their phones, especially because they know that they can just watch the lecture again later (Pandolfi, 2007). While many students that are physically present in the classroom may choose not to engage in behaviors that are distracted from the lecture for fear that the professor or other classmates may see them, the ability to "check out" is far easier online when there is no one watching.

Taking a look specifically at a few cyber programs, it is interesting to note that they attempt to subvert the aforementioned criticism of cyber school programs even in their advertisements and on their websites. For example, PA Cyber, operating out of Midland, PA, claims to be one of the premier cyber school programs in the state (About us, 2018). Its website tells parents that it uses "the power of the Internet to overcome the traditional boundaries of time and space" and states that "PA Cyber makes it possible to deeply personalize the learning

experience, connecting students and families with skilled and caring teachers anytime, from any place" (About us, 2018). Within its own advertisement, it implies that traditional public schools create boundaries that are somehow limiting a student's ability to achieve. It portrays learning as something to be personalized specifically for one person rather than an activity in which one engages with the Other.

It also describes the online school environment as a "real community" that enables students to successfully grow at their own convenience and within their own space (About us, 2018). An online education blurs the lines between public and private space that encourages students to view learning as something that should be done alone in a room, physically isolated from other learners, and not necessarily taking place in real time. Dialogue between students and teachers may occur, but may not be done in real time when initial reactions and thoughts are the most fresh and authentic. More importantly, relationships are not developed between teachers and students and between students and their peers. Students have difficulty engaging in conversation with the Other as it is, but in the physical space of the school environment, they are required to attend to the Other. Because they struggle to find ways to engage in conversation, we must require them to do it by putting them in situations where they have no other way to engage others. Conversations, however, require a time and effort that we are too distracted and busy to attend (Turkle, 2016). It is only through conversation that we develop relationships that are built into communities. When students are operating in their own time and their own space, the conversations do not take place face-to-face or in real time so the communities they develop do not exist in a real space in time.

Another example, The Agora Cyber Charter School, also located in the state of Pennsylvania, advertises a quality education "how and where" it is best for the students and their

parents, and also refers to its school as a "community" of learners (Agora, 2018). While the education here is offered strictly in an online format, parents are offered multiple suggestions for involvement in their student's academic lives. One of these ways is to physically attend a "town hall" meeting with teachers and staff. This is a bit ironic coming from a school that sees learning as a strictly virtual opportunity for students to engage from a distance. The school also ironically suggests that parents limit their children's viewing of television on "school nights," but it stops short of defining what a "school night" actually is when students can "attend" class any time and place that they desire. So while Agora encourages students to use digital technology to attend school from a distance, it encourages its parents to participate publicly at physically attended parent meetings and limit their children's digital technology use at home. It effectively attempts to redefine the term "community" by asserting that the community is not something that exists in a physical space.

Finally, the main goal of cyber programs is to provide a quality education to students in a flexible and alternative environment that is independent of the public school program. Proponents believe that cyber programs may be more beneficial to students than public school programs and, at their end, engage students more so than physical schools do. One would think that the results should be an increase in student achievement. Unfortunately, cyber programs have not proven to be any more effective in engaging students in the act of learning than their brick and mortar counterparts. A senior advisor with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, Nelson Smith, admitted in a report that no state in the country has cyber charter schools that are high performing (Hacke, 2017). During their school careers, students in these schools often receive 180 less days of instruction in math than students in traditional schools and, when viewing a chart of data for 14 of the public cyber charter schools in Pennsylvania, it is

notable that only one of the schools had a graduation rate in 2015-16 that was above 75% (Hacke, 2017). Ultimately, the cyber schools seem to be falling short of their goals and students attending them are sacrificing something that cannot be achieved online: dialogic engagement in a physical and temporal moment.

Overall, Cyber school programs seem like a good idea on the surface. They give students with disabilities, illnesses, young children, and those far from physical school buildings access to an education that they may otherwise not receive. They break down the walls of the classroom and open it to all and offer the flexibility for students to engage in other activities during the hours of the regular school day. While these are fabulous benefits to the programs, the development of cyber programs has not proven to address student learning, achievement, or engagement.

Additionally, cyber programs have helped to advance a far more dangerous narrative: personalized learning. The technological platforms that deliver the cyber programs to students have also enabled educators to specifically develop programs that address each students' needs, progress, and interests. Educators are now using this digital technology to address the post-modern petit narratives of their students by developing personalized learning modules that allow students to not only learn when they want, but also to learn only what they want or what they perceive is necessary for their future careers.

Personalized Learning: It's All About Me

Thinking back to childhood, most of us had very lofty dreams when it came to our futures. When parents asked what we wanted to be when we grew up, some said firefighters and police officers, hoping to engage in a life of public service through careers that seemed both meaningful and strong and where we could idealistically save the world by helping one person at

a time. Others instead focused on careers like astronaut or marine biologist where we could explore foreign worlds and different environments with the hope of learning what they had to teach us. We were kids and our childhood innocence and romanticized views of adulthood drove us to these answers. They were dreams, some of which came to fruition and others not, but dreams nonetheless.

While it is wonderful to encourage children to follow their dreams, parents were realistic and knew that, with time and maturity, our dreams would probably change. They patted us on the head and encouraged us to keep exploring and learning. Sometimes our dreams changed through no desire of our own. As we grew, we developed asthma and were unable to practically believe we could go into orbit around the planet or use a dive tank to go underwater or we had an accident that rendered us unable to climb the ladders on the fire truck. For us, however, there was still hope. We had enough knowledge of other fields and other experiences that we shifted gears, recovered, and became successful in another field. We were well rounded, adaptable, and did not look for immediate gratification in our learning, and were patient, realizing that with time and effort on our parts we could change course easily.

This may not be the case for the next generation. Today's kids are being told that those childhood dreams are the only thing worth pursuing and they should start pursuing them immediately, even if immediately is in elementary school. If a child wants to be an astronaut then his decision is made in grade five and he should immediately start putting himself on the track to this career by taking only classes that help him achieve this goal. In the 21st century, personalized learning not only encourages this concept, but makes it possible through technological delivery where every child can learn only what he or she believes is interesting and necessary for the future when considering that they have decided their futures already.

Although the definition of personalized learning is still evolving, the current accepted definition is that it is "Tailoring learning for each student's strengths, needs and interests– including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn–to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible" (Abel, 2016). Experts in the field claim that personalized learning is a self-centered approach to teaching and learning that allows instructors to personalize learning tasks for students (Abel, 2016). With new technologies available to teachers to help facilitate this process, personalized learning modules can be created that will specifically address students' unique needs, deficiencies, and interests. Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Blackboard, Schoolology, and Canvas all help to support these personalized learning modules .

According to experts, this will increase student achievement and maximize learning so that it can be done faster and more efficiently (Abel, 2016). Although these claims have been made, it is also noteworthy that experts also refer to personalized learning as a "theory" with "very few evaluations" to support its merit (Pane, et.al, 2017, p. 1). With little evidence at this point to prove that personalized learning actually is effective, most of the data being cited to support it has been done on small scales, with specific demographics of students that lend more positively to the acceptance of the learning process, and that are extremely limited when considering long-term benefits because they have only been studied for the last three to four years.

In contrast to earlier periods in America, personalized learning offers a level of academic efficiency that rivals the assembly line models of the industrial period. Not only can this offer a faster and cheaper way to educate students, but it will also cut through the useless subjects and only give the student what he or she believes is needed. Where the assembly line created many

of the same type of product, personalized learning will create many different products with the same efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Also in comparison to the industrialized era where teachers were authoritarian and instilled order in the classroom, personalized learning encourages teachers to "take on new roles as mentors, coaches, and facilitators and power and control shifts to the students" (Abel, 2016). This puts the students in the drivers' seats here as they dictate their own educational paths as if they are they only ones that know what they should learn at their young, inexperienced ages.

Learning in a digital environment will not just change the way students learn. It will also change the way students behave according to Postman. "Civilization cannot exist without the control of impulses, particularly the impulse toward aggression and immediate gratification" (Postman, 1982, p. 85). Personalized learning and learning via digital devices encourages immediate gratification by definition. Students get immediate feedback directed specifically for their needs and their interests. This sounds good on paper but it makes the student a customer of education, not an engaged learner. It makes learning a commodity to be bought and sold rather than a communicative act in which one engages the Other. Students come to expect immediacy in every area of their lives and become hardwired to demand it when they do not get it or to completely disengage in the materials offered to them if they are not offered in an expedient manner that interests them. This was what Postman feared would happen as a result of the integration of television and the image. While television may have started this revolution, personal digital devices clearly finished the job of making learners impatient, disengaged, and self-focused.

The biggest problem with the concept of the personalized learning model is rhetorical: it fosters the agenda that only what the student wants to learn matters. It fosters a narrative of

individualism based on the petit narratives of each individual student. It does not use a common narrative to bring students together, but rather allows them to separate into their own personal worlds. More accurately, in the long term, it may create selfishness. "Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self that brings man to relate everything to himself alone and to prefer himself to everything himself along and to prefer himself to everything" (Arnett, Fritz, & Holba, 2017, p. 118). This selfishness results in a lack of concern for the Other (Arnett, Fritz & Holba, 2017). Where the modern narrative provided for a broad career track for groups of students that engaged them as groups, the personalized learning models now being presented as options for students allow for the student to choose his or her own narrative without consideration of or engagement with the Other.

The track they choose is an extremely narrow one focused specifically on their needs and interests for their future careers, at least as they see them in that moment. Because the model focuses on learning skills and knowledge of interest to the student today, it does not account for necessary learning in the future. It does not instill a love of learning in children because it only exposes them to what they desire and does not encourage them to explore alternatives. Students are never pushed outside of their proverbial boxes to explore new things or consider new perspectives. Without a love of learning, students may not be motivated to learn anything new in the future, which is an enormous problem in a constantly changing 21st century environment that requires adaptability.

Leaders in the field of personalized learning say that the social and cultural challenges of the 21st century "require new approaches to education, approaches that tailor learning to students' individual needs and strengths, and that encourage student agency and ownership" (*Sustaining innovation*, 2018, p. 8). Once again, in order to get students to participate in

learning, we give them the illusion that they are controlling their academic destinies because they are choosing their topics or have a voice in their learning. We use personalized learning as though it were a treat for Pavlovian dogs to entice them to do a trick. We provide them with personalized "learning models" that will help lead them to increased test scores that are self-serving for the school district and for politicians. It does not push the students to learn new things that they may enjoy. It puts novices with little life experience in charge of their uncertain futures and gives them the illusion they are controlling them. It appears that they are learning and the data the schools gather says they are so it must be true; however, we must ask ourselves: Are they really learning or are they appearing to learn?

Personalized learning encourages students to learn in a vacuum, something Postman also criticizes. By making curriculum specific for each student, it does not foster the communal activity that learning is supposed to be. Learning is something that takes place what Arendt would call the space between (1958). It occurs as a direct result of dialectic engagement with others in a space where new ideas are protected and encouraged and where they can be debated and discussed. Most personalized learning situations seem to lack a connection between teachers and students and/or students and their peers because digital technology is being used as a platform for the personalized experience (Sparks, 2018). Personalized learning by definition requires students to engage in learning only what they care about and does not invite them to engage views with others outside of their own. In response, many schools that are currently attempting to practice personalized learning are finding that they must supplement it with face-to-face interviews or meetings with students (Sparks, 2018). Only by maintaining a human element here can the personalized model provide narrative ground from which a student can work.

LEAP Innovations, a national educational organization based in Chicago, is one of the groups on the forefront of the development of personalized learning initiatives. It touts its early experience and research as successful in the development of personalized learning programs that foster student engagement and achievement. The organization website acknowledges that, "Though personalized learning is still a new, evolving approach, both the outside research and our own studies say it makes students more confident, understood and appropriately challenged—which leads, of course, to better performance" (Our research, 2018). So once again, this "new" method of learning is concerned more with student "performance" – another word for progress. LEAP consistently cites statistics on its website that show improved literacy and math skills that are the result of these personalized experiences.

In fact, the LEAP organization recognizes "The use of data is crucial to all the personalized learning models in the study" (Our research, 2018, p. 4). Once again, personalized learning attempts to force scientific study on to the human act of learning. By alluding to the importance of student performance and progress, personalized learning may once again force schools into an accountability construct where they are still concerned with test scores, standardization, and progress instead of real student learning. If this learning is truly personalized, then why is data being used to compare each student to others. Personalization, by definition, requires individuality and if students are studying their own individual interests and working at their own paces, standardized data analyses cannot be used to gauge their "progress" and, more importantly, why should their progress be measured anyway? The act of measuring progress of students in a data-driven curriculum implies that the schools are using students to evaluate themselves and their methods. So are we concerned about student progress here or the progress of the faculty and the school?

Let us also take a moment to take issue with the concept of increasing student "confidence" in material learned and ask ourselves how one builds confidence, as the website claims personalized learning does. Confidence, when considering the concept in relationship to academic material, is built over time and comes from hard work, consistent study, and hours of engagement with others who are experts in the field of study. The personalized learning model here implies that it can merely give students confidence by providing them with information in their interest areas. In the academic world, confidence in one's knowledge and academic perspective comes not just from what one has learned, but also from the challenges one has endured to one's own scholarship. Current models of personalized learning are being criticized for isolating students from others and detaching them from their peers and teachers (Berdik, 2018; Sparks, 2018) and thus, isolating them as well from any challenge to their scholarship. Confidence, in part, comes from being pushed outside of one's box and by engaging ideas and concepts other than what one likes, believes, or perceives as important.

When students are engaged in a personalized narrative, the narrative they want to hear is handed to them on a silver platter. They are not challenged to hear others. They are provided the equivalent of a parent who lets a child choose all the meals he will eat for dinner. The child will never choose the broccoli. He will always choose the chocolate cake. His confidence in learning, therefore, comes from the gluttony of information he desires and is not balanced with another knowledge food group. He is merely drowning in the sea of irrelevant and unconnected information that Postman warns of in both *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) and *Technopoly* (1992). Our students will know many things, but they will ultimately mean nothing. Their confidence in their knowledge is an illusion of which they will be unaware until they try to connect it with something else.

LEAP also advertises that, after the some "small upfront costs" are paid, it can help school districts implement "whole-school personalized learning models" that are "financially sustainable" (Our research, 2018). The notion of this entire concept is a large oxymoron. First, models by definition are to be replicated an imitated. They are not individualistic. So by providing a "model" of learning, the organization is depersonalizing the action here and forcing school districts to use its models to create these so-called personalized opportunities. It is, once again, turning learning into a cookie cutter approach by providing a model for learning that is supposed to be personalized.

Second, it appeals directly to the fiscal concerns of school districts. LEAP strives to assure districts that they can provide personalized learning opportunities to their students because they will be cost effective (Our research, 2018). It cites the range of $223 to $1,135 per pupil to implement personalized learning models but does not cite continued costs to facilitate these programs (Our research, 2018). This nod to the efficiency of modernity is not lost on scholars here. Schools must be persuaded that it is in their best financial interest to adopt these models so they can continue to pay for them over time. Telling school administrators that a small investment made now will resulted in continued large rewards in student achievement later is simply enticing these leaders by using the rhetoric they want to hear. In reality, these corporations are selling a product to schools by making them believe that this is in the best interest of the students. Once again here, the students are portrayed as the winners using Postman's view, yet the real winners here are the businesses selling the products.

Personalized learning may seem like a totally postmodern concept that fosters the petit multi-narratives of each student, but it also incorporates the values of modernism that began in the industrial era. It results from a perfect storm that brings together the negative aspects of

modernism and of post-modernism. It fosters the trivium of individual autonomy, progress, and efficiency that plagued the industrial and post-industrial ages and that fed the "dark times" that Arendt discussed in her work (1958) while also feeding the petit narratives of each student. Personalized learning situations, created and fostered by digital technology, enable districts to spend less money on curriculum, textbooks, and materials. They can further reduce the number of staff members required to support students in the classroom, despite the contrary arguments of those that have created the personalized environments. Since school districts are consistently strapped for money and the public at large has a general dislike for public education professionals, they are supported in their digital technology purchases because the technology can clearly do the job better than humans. This modern confidence in digital technology's efficiency and cost-effectiveness combined with the petit narrative focus of post-modernity is allowing personalized learning to now become the hottest trend in public education. The personalized learning agenda could not have become so widely embraced and accepted if it were not for the availability of modern digital technology combined with the petit narratives of individual career-focused STEM curricula.

Additionally, the personalized learning narrative presents a more global communicative challenge as well. It gives the students and parents the illusion of control over the student's destiny. While on the positive side, motivation to learn comes from a genuine interest in the subject area, on the negative side, it does not encourage students to learn beyond their interests. It encourages learning only the narratives they already know, which appeals to the students because it is easy. There is no challenge here. They are confident in this material because they know it already so it is very easy and quick to get academic work done; however if the school is still to serve a communal purpose, this personal narrative serves as an obstacle in a world of

diversity. It furthers a narrative of individualism, which comes with philosophical sanction, but eventually results in selfishness and lack of concern for the Other" (Arnett, Fritz, & Holba, 2007, 118). The personalized narrative does not encourage diversity but instead fosters an every man for himself narrative that will continue to divide the country and the world as it isolates future generations from their past and their peers.

Ironically enough, as those on the forefront of the personalized learning initiative believe they are on the cutting edge of educational change, it is interesting to note that this, like over 90% of the educational initiatives that have come before me in 20 years, is not a new concept. In education, we often recycle old ideas by making them new again. To make them new, we simply change their names and roll them out as new concepts just so it can appear that we are making change. Progress, after all, is what is important: or at least the appearance of it. In the early 1990s, administrators were all a buzz about having students build portfolios of their work as they embraced the idea of Outcomes Based Education where students achieved certain outcomes rather than grades to progress to the next educational level. This faded with time and was replaced with other trends, but has now resurfaced as we award students with "digital badges" to show their mastery of a skill. The only difference between the two is that the badging concept reflects a cultural trend inspired by 21st century digital technology, where students who are gamers are familiar with the badges they earn in their online games. In both situations, students collect artifacts that are indications of their progress toward certain skills.

The same can be said for the concept of personalized learning. In 1921, Alexander Sutherland Neill and his wife opened the Summerhill School, an independent, private, tuition-paying boarding school in Britain. He believed, even then, that the problem with schools was that they were not serving the child because the child had no say in what was being studied

(Neill, 1960). This lack of choice made Neill believe that student's motivation to learn was directly connected to their interest in the subject being studied. Instead of just applying the choice to the subjects students studied, Neill went one step further and applied this choice to the entire learning model. If they did not wish to attend class, they did not. He believed that, if left alone long enough, the child would seek learning opportunities out of boredom and return to class of his own choice. His model does not value teaching at all, because he did not consider that teaching "in itself, matters very much" (Neill, 1960, p. 5). The student is the teacher in this model. The teacher is there merely to facilitate the process for the student once the student figures out his or her own path and once the student decides to engage that path on his or her own terms.

Neill believes that all students, if left to their own devices, will learn eventually what they want in their own way and on their own terms. They just need to be given time to figure it out for themselves and find their own motivation. He states, "a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing" (Neill, 1960, p. 4). Neill's philosophy downplays the importance of experience here and is taking a terrible gamble with the life of a child. Similar to today's personalized learning model, Neill assumed that children know what is best for them without having been guided by adults with life experiences. He believes that knowing what is best is somehow born innately within us rather than created as a result of our cultural experiences. He removes all that is rhetorical about the act of learning by intimating that it must be inspired strictly in a child's head before the child can ever act upon it.

In this model, how will students ever even know that they do not know about something? While Postman states in his works that teachers are asked to be many things that they are not and

should not be, he is adamant that they are supposed to be content experts and should engage in the act of pushing students to have learning experiences that teach them to love, or at least experience, things they would not typically engage (Postman & Weingartner, 1973). They are responsible for guiding students to pursuits in areas that they would not typically embrace. They have a wealth of experience and information that it is their role to impart on the students in their classrooms (Postman, 1999). Then, and only then, should students be left to choose what to do with the information. This is yet another example of how the line between childhood and adulthood is being blurred. When the child, alone with little guidance, structure, and boundaries, is left to dictate his own actions for which he is never held accountable, the child has usurped the adults in his world and has effectively become one. Adults in his world are now outmoded, much like old technologies.

While Neill's model school still exists today, and bills itself as the only true democracy for children in the world, it does not appear to still follow the exact model established in 1921 by its founders. While Neill's original model allowed students the freedom to choose what they wanted to do each day, even if that meant not attending class, the current model appears different on the school's website. It describes a structured day where breakfast begins at a specific time. Students must be up and dressed by a specific hour or "the 'Beddies Officers' can fine you" a portion of your pocket money or require you to work extra on a communal project as a punishment (Summerhill, 2018). Perhaps Neill's theory that students will just do what they are supposed to do without being told or required to simply does not work in the 21st century. Or perhaps, his theories never really worked at all. Regardless of whether they did then or not, personalized learning is presently attempting to resurrect this concept and allow students to choose their own paths.

Schools as Social Service Organizations: Problem Solved or Problem Created?

School is one of the last places that people gather that truly represents their own communities and beliefs. As the world becomes the global village that McLuhan envisioned (1964), there are fewer and fewer places where communities come together to engage in activities that both protect and reveal their shared values and norms. The days of people gathering in the town square to hear a speaker or participate in some other academically rooted activity are long gone. The church, which has traditionally been the place to go in times of struggle or in search of answers, has also lost its central role in the community. Our schools are really the last place where, at least our children, come together to engage in discourse that is supposed to promote learning, citizenship, and other positive engagements.

This may be the reason that the school has become the end-all-be-all of social services. As discussed earlier, schools are becoming increasingly more responsible for providing social services to children and their families simply because there is nowhere else to go. The family unit has broken down, creating a fragmented situation where parents, children, and siblings are physically separated and often emotionally scarred from their experiences at home. Parents may be absent at best due to the multiple jobs they must work to make ends meet or inadequate at worst, creating situations at home where the children have no adult guidance or may be victims of abuse or neglect. Who fills that void: the public school system. When parents cannot guide the children at home, teachers and counselors step in to help. Educators are repeatedly told of their importance in this role as administrators tell them that all a child needs is a connection to one caring adult in order to rise above poverty, abuse, and the dereliction of duty on their parents' parts. It is implied that any one of us could be *the one* person who changes the direction of a child. While this may be true in some rare cases, in most cases one person who spends 40

minutes or so per day with a child has a small likelihood of having such a significant impact and, even when there is such an impact, the greater amount of time that is spent at home with problem parents diminishes any positive impact gained during those precious few minutes.

When the situation causes severe emotional health problems for the children, the school provides and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to help manage the children's behaviors, improve their academic standing, and provide them with professional counseling that is often billed to government agencies when the parents cannot afford or are unwilling to pay. It is the school that often diagnoses the children with mental health problems and that serves as the catch all for these social problems that are increasing in their diagnosis and severity. This could be why only 41% of adults in the United States with mental health conditions received care but over half of the children who needed services received them (NAMI, 2018). The children can receive services because they are diagnosed by professionals in the school system and then connected to treatment that is often free to them and is provided during their school day when they are mandated by law to be in school anyway. Adults do not have these advantages or these mandates to get help. Thinking back to the caring adult philosophy mentioned earlier, school employees are reminded that if a student in trouble is connected to one caring adult the outlook for his or her future improves. The likelihood of that child becoming a productive and successful adult increases. "Poverty is passed on from generation to generation" because it is difficult for poor children to receive a level of education that allows them to rise above financial inequities and to ultimately do better than their parents did (Spring, 2005, 390). For this reason, the school jumps at the opportunity to help its students, hoping that it can save them from the terrible situations in their homes and stop the cycle of poverty, abuse, or neglect that has plagued this child and his or her family.

In previous generations, churches were the traditional places where people would go in times of economic or emotional crisis because they provided meals, clothing, and shelter for their parishioners. As less young adults identify with a religion and more adults report that they do not regularly attend church or participate in church-related organizations, less people are finding both solace and help through religious affiliations (Kuruvilla, 2017). Many social services such as counseling, clothing and food distribution to the needy, and others were traditionally coordinated through the churches. With less parishioners and ultimately less donations of products and cash, the church is no longer able to support these initiatives, which is fine in the eyes of the community because they no longer have the same connection to those who need the services.

In response, schools have again risen to the task as the place where every child must go by law. This is not a new concept considering that the public school system has long been the catch all of society's problems. While free and reduced lunch programs were already in place in some public schools as early as 1894 (Rude, 2016), it was in 1946 that Congress passed the National School Lunch Act that called the implementation of a national school lunch program a "measure of national security" that provided the nation's school children access to nutritious meals regardless of their economic standing (Gunderson, 2017). More recently through government meal programs, schools now provide both breakfast and lunch to students, many of whom would not otherwise have a meal.

In 2016, 30.3 million children receive either reduced price or free lunch through the public school system (Lill, 2016). In addition, many school administrators and teachers regularly bring food paid for from their own pockets or apply for grants to operate food cupboards to serve their students and their families. They send students home at night and on the weekends with

bags of food so they can have dinner because their families cannot afford to eat or, because of an absentee or ill parent, will not eat. Many schools have now begun programs that operate in the summer months as well so that these children, who depend on going to school to eat, will be serviced in the summer months as well. To contrast the importance of school attendance for children who have insufficient food at home, it is important to note that, in the summer of 2016, only 2.6 million of the 30.3 million who receive the aforementioned lunch benefits receive food benefits in the summer (Lill, 2016). When school is out and these children have nowhere to go, they do not eat. It is that simple. Without their mandated attendance at school, social problems like hunger and mental health would go largely untreated. They have become dependent on the school system to provide them with sustenance and without it they are helpless to solve the problem on their own.

In addition to providing food, medical screenings and medical care are also mandated by state law in nearly all of the 50 states. Pennsylvania specifically, as part of its PA School Health Program Manual, has specific intervals for student hearing and vision screenings, body mass index screenings, mental health evaluations, and even dental care (Mandated, 2017). Parents, who may or may not have access to healthcare of their own, are now relieved of taking their children for regular check ups, unless of course the school calls to say that the child had a vision screening at school and it was discovered that he may need glasses or attention to some other medical issue detected by school officials.

Many also provide clothing and even Christmas presents to children in need. Drives are held where teachers and other members of the faculty all pitch in their own money to purchase these things or they buy the items and donate them. Staff members choose names of students in need and purchase what the students want or need or they choose a random child anonymously

and purchase a gift that will be given without acknowledgement to the purchaser. Often the staff members do not live in the district and have no connection to the community other than working there. Members of the community are not often engaged in these activities so the community itself is not coming together to solve this problem or to identify that this problem even exists. Schools take on the role of parents who cannot or will not take responsibility for providing these services for their children.

These all seem like nice gestures, but when schools do this, they alleviate parental responsibility instead of requiring it. Along with social workers and other government agencies before them, schools usurped the authority of the parents and, by doing this, effectively told parents that they were not experts in childrearing. They taught parents that the government knew how to raise their children better than the parents did (Lasch, 1984). The more responsibilities the schools take from parents, the less parents step up to engage their own responsibilities. This cycle continues as each generation expects the schools to provide more to solve society's problems while parents are increasingly asked to do less.

Postman criticizes our school systems for attempting to replace other social services that have long provided services for those in need including the family, the church, and the other local community organizations. He believes that the school system has overstepped its boundaries by attempting to fill the gaps in social services once provided for those in need by these groups. Where the school "has tried to do what the family, the church, the economy, or the political system has failed to do, it has also failed, and at the expense of doing well what it is best suited to do" (Postman, 1979, p. 125). To put it simply: the school tries to do too much outside of the scope of its job and ends up failing miserably at the one thing teachers and administrators were actually trained to do well: educate children.

The public school system and its employees are expected to solve all of these problems and they do it under the guise that it is necessary in order to have students that are at an optimum level of health and welfare for learning. They are led into some Maslowian world where they are told that if they meet the lower level physiological, safety, and belonging needs in the hierarchy, then students can eventually rise to the esteem and self-actualization levels necessary to focus on actual learning (Maslow, 1987). As Postman points out, the schools are engaging in activities that are simply "none of the schools' business" (1979, p. 109) instead of focusing on academics. Because the schools have been engaging in these activities for so long, parents and communities have come to expect that the school will continue to solve the problems that these other organizations have failed to do (Perkinson, 1977). This is not, according to Postman, what school staff members are trained to do. As schools take on more of the responsibilities of parents and families, more becomes expected of them and less is expected of parents and students. Schools have usurped both parents' rights and their responsibilities and as a result have sacrificed learning in the process. Parents have been led to believe that the schools will do so many aspects of their jobs for them, so why should they attempt to do those things for themselves?

This belief that schools will solve all of the community's problems drives curriculum and professional development of teachers. Time that should be spent providing professional development for teachers that helps them engage their subject matter in a new way is instead spent on trainings to help teachers recognize students who are neglected and abused as mandated by state and federal law. Although there is no federal requirement, continued professional development for teachers is required in nearly all states through state laws and statues.

For example, in New Jersey, yearly professional development is required in one of six categories that include 1) Reading Disabilities, 2) Prevention: Suicide, Substance Abuse, Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, 3) School Safety, Security and Code of Student Conduct, 4) Health, 5) Interscholastic Activities, and 6) Additional Professional Development Topics (New Jersey Professional Development, 2018). Even the "Additional Professional Development Topics" category, when examined closely, provides for things like policy training, teacher evaluation tools, bullying, affirmative action, and other non-academic activities (New Jersey Professional Development, 2018). Three of the areas, "Prevention: Suicide, Substance Abuse, Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying," School Safety, Security and Code of Student Conduct," and "Health," are unarguably geared toward training teachers to deal with social, mental health, and medical issues. In the "Interscholastic Activities" category, it is notable that all coaches are required to complete training that enable them to deal with head injury protocols. Only the "Reading Disabilities" category could be deemed completely an academic-based training because it enables teachers to identify and assist students with reading difficulties. Even in this case, reading is focused on as a skill. Content itself is not addressed. In short, the vast amount of required training here focuses on social issues of the communities these teachers serve instead of on academics. Where is the further development of content?

Additionally, in Pennsylvania, teachers spend hours of professional development time learning how to deal with problems that are social ills rather than exploring their content areas. PA Act 126 of 2012 (PA Act, 2012) is required every five years. Teachers must go through a course either in person or online that trains them to recognize signs of sexual abuse of a child and teaches them how and when to report their suspicions. It also points out the penalties for them if they do not report something that they have seen or that they know. PA teachers are also

required to complete four hours of suicide awareness training to identify students who may be considering ending their lives before the students act. In my 20 years as a PA teacher, I have personally participated in both of those activities more than once. I have also spent many professional development days with my colleagues in workshops on child abduction presented by the FBI, anti-bullying, sexual harassment, opioid abuse, drug abuse, communal poverty issues, hunger, and positive behavior reinforcement, just to name a few. In 20 years of work in public education less than 5% of the professional development I received was in my specific content area. This 5% largely incorporated training on skill-based concepts like reading and writing strategies and did not include a focus on actual content. All other professional development I have obtained in my content area was done by me, on my own time, and at my own expense. Our public school system has little commitment to the development of highly qualified educators with advanced knowledge in their subject areas and significant commitment to a poor attempt at solving the social issues of the communities they serve.

The narrative that guides the school is one of caring for the students' physical and mental well being above before their academic well-being. Teachers are encouraged to develop relationships with their students that are more like a parent or a friend instead of an educator. The relationships are developed as a result of the students' personal problems or interests and not as a result of scholarship and academia. This, Postman says, causes schools to become "a kind of well-financed garbage dump, from which very little can be expected except the unsweet odor of failure" (Postman, 1979, p.110). As a result of a systemic failure of parents, communities, and governments, schools have lost their academic focus and the academic narrative that should guide students has been lost. The reason many students attend school is not to get an education, but instead to get free food, free medical care, and free counseling.

Schools are now in the business of fixing society, not educating individuals (Postman, 1979). They try to do too much in regards to things that they are really not designed to do and not enough of the things they should. Teachers, as Postman indicated, are totally capable of doing their work; they just "cannot do everyone's work" (Postman, 1979, p. 115). Once the school has taken responsibility for fixing a social problem, the social problem becomes the school's guiding narrative and parents, government officials, and other community stakeholders are officially relieved of that responsibility forever.

Schools are supposed to help children become independent learners who can participate in the world around them through work, cultural pursuits, and community engagement. Instead, when providing services outside of the scope of academia, schools are supporting a narrative of dependence and victimization (Postman, 1979). From Postman's view, this is problematic because, by providing so many social services for schools, they are creating a public that is dependent on institutions for all of its needs. Schools do not provide guidance for the future, as Postman said, but instead dictate the future. Schools actually create the public rather than serving it (Postman, 1995). Schools become places for students to get everything but an education and they make parents believe that they are powerless to care for their own children.

Chapter 5: Many Problems Require Many Solutions

As we move forward in the 21st century, we must ask ourselves as educators how we can attend to these problems? How can we improve education while still providing students with skills to make them functional in the work world? For how much should the school be responsible and where does that responsibility end? How can we encourage students to think outside of the box and build skills for careers while still teaching them to recognize the importance of engaging the Other? The problem here is one of both language and narrative. Schools are grounding their curriculum in the wrong narratives and attempting speak only the language of the learners. Our educational system does not have just one problem and it will not have one solution. Again it is Postman's work that provides inspiration for several solutions to these problems.

Postman and Weingartner suggested that we teach as a "subversive activity" years ago (1969). Now it is suggested that we "learn as a subversive activity" as well (Hatch, 2007). Learning as a subversive activity encourages teachers and students to "debunk the shallow conception that achievement equals learning" (Hatch, 2007, p. 311). By shifting the narrative back to learning as an end in itself, it is suggested that students will actually reach greater enlightenment in regard to the world around them (Hatch, 2007). They will have stronger critical thinking skills because they will think critically about the world around them and they will become more analytical as they reflect on the reasons why they learn in the first place. They will return to the philosophical roots of each subject and will explore new areas outside of their interest areas. They will see connections between concepts and subjects and they will engage their peers and communities from a different perspective. Most importantly, they will be more adaptable in the changing world.

If we are to be true to Postman's call for balance, we must recognize that there are several components required to balance the current educational narrative of focus on the self. He reminds us that education must always provide the counterargument to society (Postman, 1979) by providing alternative narratives. If society is focusing progress and efficiency, then schools should focus on conservation of tradition, slow contemplation, and reflection. It is only by providing this balance that Postman speaks of that we can actually create social community. In this chapter, we will look at a few options for providing the balance that Postman discusses, including the Waldorf School model, service learning, and a re-incorporation of a focus on the study of the humanities that also includes a media ecology focus.

Waldorf School Model: Addressing a More Spiritual and Creative Narrative

Our present day model of schooling separates learning from the narrative. Students are taught facts and skills but are not taught the historical connection to them. For example, they are taught the Pythagorean Theorem but are not taught the philosophical narrative as to how or why it was created or more importantly how it changed the field of mathematics and other subsequent fields. They are taught skills necessary to pass a test or get a diploma or a job. No connection is made to the story behind why these skills are necessary or where they came from historically. The skills and facts are taught in a vacuum.

While public schools across the nation rush to gather funds to purchase and incorporate digital technology into classrooms because administrators believe that this is the way to best educate and engage students, Waldorf Schools operate with a focus on learning and creativity rather than on technology and careers. Digital technology is in fact prohibited for the most part until the upper grades (McDermott, 1992). In 1919, Austrian social reformer Rudolf Steiner developed the Waldorf School in order to help educate the lower class children of workers in the

Waldorf tobacco factories in Stuttgart, Germany (McDermott, 1992). He reportedly spoke with the workers at the factory, encouraging them to be wary of a system that, in the early 20th century industrialized world, was preparing students to work in factories, not encouraging them to develop their own knowledge and possibly seek out a path other than labor. He said that it was unfortunate that, in this world, workers "suffer from the fact that your real personality has been buried because from a certain moment there was only the hard school of life for you, but no longer any real education" (Carlgren, 1981, p. 15). Waldorf Schools encourage children to think outside of the box and to gather knowledge to use to think independently and creatively instead of merely gaining skills to obtain a job in a factory.

Steiner was concerned about the dehumanization of the industrialized world where people served menial roles in the production of goods, the finished products of which they rarely, if ever, saw. The value they had as human beings was once created by things they did or products they produced. When replaced by the technology of the assembly lines, these workers lose their value as they become disconnected from the final product. Steiner knew that "as cultures become more technologically advanced, human beings need to . . . resist competing pressures toward dehumanization" (Easton, 1997, p. 88). Factories, he believed, did not nurture creative thought and held workers back from achieving their full intellectual potential. The work they were asked to do in factories was dehumanizing because it did not engage them intellectually or creatively. Like the Nostradamus of his time, Steiner accurately predicted the future that is still unfolding in the 21st century.

As robots begin to replace human workers in almost every type of manufacturing plant and even in many service industries, humans are not just finding new ways to earn a living. They are also looking for new ways to find meaning in their lives. Human beings once found

meaning and purpose in their work, but in the 21st century, they may have to find those in a world without work as jobs once done by humans are taken by emerging technologies (Thompson, 2015). They may need to find a new narrative of purpose that comes from creative areas like must and art (Thompson, 2015). They may need to engage the world in a way by which Steiner's and Postman's educational philosophies could prepare them but for which the traditional narrative of career-focused education will fail to do.

One component of the Waldorf School curriculum that could help in this area is the connection to a spiritual being. While many feel this cannot be done in a public school setting because of laws separating church and state, the Waldorf School curriculum strives to be religiously all inclusive and totally nondenominational. Instead of being exclusionary and teaching religion, these schools ask students to connect to something larger than themselves at the philosophical merge between science and nature (McDermott, 1992). This spiritual focus is derived from Steiner's study of Anthroposophy.

One of the tenants of this school of thought is the interconnectedness between reality and the spiritual world. Steiner believed that any attempts to "deny the existence of the spiritual world or to solve problems on a solely material level were doomed to fail" (Uhrmacher, 1995, p. 386). The interconnectedness between mind and body, spirit and reality, is necessary in Steiner's view, in order to understand, acknowledge, learn, and grow. It is this spirituality that Steiner believes makes humans grow in an industrialized world that promotes and protects standardization (Steiner, 1919). When educating children strictly to participate in the industrialized, capitalist, consumerist economy, students are denied the spiritual, moral, ethical, and philosophical connections to learning and they are therefore taught devoid of meaning and

narrative. The Waldorf model created by Steiner's study of Anthroposophy addresses those necessary connections.

Waldorf Schools try to avoid the common achievement indicators, like standardized tests, and focus on including all children as participants in learning instead of competitors like the public school system often does (McDermott, 1992). These common achievement indicators lead only to the tracking of students into careers that "meet the needs of the industrialized world" rather than encouraging students to "develop their own natural talents" (Uhrmacher, 1995, p. 383). Standardized testing, in the Waldorf view, forces teachers to think "scientifically rather than artistically" about teaching and learning (Uhrmacher, 2004, p. 114). Standardizing is an attempt to attach scientific principles to learning: something that is a human experience that should not be and cannot be accurately measured by a scientific scale. This is strictly avoided in the Waldorf model.

The expectation is that every student in a Waldorf classroom will participate in all activities and will focus, not on being better than their peers, but instead on simply bettering themselves and strengthening their natural abilities. They will take all of their basic subjects regardless of their own aptitudes or their own interests in an attempt to "awaken and educate capacities that every human being needs" (Barnes, 1991, p. 54). In Waldorf Schools, Steiner's philosophies assume that students cannot possibly only be good at what interests them.

In addition to its core curricula, the schools also provide students with a "palette of experience from which to choose the particular colors that one's interest, capacities, and life circumstances allow" (Barnes, 1991, p. 54). This reflects an attempt to engage learners in things that may not be of interest to them at first or in areas in which they may feel that they have no talent. This helps them to explore beyond their comfort zones and gives them a plethora of paths

to follow by the end of their educational experience. It helps them to engage new experiences and ultimately teaches them to adapt to change and differentiate their learning.

Steiner's philosophies do not encourage the development of curriculum that supports any given career or career track because "the choice of a vocation is left to the free decision of the adult" once he or she has graduated (Barnes, 1991, p. 54). Steiner indicates that career decisions are in fact adult decisions that young children are not ready to make while engaged in the lower, middle, and even early in the high school years of public schooling. Therefore, it is beneficial for students not to engage in a strictly career focused curriculum. Knowing this, Steiner's schools encourage learning to gain knowledge that "the threads may everywhere be found linking it with practical human life" rather than on learning to build a career track (Steiner, 1976, p. 168). They learn for the sake of the learning itself and, thus, become knowledgeable, develop a life-long love of learning, and are ultimately adaptable when it comes to engaging their social environment.

Students begin their day with a recitation of verse that connects the spiritual world and the lessons that will be taught that day. During transitions between lessons, students sing songs and engage in rhythmic motions that encourage both focus and discipline (Ruenzel, 1995). There are no young squirrely elementary school students shifting around in their seats and becoming unruly. They are focused by the music and disciplined by the rhythm and the routine of the motions. They do not use song sheets of lyrics as they sing, for the verses are committed to memory and repeated daily until mastered (Ruenzel, 1995), something else that is discouraged by the public school system, which frowns upon rote memorization as boring and unnecessary in a world where the answers can be Googled anyway. Postman specifically supports memorization, especially of important cultural tenants (1995). It is by memorizing poetry,

historical references, and the like that the story of who we are as a people is not just passed on, but also appreciated and owned by the next generation.

It is also through memorization that the brain is developed so that knowledge can be retained. The brain's neuroplasticity, as discussed earlier, is the reason that it must be challenged to learn new things and engage new experiences (Carr, 2011). This helps foster brain development, "as particular circuits in our brain strengthen through the repetition of a physical or mental activity" that then transforms this "activity into a habit" (Carr, 2011, p. 34). The brain must be continuously engaged in this way, for any lack of use will result in atrophy similar to that of an unused arm or leg muscle (Doidge, 2009). Not asking students to memorize information is the equivalent of asking a quarterback to play in the Super Bowl without going to practice. The mind, like the quarterback's arm, is a muscle that must be repeatedly exercised and conditioned for retention. Waldorf Schools address this daily and train the minds of their students to remember important material that is necessary for future lessons and helps to exercise the mind so as to build mental memory muscle.

Memorization, one of the foundational activities in the Waldorf School Curriculum, is an exercise that helps develop the brain, while learning with digital technology however, if unchecked and unbalanced, eliminates the need for memorization in the learning process. Once children stop memorizing things, they "do not just forget them: the brain map space for those skills is turned over to the skills we practice instead" (Doidge, 2009, p. 59). In this case, as Postman warns, mental acuity will be replaced by digital technology. Since the use of digital technology presents the path of least resistance (Carr, 2001) for the learner, it becomes both the preferred method of learning and eventually the only method of learning that will be acceptable for the learner. The ability of the learner to develop questions and engage in the inquiry method

discussed by Postman and Weingartner (1969) will give way to the feeding of unquestioned, unfiltered, and unevaluated information via Google or other search engines directly to the learner. The Waldorf philosophy addresses the importance of memorization, practice, and inquiry so as to strengthen the mind's natural abilities to retain and process information and develop as the muscle that nature intended.

In addition to the differed role of the student in the Waldorf School, the role and expectations of the teacher are different from public schools as well. In the public school system, the teacher is viewed as a facilitator of learning who often learns as much from his or her students. Teachers are pigeonholed by formulaic lesson plan formats that standardize their lessons while contradictorily being told that they should treat each student as an individualized learner. They are encouraged to develop student-centered lessons where students direct their own learning instead of using any lecture or teacher-centered lessons. In Waldorf Schools, the more traditional model of the teacher as the director of the learning is reflected as teachers engage students in activities in which they all participate but that ultimately are directed by the teacher. Teachers engage in what Postman and Weingartner (1969) call the "inquiry method." This involves teachers asking students to question language and learning because "language is not merely a vehicle of expression, it is also the driver" (Postman and Weingartner, 1969, p. 101). While the teacher directs the lessons, students are encouraged to participate through questioning and inquiry and not to just blindly accept things as truths.

Teachers at Waldorf schools are given a "high degree of autonomy" when designing their curriculum and choosing the materials they will use to teach their courses (Ruenzel, 1995, p. 89). Teachers personalize teaching by connecting it to their own creativity, their own quest for professional development, and their own perceptions of what is necessary for learning as

opposed to designing things specifically for each student or following state and federal mandates. Educators make learning personal to them, which brings out their enthusiasm for the subject that is then passed on to the students (Ruenzel, 1995). The teachers engage the students by being engaged in the learning narrative themselves. Students buy into the content because their teachers buy into the content. The students build trust in the teachers over years because the Waldorf model requires teachers to follow their students through multiple grades for the purposes of continuity and student/teacher connection.

Waldorf teachers are not required to teach to any specific national or state standards and are given the freedom to develop curriculum as they see fit. These teachers do not require observations by their superiors or scripted lesson plans or standardized assessments to hold them accountable for the learning in the classroom. They have a vested interest in what is being learned because they create their own curriculum. They are tied to the Aristotelian Telos because they are directly connected to the end product: their curriculum. "There are no prescribed rules for teaching in the Waldorf School . . . The teacher is autonomous. Within this one unifying spirit [referring to his Anthroposophy philosophy] he can do entirely what he thinks right" (Steiner, 1988, p. 46). They are engaged in the material because they created it and they want to assure themselves that it meets their expectations, not those of state and national bureaucrats that are disconnected from the educational process. They hold themselves accountable and are more critical and evaluative of their own work than administrators who are disconnected from the content because they have no background in the subject or may never have taught in a classroom at all. Teachers at Waldorf Schools are trusted and viewed as knowledgeable professionals who engage students in a learning community and who ultimately

know, without the guidance of local, state, and federal government interference, how students need to engage learning.

Finally, digital technology in Waldorf Schools is prohibited before grade 6 and is only gradually introduced to students after that point. Waldorf educators believe technological tools "and their messages lead children toward materialism, consumerism, competition, and addictions in a variety of forms" (Armon, 1997, p. 178). Steiner's philosophy focuses on learning as occurring through connections between human beings: as a rhetorical act. "The idea that advanced technology, with its full graphics and its next-to-being-there potential could replace adults telling stories to children from one soul to another would have been anathema to Steiner" (Uhrmacher, 2004, p. 114). Teachers are encouraged to teach by telling stories to their students and using first-person accounts and other primary sources instead of textbooks, which are also viewed by Steiner as a form of technology (Uhrmacher, 2004). Instead of throwing students to the wolves of digital technology and hoping that they will discover knowledge on their own, the teachers directly connect them to the narrative by telling the stories themselves.

Postman encourages this type of learning as a way to combat the learning encouraged by the emerging medium of his time, television, although it could also be applied to the use of computers and the internet today. He says that children did not need to be taught how to watch television or be allowed to watch television in schools because this image-based technology was the one being promoted socially outside of the classroom (Postman, 1979). Consistent with his belief that schools should provide a balance to socially promoted goals, Postman encourages schools to oppose the use of imaged-based and digital technologies that are used at home and widely in other non-school situations and instead provide the balance by requiring students not to use technology in the classroom.

Postman's fear was that the medium of television had a curriculum of its own and that the curriculum taught children how to watch television instead of teaching content (Postman, 1979). Schools instead need to "restore balance to a culture" that was being shifted by the new curriculum of television, instead of focusing on being progressive (Strate, 2014, p. 33). The same application can be made to computers and the Internet today as well. The balance that Postman encourages seems to be addressed by the Waldorf School model because it requires students to engage academia without digital technology before the digital technology is allowed to skew their academic experiences. They must learn how to do things on their own before they are allowed to let digital technology do things for them.

Even after its introduction after grade 6, digital technology, including calculators and computers, never becomes the driving force behind the learning narrative. Instead, the Waldorf philosophy encourages the incorporation of art and natural elements into learning rather than corporately produced objects (Armon, 1997). Teachers' classrooms are minimalistic in design and décor, often including artwork created by students and teachers, and natural elements that connect in some way to the lessons being taught. Too many mass-produced posters and lists with rules on them create "conditions that contribute to chaos" (Armon, 1997, p. 112-113). Waldorf educators use natural elements from the outdoors to connect to the spiritual component of their educational philosophy and to help students develop an appreciation for both the lesson and the natural world. They include their own artwork as a testament to Steiner's views that a creative person resides in everyone and that it is the job of the schools to unlock that creativity through its curricula.

As we further examine the Waldorf model, what, if anything, could the public school system take from Steiner's philosophies? First, public schools could provide a balance regarding

digital technology. While it is unrealistic to assume that schools could get a buy-in from every parent to limit digital technology use at home, it is realistic to provide those limitations at school. It is appropriate for students to use calculators in math class or computers to do research in English class. While at first, the use of this digital technology should be controlled, students should gradually get more autonomy as they mature under the direction of experienced adults. Like the printed word before it, digital technology must be restricted and gradually revealed to young children so that their childhood is not eroded, and they are protected from inappropriate material and any negative impacts the digital technology may have on their developing brains.

What is not appropriate is to force the use of digital technology on students in art, music, or gym classes. Art and music classes are places where students should immerse themselves in creativity and where they should develop the parts of their brain that require slow attention to detail, focus, and practice. They also should not be required to use digital technology in gym class. While the Fit Bit and My Fitness Pal devices are nice to have, gym needs to be a place where students blow off steam and release pent up energy. Digital devices in gym class force students to engage in a narrative of productivity instead of release. They are focused on how many miles they have walked or how many calories they have burned and not simply on letting go of stress and angst by engaging in free-form, unstructured exercise.

Another concept that public schools could use from the Waldorf model is a focus on the spiritual. Yes, this is an extremely controversial subject because it is automatically assumed that this means teaching of religious doctrine. In reality, this is not the case. While it is absolutely not possible for public schools to teach Christianity or any other religion for that matter, it is possible for them to take a more Transcendental view and/or offer courses that explore comparative religions from a historical view. We must view this as an opportunity to teach it,

not preach it. History teachers could incorporate a course of study to provide students with an historical view of world religions to show how they emerged and what, in that historical moment, enabled their development. As I put it each year when I teach Puritan literature, we do not tell students what to believe, we tell them what others believed so that they may understand the philosophies behind their writings and their actions and the implications of those beliefs on their culture.

The Waldorf model supports this nondenominational view where students can connect to nature as a spiritual being, similar to the views of Thoreau and Emerson during the American Transcendental period in the 1800s. By bringing natural items into classes and by requiring students to explore nature as part of their lessons, schools encourage them to think of themselves as parts of something bigger than they are. This does not support any specific religious tenant or doctrine, but rather encourages an appreciation of the natural world and the ability to see our place in it.

Finally, Steiner's model supports the view that students cannot just be good at what interests them. Public schools must keep this in mind as they begin to embrace more personalized learning models. While it is ok to offer students voice and choice in some areas, it is not appropriate to offer this in *all* areas nor is it appropriate to simply leave students completely on their own to find their own educational narratives without guidance. Certain subjects, history, literature, and math for example, should always be required for students. Students should also be required, as they are in many Asian schools, to engage in at least one study of music or art. Students should have common foundational narratives from which we all can work and engage the world together regardless of their interest. Steiner believed that, when students are required to engage in all tasks, they may find something else that interests them and,

in turn, find something else they are really good at as well. Public schools must heed this and, in the course of providing some personalized experiences, remember that students engage a world full of other, often competing, narratives. They must do this with an open mind and heart that encourages them to see things that many not interest them objectively and with at least a foundational basis of content knowledge so that they may participate in the larger conversation.

Service Learning: Giving Students Ownership of Society's Problems

Earlier in this paper, Postman and I were extremely critical of offering social services through the public school system. While Postman intimates that it is really never a good idea for the public schools to provide these social services (1988), there may be a way to provide those services while teaching students to have care and concern for the Other. Although Postman's scholarship usually indicates a balance in respect to image-based and digital technologies in the classroom, the concept of balance Postman calls for could also be helpful in accomplishing the goal of dealing with social service issues while still focusing on content and academia and possibly reducing the number of social services necessary in the future.

Perhaps the problem with the offering of social services through the public school system is that the adults in the room are handing out these services. The students have no connection whatsoever to these services. They do not participate in them. They do not decide what services to offer nor do they problem solve the situation to find a way to deal with what is needed. They do not identify the need in any way. They are disconnected from the narrative, so what occurs is a repeated and prolonged need for the services. For example, some public schools, as mentioned earlier, are now implementing food programs where students are provided with bags of food to take home because they do not have food to eat for dinner at night. The idea for these programs is usually generated by an adult administrator or teacher and not by the students in need or their

peers who are not in need. It is the adults or students who do not receive these programs that are solving the community problem here. The students who currently benefit from this are in no way involved in this solution. The students indicate their needs and preferences to those filling the bags and they pick up the bags. The people who prepare the bags are adults or even sometimes students, but never students who receive the benefits of the program. What would happen if these students in need were meaningfully engaged in this as a service learning opportunity? What if they saw a need in their own community, took ownership of it, and solved the problem?

Service learning may offer an opportunity to engage social service issues in the public school system that is meaningful to both schools and the communities they serve. Service learning, by definition, requires students to engage in the act of asking questions, critically thinking about possible answers, and reflecting on the actions taken. It is defined specifically as "a form of experiential education in which students engage activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Jacoby, 2003, p.3). Community is broadly defined in this definition to mean both the local areas where the students live and the global community (Jacoby, 2003). With this definition in mind, students engaged in service learning activities could develop projects that solve the social problems in their own districts that are currently being attended to by their schools or they could also tackle larger global issues like climate change, immigration, or world hunger that are currently going unsolved by the politicians and corporate leaders of the world. In this respect, students could become part of a greater and much needed conversation in those areas that has the potential to lead to real change in the future: the future that ultimately belongs to those students anyway.

It is important to note the difference between service learning and simple volunteer work. Volunteer work does not require prerequisite knowledge in order to engage in the activities. Volunteers can simply show up the day of the activity without having ever done the activity before and engage it. It also does not require those engaged in the activity to be the problem solvers. Volunteers simply carry out the directions of others who have already developed a plan of action. Finally, volunteering does not require an exit activity or reflection of any kind. At the end of the activity, volunteers go home feeling good about themselves for having done something without actually knowing whom they helped. They may not even be doing this work in the communities where they live. Service learning, however, requires complexity, respect, and understanding of cultures and viewpoints (Corrigan, 2011). Cultural knowledge is necessary as is an understanding of the community that will be impacted by the project. Coursework is done and the knowledge gained in the course is reflected within the project that is designed. Service learning projects are planned, carried out, analyzed, and evaluated. The service learning project helps instructors identify gaps between the theories they teach in class and the practice that is realistically possible outside of the classroom, especially when studying ethics (Lee, 2009). Critical and analytical problem solving skills are used but they cannot be used without a significant knowledge and experience base that allows the designers of the project to plan, implement, and reflect on the project. Service provides the practice that connects material learned to real-world situations (Lee, 2009). Service learning and volunteering should not be viewed through the same lens since they require different approaches and engage the Other in a different manner.

Service learning programs are very popular at the post-secondary level but not as much in American public schools. In public schools, service learning projects are often created and

organized by student organizations like the National Honor Society or the Student Council Association. These groups often have a small minority of students who are actually in need and receive the benefits of the programs they create, if they have any at all that receive them. Students who are economically disadvantaged are often unable to join these organizations as a result of their disadvantage. They may be required to go home after school to care for younger siblings while their parents work, they may lack transportation home, they may work after school jobs to help their families, or they may be intimidated by costs associated with projects that are done by these groups. Often, these groups do extensive fundraising to pay for there service learning projects and children in need may feel as though they cannot raise funds in this manner. There are, however, ways to combat this, as I will discuss later.

Service learning questions are "questions of the spirit" (Johnson, 2006, p. 224). They are not questions that have only one answer and most times they are questions that do not currently have any effective methods to address them. Service learning questions allow students to think of themselves as part of something bigger than they are. They realize that they have a role in the world and are empowered to engage it and take part in it. "When students truly share power with other service-learning practitioners, when they understand that others believe that they can achieve, and when appropriate supports are in place, desired learning and service outcomes can be achieved" (Fisher & Huff Wilson, 2003, p. 101). Service learning problems are not problems for someone else to solve or projects that enable the buck to be passed to others and their possible solutions are within reach of students. Service learning can create within students a renewed sense of responsibility to the Other that is being diminished by a constant focus on personal profit in the post-modern, every-man-for-himself world that is emerging.

All learning requires questions to be asked and answered, but service learning also requires two other components: reflection and reciprocity. Reflection is necessary in order to analyze and evaluate the answers to the questions. "Reflection is the heart, the key, the linchpin to service-learning; without it, deep learning cannot happen" (Johnson, 2006, p. 209).
It is the reflection component of service learning that allows us to see ourselves in others (Johnson, 2006, p. 210). Service learning requires critical thinking and problem solving skills. It requires students to identify a specific problem or generate a specific question then use research, cross-curricular knowledge, and analysis to propose a plan of service that will address the problem. Proponents of service learning are quick to point out though that the learning does not take place during those processes. It is the reflective piece of the project where the learning actually occurs (Jacoby, 2003). When students reflect both verbally and in writing on the project they have done, the reflection requires them to determine the impact and effectiveness of the project. They must evaluate whether what they have done has make a difference by critically analyzing the project's outcomes.

Reciprocity, the second component necessary for a solid service learning program, requires all parties to be stakeholders in every project undertaken. If asked the question, "Who benefits from this project?" the answer must be "all parties" or the project does not involve a true partnership of parties (Grobe, 1990, p. 6). With many current projects undertaken by our schools that are not service learning projects, the parties that actually benefit from these programs could be significantly debated. First, in relationship to the students who are being served, the services do not solve the problems waiting for them at home. They provide a temporary fix. To paraphrase an old Chinese proverb: they provide the man with a fish that feeds him for the day. They do not teach the man to fish so he is fed for a lifetime. They deal with the problem in the

short-term only. When the bag of food is empty or the clothing provided has holes in it, the student is now dependent on the school's program for these things to be replenished. They do not learn how to engage the problem and search for a solution on their own.

Second, in relationship to the schools themselves, school officials are consistently told by social and health professionals that students will achieve more in school if they are fed, clothed, and have the care they need so they are not distracted by these deficiencies in the classroom. In true Maslowian style, they are told that, to reach self-actualization, students must have their foundational needs met (Maslow, 1987). While that may be true for some students who are intrinsically motivated to break the cycle of dependence, there are still many who graduate unable to find a path to solving their own problems and doomed to repeat the cycle themselves. In the current system, schools do not benefit from providing these programs in the long-term. They perpetuate the cycle and enable it to both continue and expand as future generations of students in the district continue what their parents began.

The goal of service learning opportunities for those in need is to enable them to move away from charity and service to justice and the elimination of need (Jacoby, 2003). By learning how to solve the problems that they experience every day, students in need become empowered. They learn that change is within their grasp and that their lives are within their control. Only once they feel that they can control their worlds can they truly break the cycles of poverty, violence, abuse, and other social problems that hold back factions of our nation. Reciprocity can be achieved through service learning when students who are in need are engaged in the learning opportunity and the school district itself is relieved from some of its current non-academic responsibilities through the completion of the projects. While this reciprocity on the school's

end may not be seen immediately, districts should consider the possible long-range benefits of any project when evaluating its benefits and reflecting on its impact.

Service learning also enables students to develop an awareness of issues outside of the scope of what they learn in school while also helping them to use what they have learned in school. It brings together knowledge, skill, and reality. In school, students may learn about third world countries where there are issues with poverty, hunger, disease, and other issues. Service learning brings those issues home to them in their countries or in their communities. They are able to see how those problems that occur in other parts of the world happen here as well. They learn that these people are just like them and they too could be in a similar situation.

Service learning gives students the opportunity to develop moral and ethical skills including honesty, compassion, altruism, and perceptiveness (Johnson, 2006). In a world where many people have forgone traditional religious narratives that have provided the foundation for these practices, service learning projects may aid in the development of narrative that will fill this gap. Service learning can enable students to understand that human beings, regardless of color, ethnicity, religion, gender, or orientation, are "connected to one another in the tapestry of community and social relations" (Johnson, 2006, p. 221). It requires students to become part of a team of problem solvers that work with multiple stakeholders in their communities. Service learning, by definition, requires attention to the Other in a way that other courses do not.

So how can public schools engage in service learning in an all-inclusive manner without limiting service learning opportunities to students who really do not benefit from them? First, colleges and universities could partner with public school organizations to help raise funds and earn grants to pay for these projects so that the financial burden would not be on the public school students alone. Colleges and universities have traditionally partnered with public schools

in other areas of study, so collaboration between the two levels on service learning projects seems to only be a natural step as well (Pickeral, 2003). Professors and administrators at the post-secondary level have found that, when students are exposed to positive service learning opportunities in high school or middle school, they are more likely to seek out those opportunities at the collegiate level (Pickeral, 2003). This trend to continue on a path of service affirms that, once students realize they can solve problems that impact them and that they have power to affect positive change, they are more likely to continue on a path that helps them engage the Other. Participating in service empowers them as students and as citizens and provides them with a foundational narrative that will encourage them to consistently engage the Other in all of their endeavors. For the students in need, working with colleges and universities can help the students, who may see college as an impossible goal, find ways to obtain the needed funding and assistance to further their education and break the cycle of poverty that has held other members of their family back.

A second way to address this is by making service learning an elective course. By doing this, students in service learning courses would have the resources of their district to back them with a teacher to guide them in their pursuits. They would connect the knowledge they have gained in their classes to the projects that they design for their communities. Because the course takes place during the school day, the students would not be limited by their after school commitments at home and could participate with their peers. This would level the playing field for students and allow for participation by everyone, not just those who have the time to dedicate after school.

In order to make service learning a reality in the public school system, teachers, administrators and community members must realize their important role in the development and

facilitation of student projects. Participating with a college or university is one way that public schools can embrace service learning that will benefit their students and communities while also connecting students to members of the collegiate realm. One example of how this concept has worked can be found in San Diego, California. Students at the University of San Diego partnered with students at Mark Twain Junior and Senior High School. Students at both levels engaged community members by bringing their content knowledge learned in their classrooms to a community environmental center where their knowledge could be used to solve problems of consequence to all parties. They have engaged in multiple health and safety projects as well as environmental projects. All parties were equal participants and were equal benefactors when considering reciprocity. Participants pointed out that college students could have just provided services *for* the public school students and received their own intrinsic rewards, but instead they worked *with* the students to point out their mutual commitment to the projects and to the community (Pickeral, 2003). Projects of this caliber can only be completed and beneficial to a larger group when all stakeholders are engaged equally.

This type of opportunity will no doubt push some students and teachers outside of their comfort zones and require administrative and community support. The school day must be flexible when considering the time commitment required of these endeavors and allow students and facilitating faculty to attend to necessary tasks both during and outside of the school day. School districts must also be willing to assist with funding by paying for faculty and staff to run the program and the development of the program and they must also be willing to help find grants and corporate sponsorships within communities that will help fund student projects. While this may seem like a great time and monetary commitment for districts to make, they are currently paying for many different social services including mental health care, food, clothing,

and other materials and services that they are handing out to students when they could be engaging students to help solve these problems permanently, so the ultimate cost of implementing a service learning program may eventually be paid for by the money saved on social welfare programs.

Despite Postman's serious criticism of schools becoming social service agencies that are solving all of society's problems at the expense of educating youth, his work seems to support service learning as a method of bringing learning and social service together. Postman criticizes media, specifically television, for turning education into entertainment. He encourages educators to find a cultural balance to image-based media in the classroom because it has a "curriculum" of its own. As mentioned before, he cites three commandments of television "curriculum," as he calls it, which are different from traditional schooling methods. These commandments: 1) thou shalt have no prerequisites, 2) thou shalt induce no perplexity, and 3) thou shalt avoid exposition like the ten plagues visited upon Egypt (Postman, 1985) can all be addressed and countered via service learning.

First, service learning does require some type of prerequisite. In order for students to solve problems in their communities, they must be aware that the problems exist. They must have first- or second-hand knowledge of the problems and details about how those problems came about in their communities. They must also have cross-curricular knowledge that will provide them with a narrative by which they can solve the problems.

Second, problems that could be addressed by service learning projects are by definition complex problems. If these were simple problems, the professionals of the world would have solved them already. These problems require higher order thinking skills, critical analysis, and as already mentioned a strong knowledge and experience base. They are not simple problems

with one solution that fits all, but rather are complex problems with multiple possible solutions. The appropriate solution used may depend on the moment, the history, or the individuals engaging in the program. After six months of implementation and reflection, students involved in a service-learning project may find that their proposed solution worked at the outset, but as details and people change, the solution must change as well, even if it is ever so slightly.

Third, Postman's commentary on exposition is one that is notable and solvable as well through service learning. In order for students to have successful learning outcomes, they must engage in exposition both orally and in writing. They must research and plan their proposed projects. They must write corporations and organizations for grants. They must publicly defend their positions and their proposed projects to multiple stakeholders. Finally, they must reflect and re-evaluate their projects and solutions to determine their effectiveness and propose modifications if needed.

Postman continuously calls for cultural balance in our public schools and service learning may be one of the ways we can achieve this balance. When students are using digital technology and engaged in media activities in other courses, they can balance their learning in a service-learning course by engaging exposition and more complex tasks. When they are receiving immediate feedback in their math classes after completing an online math practice via Kahn Academy, they can balance this immediacy in a service-learning course where they may wait weeks or months to receive feedback from community and corporate stakeholders. Finally, instead of schools being the social service agencies that Postman criticizes, they can empower the students who receive these services to engage their problems on a communal level by helping them realize that they can solve these problems. These problems are not insurmountable and they have the power to affect real change and improvement in their communities. This puts

schools back in the role of doing the one thing that they are truly qualified to do according to Postman: teach students.

The Liberal Arts: Preserving the Narrative of Humanity

Critics of the humanities believe that the liberal arts have nothing to offer students in a highly technological world. They see art, music, history, and literature studies as a waste that takes up valuable time that could be spent taking an extra science class. Because history and literature specifically focus on the acquisition of content including facts, dates, and names and the reading of fiction, critics believe that there is really no real-world application to this information. After all, this type of information is available with little effort using Google if one were so inclined to need it. Additionally, critics point out that the humanities are not a "technology or method" nor are there SAT subject tests of those subjects as well (Vender, 2014). They are taught largely through dialogue, reading, and experience. They cannot be engaged through simple rote memorization alone. They cannot be evaluated effectively on a multiple choice test using a Scantron machine. Postman cautions that the pervading belief about education is "if something that is learned cannot be precisely measured, it does not exist" (Postman, 1979, p. 103). Therefore, if a numeric value cannot be found for the quality of art or the sounds of a musical piece, then studying those subjects is an engagement in futility because what is learned cannot measured. The lack of a standardized way to evaluate these subjects has caused them to be lessened and in some cases removed from the curriculum in many public schools. When budgets are cut, the arts are often the first to go since reading and math are the subjects of standardized tests, the scores of which are used to judge the performance of schools and teachers, not the academic achievements of students.

For these reasons, humanities programs are the first place that districts make cuts when funds are tight. As state and federal funds contributions to education are either cut or tied to test scores, districts put their money into programs that either help to improve test scores or that they perceive are important for students to obtain jobs. The Obama administration's Race to the Top program tied federal funding to test scores that specifically supported the STEM agenda. The arts and humanities were not one of the seven points measured for this funding (Richards, 2013). The continued push for STEM education at the federal level also contributes to these funding cuts (Richards, 2013). Schools must prioritize their money, making every dollar count, and they are accountable to the taxpayers in their districts who also demand a focus on finding their children jobs. They view the arts, music, and other liberal arts subjects as pastimes or hobbies rather than opportunities for gainful employment.

Supporters of the arts and humanities argue that, without them, students will be unable to rise to the top of these fields because the arts and humanities teach creative and independent thought. They also provide the moral and ethical foundation for decision-making. Without these foundations, students will turn in to scientists and engineers that will develop things because they can, not because they should. They will engage in reckless science devoid of consequence and will be unable to ascertain the implications and limitations of their actions. They will engage in an Orwellian world that enables them to believe that two plus two really is five.

The importance of school in the construction and preservation of the cultural narrative cannot be understated, especially considering the aforementioned Orwellian example. "From the standpoint of the society as a whole, and often of groups within the society, the primary function of education is the maintenance of culture" (Goslin, 1965, p. 2). It is through the study of cultural narratives in the humanities that we learn who we are historically and ultimately

determine who we are as present day individuals. Cultural narratives help us to find our place in the communities in which we live. "Education transmits a common cultural fund to the next generation and in the process helps to bring hordes of young barbarians to adult ways that are continuous with the past" (Burton, 1962, p. 11). Schools provide opportunities to read and study these narratives, offering places where students can discuss and critique them and ultimately learn from the successes and mistakes of their predecessors. They also force students to engage narratives that they would not otherwise engage, thus forcing them outside of their proverbial boxes to view new ideas and requiring them to challenge and defend their own.

Proponents of the arts and humanities also argue that students will be unable to rise to the top of other fields because it is the arts and humanities that teach students how to think creatively and independently. The humanities provide a critical balance to the STEM focus currently driving curriculum in America, for it is the humanities that encourage students to consider the consequence of the STEM fields. Without a humanities-based foundational narrative, students will not understand that there are consequences when they engage in science without considering the limitations and implications of its use. For example, as part of the Manhattan Project, J. Robert Oppenheimer and his colleagues used scientific skill and knowledge to build an atomic bomb and thereby ushered in a new age of nuclear weaponry that, to date, still remains a threat to life as we know it on the planet. These scientists developed these weapons because science enabled them to do so. They could, so they did, without regard to consequence.

It is instead, a work of literature that enables us to see the implications of using this technology. John Hersey's non-fiction book *Hiroshima* tells the human tale of the bombing of Japan using this weaponized technology. It is Hersey that, through his journalistic efforts, shows the impact of the bombing on six individuals: their pain, their fear, and their grim realities.

These tales cannot be told in the annals of science texts and, as readers, we cannot really feel what it is like to be in the shoes of the people impacted by this horrific event even if an historical text tells us of possible impacts. It is Hersey's work that shows us that, even though we can develop a bomb, there are human consequences that indicate that maybe we should not use it or, just perhaps, maybe we should not make them at all. It is this focus on the humanities that reminds us how small we are, but also that we are all here together and that our action or lack of action has a consistent and direct impact on the Other.

It is the public school system that provides for the construction and preservation of the cultural narrative that binds us as a community. It is the public school system whose "primary function . . . is the maintenance of culture" (Goslin, 1965, p. 2). These cultural narratives help us to find our place in the world by establishing our past, explaining our present, and predicting our future. "Education transmits a common cultural fund to the next generation and in the process helps to bring hordes of young barbarians to adult ways that are continuous with the past" (Burton, 1962, p. 11). Schools require students to read and study these narratives and offer places where they can engage them and critique them with others. They can engage these narratives and, hopefully, learn from the successes and failures of the previous generations. Most students would not embark on this journey on their own. It is with guidance and prompting that their teachers encourage and require them to read the narratives of the past.

Postman offers us another example of the value of literature in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter.* In this tale, adulteress Hester Prynne is forced to live a life of public shame and infamy by wearing a scarlet letter on her breast as a symbol of a sin she committed with the town minister. She and her daughter, Pearl, are shunned by their Puritan community as a result of her one indiscretion and forced to live a life alone outside of their community. This reading is

largely absent from many schools today because teachers and administrators have deemed it old and irrelevant to today's youth, opting instead to replace it with *The Hunger Games* or something by Nicholas Sparks which may interest students but that is far below their reading abilities. Postman offers us an explanation of why this work is still relevant even though it was written two hundred years ago. "*The Scarlet Letter* was not written by a man who wanted to improve the art of the novel, but by a man who wanted to improve the art of living together" (Postman, 1988, p. 17). The novel was not written to improve the skill of writing. It was written to encourage readers as a community to embrace the Other regardless of any mistakes or indiscretions that have occurred. The novel reminds readers that, despite their supposed commitment to God and faith, the Puritans hypocritically ignored the concept of forgiveness and the foundational narrative that we are our brothers' keepers. Hawthorne encourages his readers to act differently by putting them in the shoes of Prynne and her daughter in the hope that readers will choose to live their lives with attention to the Other in a way that the Puritans did not. This lesson could not be taught through a scientific narrative. It can only be taught through the experience of putting oneself in the shoes of the Other that the reading of literature provides.

Although educators understand the significance of their curricula and the importance of their roles, most probably would not consider their role in the development and protection of cultural and historical narratives. They may see their roles as small, providing steps upon which students build their knowledge and skills, but not see their integral roles in preserving the values and ethics that are important to their communities. They focus on the classic subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic and approach them from a skills-based perspective. They assign students to write papers on works that fall into the literary canon of a particular time or place in the hope that students will develop the literacy skills necessary for post-secondary study. When focusing

specifically on literature, the assignments teachers give to their students require students to find figurative language – metaphors and the like - but do not really focus on how they can apply the message in the author's text to their post-modern lives. Additionally, they often neglect the historicity of the piece as well. They focus on the building of skills and not the spreading of a narrative that exposes young people to our cultural and historical past.

Some suggest that the reason that schools downplay the significance of the arts and humanities is that they are not viewed as making a worthy financial contribution to society. In a public school system that values careers, the arts and humanities are often the first to be cut when funding is short. These studies are viewed as not contributing to a profit-making end. "Today, education is almost exclusively thought of in terms of career preparation. That's what we've lost" (Haas, 2016). 25). Students need skills in order to obtain jobs. They can gain content knowledge via the internet at no cost and if they desire entertainment in the form of the arts, they can pay for it themselves. Therefore, it is far more cost effective to eliminate programs like art, band, foreign language and the like so that districts can save on the cost of teachers, books, and other instructional materials.

One value of the arts and humanities is that students who participate in these courses are more likely to be exposed to a plethora of different traditions and cultures and will ultimately be more open-minded, empathetic, and less likely to develop narrow-minded perspectives that they try to impart on others (Fish, 2018). Considering this through a literary lens, they develop sympathy and empathy as a result of experiencing the joys and the trials of the Other.
This is not to say that STEM subjects have no value. Quite to the contrary, they are very valuable in a 21st century society. What I argue here, is that they more valuable when they are combined with a strong humanities base. Children are losing the connection to who we are and

where we came from because, when the humanities are taught, they are taught in a vacuum that abandons students to contemporary pop culture (Vendler, 2014). Postman also calls for this balance in education. Without a balance of STEM and the humanities, it is our culture that will pay the price if we blindly embrace digital technology in our schools without providing a balance of narratives (Postman 1996). Teaching the humanities is not about simply teaching facts and dates, reading novels and plays, or listening to music and looking at art. The humanities require content knowledge, interpretation, and critical thinking in order to understand and evaluate. There is no immediate result or impact that is measurable from studying the humanities and there is rarely a "right" answer, which makes it difficult for students to embrace. Students want to be given an answer or provided concrete evidence that they can then easily regurgitate on a test and forget when they put their pencils down. The humanities push them outside of their boxes and require them to think and develop opinions that they will support with facts and evidence. They also require students gain knowledge and develop traits over time in comparison to math and science where students receive immediate gratification in the form of an answer. This goes against the immediacy that 21st century learners require. For this reason, the humanities often frustrate them because they rarely receive immediate gratification from learning about them. The 21st century learner likes to be told what to know, how to answer, and what to think. This is easier than having to arrive at the answers themselves through careful review, evaluation, and contemplation.

The humanities also offer a greater opportunity for public discourse, something that Postman feared was disappearing as a result of the image-based television culture of the 1980s. Postman believes that the disappearance of discourse is a direct result of the image becoming a staple in American homes and schools. In the 1960s through the 1980s, Postman's criticism of

television as an immediate cause of this disappearance is noted in his works, including *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985). Postman told us then that every technology that emerges requires a tradeoff (1985). With television, the tradeoff was text. Instead of reading books and using our imaginations to create the images of the characters and events in our heads, television provided them for us, requiring less thought and criticism on our part. However, today's media takes this to a new level. While Postman argued that television images were replacing written text in the providing of information, at least the television was still a communal piece of technology up until the late 1990s. Television at least invited discourse. As families watched a show, they were all engaged in the plot and captivated by the characters and their stories. They discussed what happened and projected what might occur on the next episode.

Postman was concerned about this as early as 1985 when he wrote about that the "value of public discourse dangerously declines" (p. 29). While television itself did not cause an end to public discourse, Postman's concern is valid in regards to the Internet, especially now considering the advent of streaming services like Netflix and YouTube. At least with the television, everyone in the home or the classroom watched the same show and could interact with each other regarding its content. The Internet isolates its users in homes and classrooms by allowing everyone to determine their own programming without affording them the opportunity of engaging in discourse about those programs. No one is watching the same thing, making it virtually impossible to engage in dialog about what is being viewed.

The solution to the problem of over-funding STEM and under-funding the humanities is to demonstrate that they are complimentary subjects. In short, whole-brain education is needed and to focus only on the left-brain with STEM ignores the right brain's creativity. STEM and the humanities are much better together than they are apart (Richards, 2013). While some have

instead embraced the idea of a STEAM education by adding an A to STEM to represent the arts, this may seem to some like the science community throwing the humanities community a bone. In the STEM acronym, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math are all represented as independent subjects to be studied. In the STEAM acronym, the arts are represented all as one subject. Where is philosophy, history, literature, or music? This A seems like an afterthought and, when considering things through the Postmanian lens, it lacks balance. We should, instead, work continuously to bring science and the humanities together in such a way that they equally compliment each other.

The humanities and STEM can both provide a foundational reason to still engage in the traditional public school model. As technology replaces jobs, many question the need for traditional brick and mortar schools in a world where everything one needs to know can simply be Googled. Postman was the first to admit that the dissemination of knowledge was really not the narrative guiding the curriculum in public schools since the advent of the printing press that enabled the distribution of texts to the masses at an affordable cost (Postman, 1999). Instead, he says, schools had two purposes that they still have even in today's highly technological world. First, they teach children how to engage in the group dynamic necessary in order to function in a democratic society (Postman, 1994). They foster a narrative of community where students are taught to engage learning with the other. They provide a platform where students can share in the acquisition of knowledge and contribute to a learning community in which others can learn from their scholarship.

Second, they help students discover the narrative that guides their learning. They find the meaning of "human history that gives meaning to the past, explains the present, and provides guidance for the future" (Postman, 1994). This guidance in understanding the meaning of the

narratives that make us who we are and help direct where we will go cannot be provided by the technological approach to teaching that is currently the focus of schools nationwide. It can only be explored in a platform that encourages engagement in the dialectic rather than the solitary gathering of information in a vacuum that technology fosters. It is where students learn to make sense of the barrage of information that is now at their fingertips and to find where that information fits in the puzzle of the social fabric they engage daily. It is only by counter-balancing the digital technology STEM narrative and a strong humanities narrative, that our students can truly have it all; they can learn skills that will lead them to highly productive careers and engage in dialogue, reading, and writing that lead them to roles as members of a community that knows, understands, and cares for the Other.

New Coursework 101:What is Media Ecology Anyway?

What Postman argued for in the age of television, and what I will argue is even more necessary now in the age of the personal digital device is to change the focus of our course work. Postman believed that in order for students to contextualize the topics they studied, they needed to learn the history of the subject (1992). For example, if students are studying evolution in Biology class, they must first learn the history of Charles Darwin. They must set him in his historical moment and evaluate what situations existed at that time that prompted him to embark on this academic endeavor. They must discuss his 5-year adventure on the HMS Beagle and its impact on his work. They also must consider his opposition by learning about the belief systems that were in place socially that caused the rejection of his theory. Only when they understand the historical moment and consider arguments from both sides can they truly evaluate where they stand on the issue and evaluate Darwin's contribution to the biological world.

In Postman's view, "every teacher must become a history teacher (1992, p. 189). For this to be accomplished, a substantial change will be required, specifically at the secondary school level where teachers are more specialized. This could be accomplished through professional development time provided to teachers by their districts. Districts waste much of this time, in my estimation, teaching teachers about digital technology devices, which is the 21st century of spending a day teaching a person how to use a hammer or a pencil. Since most of the teachers in classrooms now are, to use Prensky's term, digital natives, they will figure these out on their own and do not need significant training to do so. Teachers could instead be given time to delve into the historical moments of their subject areas to find out what was going on in those moments in regards to their subject areas and other subject areas so they can see the connective tissues that bring them all together.

There is a reason that Mark Twain wrote *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the moment that he did. His work was a response to the industrial period, or what Postman calls "a celebration of the enduring spirituality of pretechnological man" (1992, p. 47). The writing of this novel, and of every piece of literature, requires certain situations to be in place – a perfect line up of the planets if you will – or the writing cannot come to fruition. This is true for every subject area. Certain things had to be in place at certain times for things to emerge. Postman calls on us as educators to know what those things are, to convey them to our students, and to ask our students to evaluate these situations to determine how this all occurred. Once teachers have done this research, they must then incorporate this information into their courses in such a way that it answers Postman's call for analysis and evaluation. Postman believes that this is what is really meant by a "back to basics" approach to education (1992): each subject area getting back

to the basics of what they teach, why they teach it, and requiring students to evaluate and analyze its significance.

Additionally, Postman also calls for us to consider coursework in Media Ecology. Postman reminds us that, each time a new medium is introduced to a culture, it impacts the culture. It does not just add to or take away from the culture. It totally changes the culture in such a way that people within that culture are often unaware that it has changed (Postman, 1992). He calls for us to generate this awareness in our classrooms so that we may preserve our cultural history. Postman calls this study Media Ecology: "the realization that technological change is neither additive nor subtractive. It is ecological" (Postman, 1992, p. 18). Media ecology courses are philosophical in nature and require students to determine how technology changes us so that awareness may be generated and changes are evaluated and analyzed. Postman does not expect that these courses will result in students' refusal to use the emerging technologies of the moment. On the contrary, he knows they will use them. What he wants them to know is how they are being used by the technologies of their historical moments. Perhaps then the digital servants of this generation will realize their service to their digital technologies and embrace them in a different manner.

Postman was also concerned with the barrage of information that he calls "garbage" and the use of that garbage by young people (1992, p. 69). This information is, in his estimation, not really useful or meaningful and is not helpful in even providing direction for those who are inquisitive (Postman, 1992). This is, of course, why teachers and public schools are still necessary in the 21st century. Their role is to set information in an historical moment and to help students move forward to find more information that is relevant. School is where students will learn how to discern between reality and "fake news" that is prevalent online. They will engage

digital technology in a way that allows them to be critical, evaluative, and analytical – determining which digital technology is best for which task and when is it best to use no digital technology at all.

Schools have been so intent on teaching skills and evaluating their students' abilities to use those skills through standardized testing that they have sacrificed critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation. Postman points out that "A reading test does not invite one to ask whether or not what is written is true" (1992, p. 195). A reading test merely evaluates whether or not one can read. The reason for this is that it would be close to impossible to find a standard way to evaluate a student's ability to think independently, creatively, or critically since those things by nature cannot be standardized. He calls for schools to provide students with access to classic works of fiction, nonfiction, philosophy applicable to all content areas, and even religious texts so that they can evaluate for themselves whether or not those readings are true and what those readings tell us about the people who lived in those historical moments (1992). Only then can our culture be truly preserved and our students become participants in it instead of voyeurs of it.

Chapter 6: Now What?

After considering this long history of educational rhetoric in America, we are left to ask ourselves, what is next? The answer to this question cannot just be asked of our public schools and their employees. It also cannot be asked of our political and community leaders. Just because they attended school in their past does not make them experts nor does their political and legal expertise offer all of the answers to solve these problems. The problems in the public school system are problems of narrative that we must all – teachers, parents, students, business leaders, politicians, and members of the community – work to solve. In the 21st century, we must address the utilitarian needs of our economic and business communities but not forget that our social and academic communities must also be attended as part of our public school narrative. We must embrace a new trivium of careers, community, and culture so that we give meaning back to our public school system and so that we can put more faith in it than we are currently putting into our digital technologies.

Postman says, "Without narrative, life has no meaning. Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention" (1995, p. 7). Postman implies here in the early 1990s that a narrative shift was necessary in our school system. Now in the first part of the 21st century, we must create a new narrative in our schools where preparing students for moneymaking careers is not the only narrative that informs learning. While career preparation is necessary, it cannot be done in a vacuum and it cannot be done at the expense of the other culturally necessary narratives that should also drive education. If public schools are rhetorical institutions, then our students must become educationally bilingual and speak the multiple languages of learning. They must learn things that prepare them to engage careers, but also to engage their communities, their families, their nation, and the world. They

cannot just learn what is necessary for their jobs. They must learn what is necessary to engage their cultures and engage the Other. The current narrative offers a career-only focus that is producing students who are completely devoid of concern for the Other and who are empowered to ignore and in some cases negatively engage the other with the digital technology they are given.

Our jobs are what we do every day. We are invested in them and they consume hours of our days. They give us a place to go each day and they give us purpose. There is no denying that they are an important part of our social and our economic narratives. The problem is that they cannot be our *only* narrative. When all jobs in this field are filled or eliminated by the technological advancements that this generation builds a new transition must occur? Derek Thompson, a writer for *The Atlantic* attempts to address this when he posits the question: what do we do in a world without work? (Thompson, 2015). In his article, he suggests that our purpose and meaning will come from learning and creativity. We will return to a world where the arts are appreciated and where craftsmen engage in local community spaces where they work together on art projects that they place in the community or that they sell for a small price (Thompson, 2015). In today's digital market, artisans like this would be looked down upon as near penniless individuals who desire to return to the past counter-culture movements of the 1960s. Thompson is quick to point out, however, that in old manufacturing towns that have lost their industry, like Youngstown, Ohio for example, members of the communities have created these common art spaces and given purpose to those who do not have jobs. When they have purpose, they have a narrative that guides them and they are less likely to engage in activities like drugs, crime, or violence that serve as a drain on the communities' already strapped financial resources.

Postman also warns us about the loss of community that results from an increase in digital technology. When any technology, digital or otherwise, is introduced to a society, there are winners and losers: people and organizations who specifically benefit from the implementation of the technology and people and organizations who clearly are hurt by it (Postman, 1996b). In regards to computers, Postman is quick to point out that companies that build, sell, or service computers are clearly the winners (Postman, 1992, 1996). It is to their advantage to promote the use of digital technology in classrooms so that they can get the youngest generation hooked on their products for life. Since young people are often responsible for the purchasing decisions at home, they encourage their parents to purchase the digital technology as well. The corporate beneficiaries make billions today and establish a customer base that will last for at least a generation to come as long as they continue to innovate and appear to make progress.

So then who are the losers here? Postman believes that the people are the losers (1992, 1996). The corporate winners tell the losers that it is possible for them to do everything at home with minimal interaction with the Other. They can shop, work, and go to school from the comfort of their homes without ever having to speak to or encounter another person. Digital technology will "thus make community life unnecessary" (Postman, 1996b, p. 27). Community is where we find our shared values and morals, where we communicate our hopes and our fears, and where we look to find guidance and solace. It is our common ground. As the philosophies of digital technology also battle and in some cases destroy our traditional philosophies (Postman, 1996b), we are in need of common ground now more than ever. The community is one place that, if we do not allow for its destruction, that can provide us with the common ground

necessary to both preserve our past narratives and embrace new future ones. Our schools have replaced churches as the hearts of our communities.

With all of his criticism, Postman remained hopeful that his work would generate the awareness necessary to use all types of technology for good and to understand their impacts upon us. He tells us that we are not helpless unless we continue to ignore our responsibility to provide a cultural balance to digital technology that will enable us to keep it in its place (Postman, 1996b). He believed in all the way back in the 19080s that "America has not yet begun to think," in regards to the impact of technology (1982, p. 146) and he would probably not be surprised that it seems we still have not. The fast-paced nature of the technological changes that have occurred over the past 100 years has left us slow to respond and in a mental coma from which we have not yet awoken. Postman's work calls to us through the fog of this coma, telling us that it is not too late to engage digital technology in positive ways and that the classroom is one of the places where we can both teach this positive engagement and also offer the cultural balance necessary to protect our values and morals in a post-modern world.

Earlier in this paper, I mentioned that Pandora's box of digital technology has been opened, and Postman supports those who believe that digital technology is here to stay. We are not simply going to give up our iPads and Smartphones. We have become too dependent upon them. They make us feel good, provide us with the illusion of solace, and give us a perceived knowledge of everything when we may really know nothing. Socially speaking, we will not just give them up to return to a simpler time. We must learn how to work with them and balance the narratives they foster.

Postman calls upon us to remember the full story of Pandora and her box or, in reality, her jar as the myth indicates. Zeus created Pandora as a punishment to mankind because

brothers Epimetheus and Prometheus stole fire after Zeus took it from them. When Pandora married Epimetheus, Zeus gave her the jar as a wedding present, but told her never to open it. Not heeding his warning, Pandora opened the jar, letting out every terrible human condition including poverty, illness, and death in the form of bugs that stung her until she shut the jar.

The gift she was given was both beautiful and evil at the same time, much like today's digital technology. It offers us both a beautiful opportunity to share real knowledge and develop real communities of learners, and an evil opportunity to spread terrible ideologies and misinformation, to isolate ourselves from others, and to develop a world equivalent to the Wild West where the only narrative that matters to us is our own. Every man for himself.

While most of us are aware that to open Pandora's box is often a metaphor for letting terrible negative situations or events emerge, what we forget is the rest of the Greek mythological narrative. Zeus intentionally left the gift of hope in the bottom of the jar, so that when Pandora shut her jar, she left hope inside. There are multiple critical interpretations of this mythological tale. Some feel that this means that hope is lost to mankind, forever kept in the jar, and never to escape. Others feel that hope is the most evil of the objects in the jar because it allows humans to see greater possibilities and thus to regret that they cannot attain them.

I choose to apply this myth a little differently after reading Postman's work. While the Pandora's jar of digital technology has clearly been opened to reveal greed, selfishness, crime, and so many other evil things that digital technology purports and enables, I believe that the hope in her jar comes from education in our public schools. Inside the jar from which emerged standardized testing, formulaic lesson plans and cookie-cutter curriculum enabled by emerging digital technologies is the hope that comes from teachers who are rich in their content knowledge, can develop cross-curricular experiences, can use lessons to teach content that

supports culture, morals, and values, and that will enable students to truly connect to the Other by creating curriculum that requires communication with and service to the Other. It acknowledges the use of digital technology where appropriate and balances that use with the great oral and written traditions of human history that make us who we are as a species. All of these positive things are being held back in Pandora's jar by those who wish to profit from our national public school system or worse by educators who should know better but who instead jump on the bandwagon of each and every educational trend that emerges just so it looks like something is being done, even when that something is wrong. As educators, we have the ability to begin a dialogue that can stimulate positive changes – a preservation of the narratives that are culturally important to us combined with an approach that allows for innovation and technology to be embraced as well. We can have it all if we consider Postman's call for balance.

Postman suggests that we will not solve all of our problems in education by forcing students to choose careers in elementary school, by using data to create our curriculum, by providing social services, or by over-incorporating digital technology into our classrooms. He says, "We must now turn to our poets, playwrights, composers, theologians, and artists, who, alone, can create or restore the narratives that will give a meaningful pattern to our lives" (Postman, 1996a, p. 392). Students must receive exposure to the playwrights and poets to which Postman refers in the public school system. They will not, for the most part, seek them out on their own and they certainly will not seek them out through a personalized educational model based solely on the student's interest. It is never too late to provide these narratives in our schools or include a study of media ecology that will provide a counter-narrative to the STEM focus that currently exists. This does not mean we ignore digital technology or the post-modern desire for attention to our petit narratives via personalization. These things are here to stay.

What Postman's work encourages us to do is to balance them, for not one of these initiatives on their own will be a solution to the world's problems. If Neil Postman has taught us anything it is that hope still exists in the bottom of Pandora's jar of digital technology and that hope lies in our schools. As educators, we just need to open the jar and let it out.

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