UNIT 5

Please note that this is a sample Discussion post to help inspire and guide your own original writing of the assignment. Your assignment does not need to look exactly like the sample, as this sample is just a possible response to the assignment prompt. Be sure to review the reading and grading rubric, complete each task in the instructions, and contact the instructor with any questions.

DISCUSSION POST:

I was able to find a video on the TED site that relates to my topic, a speech by Salman Khan (2011), the founder of the online Khan Academy. While working as a hedge fund analyst in Boston, Khan created math video tutorials for his cousins; after posting them on YouTube, the feedback he received from his cousins and random posters convinced him to quit his job and start a non-profit (Khan, 2011). Khan Academy now has over 2,000 videos on math and other topics as well as interactive exercises, and some teachers are now using these videos to “flip” their classrooms (Khan, 2011). Students watch the videos at home then come to class and work on problems in a setting where they can seek help from their teacher and classmates. Khan’s argument that technology can actually be used to “humanize” education is a compelling one to me, and he also believes that this approach can be used to create a “global, one-world classroom” where a student in Asia could help a student in Chicago with a math problem (Khan, 2011).

Khan (2011) used several methods to strengthen his argument, including a discussion of a pilot program with two fifth grade classes that were using the Khan videos and exercises; he showed a chart demonstrating one student’s progress. He also showed clips of videos and quoted from letters he had received, including one from the mother of an autistic 12 year old boy who struggled with math but suddenly “got” decimals and fractions after watching Khan’s videos. An example like that seemed to fall into the pathos appeal described by Clements (2013) in “The Three Appeals of Argumentative Writing,” while the chart that showed how the database could track how much time students spent on a problem or watching a video (even where they paused or rewatched the video) seemed to be an appeal to logos. With such a powerful program, how could teachers not be better equipped to help struggling students? After reviewing Clements’ “How to Support an Argument and Avoid Logical Fallacies” (2011), I tried to determine Khan’s three parts to his argument:

1. Conclusion: Teachers should integrate videos and interactive exercises into the curriculum.

2. Evidence: Videos can be used to “flip” the classroom and give teachers more time to interact with students, and technology allows students to work at their own pace, which will actually ensure mastery of skills.

3. Assumption: Technology humanizes and equalizes education.
Since I am in favor of expanding students’ access to technology, I find Khan’s argument really appealing. However, I can see some distinct gaps in his argument. First of all, he is assuming that all students will have access to a computer and the internet at home, which is definitely not a given as I have learned from my research so far. Secondly, when he talks about “globalizing” education, he does not address the fact that we do not have a global language; how can a student in India tutor one in Japan? Would Khan create a translation program? How do his videos work for students in other countries? Do they come in multiple languages? Khan was speaking to a very receptive audience, but it would have been helpful if he had anticipated questions like that and included rebuttals in his speech (Clements, 2011). Clements (2011) also notes the importance of citing expert opinion and statistics; Khan didn’t note whether any studies been done to show that the flipped classroom does increase students’ mastery of skills. While the examples Khan mentioned were powerful, the use of isolated examples could be regarded as an anecdotal fallacy (Clements, 2011).

While I did find some weaknesses in Khan’s argument, I think I could actually use his ideas about the benefits of technology in humanizing and equalizing education to strengthen my own argument. Many argue that technology is a way to lessen a teacher’s workload, when in fact, technology can enable them to spend more time helping students work on their areas of weakness. I can also focus on the need to ensure that students have the proper access to technology to make this “flipped classroom” idea workable. Putting more responsibility on students to take ownership of their education is a great idea, and giving teachers more time to help students who need it is also important, but students have to be able to go home and log in if this “global, one-world classroom” can come into being (Khan, 2011).

References


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**RESPONSE POST:**

Hi Steve,
My son has actually watched some of Khan’s math videos and found them really helpful, so I was interested in what you had to say about this video. I looked at the Khan Academy web site, and it looks like they have expanded quite a bit in the time since he made this speech; the site now offers “badging” and classroom data for teachers, which were innovations he anticipated in the follow-up discussion with Bill Gates (Khan Academy, 2014).

The technology access issue you discuss is a pretty significant one. I just read an article on Knewton’s Knerd Dispatch about the “digital divide” that argues “we can’t improve education by curing poverty. We have to cure poverty by improving education” (Ferreira, 2014). Ferreira, founder of the Knewton adaptive learning platform, notes that “richer schools get the good technology,” and until studies can prove that the technology does really improve student outcomes, there will be little desire (or money) to get this technology into poorer school districts (2014, para. 6). How might that point relate both to Khan’s argument and your own? Do you think that this focus on technology is an “either/or dilemma” (Clements, 2011), suggesting that only through technology can we really improve student performance?

Todd

References

