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Reflection #2

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Twenty-One Years is a Long Time

David Gelernter, a computer science professor at Yale University, wrote an essay about computer use in the realm of education. One would think that he would write positively about the wide use of computers in school, being an author of multiple computer logistics book as well as a man the *New York Times* have called a computer science “rock star”, but that isn’t the case. In Mr. Gelernter’s paper, titled *Unplugged*, he writes about how books are more portable than computers, how you can’t teach someone without looking them in the face, and how politicians need “tasty sound bites” to get elected; this was written in 1994, and it’s really obvious.

More technological advancement has been made in the last twenty years than any other time period to date. Obviously, a lot has changed. Since 1994, Google was founded, iPhones were released, and *Java*, the computer language that now powers over four billion devices, was created. This was even written before DVD’s came out. Gelernter writes, “...a book is more portable than a computer, has a higher-resolution display, can be written on and dog-eared and is comparatively dirt cheap.” This might have carried some weight back then, but couldn’t be further from the truth now. Most smartphones, tablets, and ebooks are more portable than every educational book I’ve seen. You don’t have to worry about bending or ripping them, either. And with internet capable devices, you have access to just about every book you can think of.

There’s nothing wrong with having alternatives to books. Unlike in the past, education is accessible through more than just textbooks and chalkboards. I don’t see anything wrong with having options. There aren’t any rules saying that teachers have to use computers, or that they’re forbidden to have students read books and write essays by hand. I was fortunate enough to have teachers that utilized this array of options. I was taught how to be productive with a computer, and without.

Going through school wasn’t nearly as awful as David thought it would be. Computers do have downsides, but the upsides outweigh them by so much that it’s not arguable if they’re worth having in class. In my experience, computers haven’t done the teaching, but instead been indispensable tools. For instance, in the english class I’m in, there is a lot of writing papers. If we didn’t use computers in class, we wouldn’t be able to turn in as many papers as we do now. Computers allow us to write papers at incredible speeds. Before, multiple drafts of a single paper were needed, but with word editing programs, the same word document you wrote your first draft with becomes the final draft as you go through and edit. While writing papers by hand, we can’t always see mistakes we’ve made, while computer programs can automatically correct them as we write.

Mr. Gelernter implies that online writers aren't legitimate, and that only authors can be taken seriously. There is some truth to this, but you still have to be a good writer if you want to be taken seriously. Online journalism and bound books are in completely different ballparks. Articles written for web are shorter and more concise, while printed materials are longer and more drawn out. They're both as legitimate as the other. You won't carry any weight in either if you don't dot your i's and cross your T's, so I don't see a problem with either.

I feel like Mr. Gelernter wrote this more for generation x. I feel like my parents would listen to him, because they are terrified of what they believe technology is turning us into. Being born just in time for computers to be as prevalent as they are, it’s hard to think badly about them. I might have listened to Mr. Gelernter if I had graduated without the heavy use of computers, like my mother and father, but having utilized them I just can’t agree.