Pros and Cons of Computer Technology in the Classroom

Author: ***Kathleen Patrice Gulley***

University: California State University, Sacramento

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Instructor: Dr. Rosemary Papalewis

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The world is constantly changing and ways in which we function at home, work and school are also changing. The speed at which technology has developed plays a major role in these changes. From e-mail to on-line classes, computers are definitely influential in our lives, and can enhance the learning process in schools in various ways. With the increasing popularity of computer technology, it is essential for administrators to support and encourage computer technology in our education systems.

Computers are important in education because they force us to reconsider how people learn, how they are empowered, and what the nature of learning and useful information is. We cannot avoid the presence of computers in our schools because they are forcing educators to re-evaluate the very nature of what and how we teach. In 1998, the Office of Technology Assessment reported there were approximately 5.8 million computers in schools across United State's or approximately one machine for every nine students (Provenzo, Brett, & McCloskey, 1999).

An advantage of having computer-assisted instruction in the classroom is that the computer can serve as a tutor. Teachers can only aid students in the learning process so far. Computers can assist teachers and act as a tutor for the students who are falling behind. A report entitled Computer Advantages: Tutoring Individuals, states "with computers as tutors, no student will be overwhelmed because he or she is missing fundamentals the computer will repeat material until each lesson has been sufficiently mastered" (Bennett, 1999, p. 3). Teachers do not have the time to repeat lessons over and over again. The writer believes it is important to give all students in the classroom the opportunity to adequately learn the lessons, and with computers acting as tutors they can.

One of the biggest problems in the world today is illiteracy. Each year thousands of students graduate from high school reading at the elementary school level, or not reading at all. Every student should have the opportunity to receive additional assistance when they need it. Teachers are doing the best they can with literacy issues in the classroom, and computers can reach the students that the teachers cannot. The article entitled "Computers as Tutors" discusses Annaben Thomas (Bennett, 1999) who was unable to read despite her years in the New York City school system. After leaving school, she was taught by tutors and had enrolled in library literacy programs and adult education classes trying to overcome her handicap. After doing everything she still had not learned to read, until she enrolled in a computer course program that taught her to read and write. Because of success stories like this it is crucial to support the use of computer technology in the classroom.

Although the advantages of having computer technology in classrooms outweigh the disadvantages, the writer can respect the concerns of the people who are against computer technology in the classroom. Many people argue the computer does all the work for the students, not allowing them the opportunity to digest what they have learned. Boyle (1998) argues that information technology "may actually be making us stupid." (p. 618). He argues that the computer takes more of the thinking process out of students.

Many people who grew up in the pre-computer age worry that the use of computers will take the emotion and heart out of the classroom. Wehrle (1998) states "the pre-computer age generation envisions designing computer technologies that still take into account the emotional needs of the students" (p.5). Their main argument against computers in the classroom is that teachers need to take into account the importance of student emotions. They do not want the quick evolution of computer technology to interfere with the student's need for human support that they receive from the teacher-based instruction. The implications of having computer technology in the schools are the belief that the computer will solve many of the problems that teachers cannot. These include helping students raise the standardized test scores, actually teaching students the basics such as reading and mathematics, and implying that the teachers have the skills and abilities needed to accurately aid students with their computer usage.

Education serves as a window through which our imagination and curiosity can take flight into the unknown and enhance our creativity, and the use of computer technology in education plays an enormous role in helping students to achieve their full development potential. Given the role that education plays in preparing students to go into the world, it seems clear

that there should be a connection between the world and the classroom. Unless education reflects the world in which it exists, it has no relevance for the students.

In conclusion, the advantages discussed concerning computer technology in the classroom outweigh the disadvantages. Computer technology is a positive supplement to bridge the gap between education and the technological world in which we live. Computer-assisted technologies in schools offer students greater access to information, an eager motivation to learn, a jump-start on marketable job skills and an enhanced quality of class work.

References

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