

Why teachers fear technology

Sep 13 2005 Daniel Davies, Western Mail

TEACHERS are afraid to use computers in the classroom because they worry technology will interfere with "genuine" learning from books, researchers said.

Many teachers underestimated their job in directing classes, even believing technology would somehow come to replace them, the report, published today, found.

It describes IT in schools as "sporadic" and "disappointing". Computers were particularly shunned in humanities and arts lessons, the study says. It found that teachers preferred to use them for administration instead of teaching.

Professor Rosamund Sutherland, of Bristol University, said teachers lacked the confidence to use computers, even though their schools are well equipped.

She said teachers needed more support to help them incorporate technology into lessons.

Her study also found teachers underestimated the impact of students' experience of technology outside school.

Computer games hindered children's concentration, with many treating science simulations as games instead of taking them seriously. The researchers saw pupils getting distracted and using download items from the internet that were not related to lessons. But pop music had a "positive impact" on composition in music lessons, internet search engines helped language investigations in English and using spreadsheets helped primary pupils handle data.

The study also highlighted the ways children pass on skills they learn in schools to their parents. Some had taught their parents how to use the presentation programme PowerPoint.

Fear Factor

Jeff Utecht, Bangkok, Thailand

I have been doing a lot of thinking lately about fear and the fear some ~~educators~~ grown-ups have about technology. When did we stop exploring? When did it all of a sudden become dangerous to click on something on our computer that we really don't know what might happen? Is it do to viruses? Or are we just afraid that the computer will blow up?

At what age do we loose that sense of exploration, that adventure of that we might not know what will happen and because we can not predict the outcome we do not take the risk?

Or maybe it has nothing to do with fear? Maybe it has to do with experience. We just don't have the experience with this new technology to have the comfort level that allows us to explore.

I mean how many of us got to grow up playing with computers like we did Legos?

This technology causes fear in us because we do not understand it. We did not...experience the computer as a way to explore. No, by the time we were introduced to the computer we were already at a stage where we were afraid that if we hit the wrong button, or click the wrong thing, that the computer might blow up. Of course we all heard the horror stories of friends losing data, and viruses taking over machines, and that of course made us more cautious. Is this part of the reason our student's are so much more advanced than we are as a generation?

Report reveals teachers' fear of classroom technology

- [Polly Curtis](#), education correspondent
- [guardian.co.uk](#), Tuesday 13 September 2005 12.16 BST

Too many teachers are nervous about using computers in the classroom even though they happily use them at home, according to new research.

Pupils are far more confident but their experience of playing computer games means they don't always take learning on computers seriously.

The four-year research project at the University of Bristol confirms recent Ofsted reports which found use of information communication technology (ICT) in schools to be "sporadic" and "disappointing". Some 30% of teachers surveyed failed to make good use of computers in the classroom - despite the government's £1bn investment.

The study, which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, reveals that many teachers fear computers will interfere with 'genuine' or book-based learning, particularly in the humanities and creative subjects, and use ICT only for administration and routine tasks.

The report says that many teachers lack the confidence to take the risk of using technology in their subject areas, although they have reasonable facilities at school and they use computers at home.

Rosamund Sutherland, who led the research, said that teachers could be helped to make more effective use of computers in a wide range of subject areas.

Professor Sutherland said: "Seventy per cent of the teachers who took part in the study were able to incorporate computers into their classroom.

"After working with researchers they generally had a more positive view of technology and said that it enhanced their role as a teacher and had a beneficial impact on the learning environment."

However the findings also reveal that young people's experience of playing games (in 2003 76% of pupils were playing games at least once a week) had a negative effect when they approached science simulations like a computer game and did not take them seriously.

Analysis of video data also showed that students could work with ICT for long periods of time, investigating their own questions and experimenting with ideas in an interactive way.

This was apparent whether students were investigating language and spelling, finding out about the properties of quadrilaterals or writing emails to a German correspondent.

However, some young people became distracted and used the internet to learn things their teachers hadn't intended. Professor Sutherland said: "Teachers are the gateway to larger cultures of knowledge. No amount of ICT will ever replace teachers in this respect."