USE OF COMPUTER IN SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The number of microcomputers in the U.S. schools has been dramatically increased from about 100,000 in the early 1980's to about 2 million today. This technological development trend was accompanied by enthusiasm and skepticism among software programmers, educators and other social scientists. Enthusiasm, because this trend was seen as a revolution in computerization of education and a new way of enhancing a student's learning ability. Skepticism because of the educational computer's side effects and ethical prospects.

This paper is an attempt to study the computer use in today's schools, emphasizing three major issues: 1) study the present status of the computer in schools and its educational role; 2) comparing present role of computers in school with past expectations; and 3) seeing how teachers view the computers' present and future roles.

In pursuit this study two units of analysis were identified: individual teachers involved with computers in schools; and schools with computer labs. Questionnaires were sent to computer teachers and principals of 50 schools randomly selected from the Greater Pittsburgh Area. The result of the survey revealed that although all schools have established computer labs, computer status as an integral part of education has not yet been instituted. The study identified two circumstances affecting the situation: First, in spite of the relative availability of computers in schools (averagely one per 18 students), they are not used adequately. On average, students' use is no more than 1-2 hours weekly. Computer use is limited to drill and practice, writing, and word processing. Mathematics is the main area of computer usage. Second, there is a lack of trained teachers to incorporate computers effectively in education.

The computer in education is far from the "revolutionary status" which tended to be the initial computerization of education goal established in the early 1980's. After all, the school authorities did not believe that current trends in development of computer application would eventually lead to effective change in educational programs.

Teachers emphasized the instrumental role of the classroom computer. They believe that the computer is an appropriate tool to assist their instruction and not a device to replace teachers. Almost all correspondents believe that social interaction among teachers and students, essential for a student's growth, will be reduced if the machine replaces human beings. In conclusion, the paper provides some suggestions concerning computer application in schools.