Electronic Textbook Technology in the Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most underutilized technologies available to the school systems of this nation is the e-book. Although the technology has been available for five years or more, school boards overwhelmingly choose paper-bound sources for their textbook needs over electronic texts. In today’s technologically savvy world where BlackBerries, iPods, and laptops are commonplace, even given to students as in the case of Quaker Valley School District, electronic textbooks should be considered as a valid alternative to traditional learning media.

BACKGROUND

What is an e-book? To put it simply, an e-book is a device about the size of a traditional paperback in which digital forms of printed material can be downloaded and read. They are light, “…portable, and have a much larger capacity than a book of comparable weight and size…” (Ask Bruce!, n.d.)

Palm Pilots, BlackBerries, SmartPhones, and other small personal devices are readily available to the public at a wide rage of prices. As with all hardware, a software program is required to allow the technology to function for its intended use. Microsoft Reader, Acrobat Reader, and PDF formats are currently the most popular reading configurations available to users. Books can be purchased from online sources and downloaded in memory cards or on the internal memory of the devices. An e-book “…can hold a whole library on a device no bigger than a paperback” (Fildes, 2003). One can think of no better fit for this technology than a learning institution.

ADVANTAGES OF ELECTRONIC TEXTBOOKS

There are many advantages to this technology and its uses seem endless in a school setting. “An e-book can give you lots more than a paper book. You can store lots of books on your computer, for example. You can mark your page with an electronic bookmark and jump straight to it when you open the book. Some e-books have built in dictionaries so you can click on a word and find out what it means. And non-fiction books may come with extensive collections of references and footnotes” (Ask Bruce!, n.d.).

Instead of heavy backpacks, students would be able to electronically carry all of their textbooks in a small two-pound device.

Accessible from anywhere by a simple touch of a screen, the complete text of every course could be available to the student. With three-dimensional pictures, interactive tools, visual and audio links, comments by the author, Web links, and small video demonstrations learning experiences would be enhanced. “Imagine a biology e-book showing video of DNA’s double helix coming to life, rather than the two-dimensional illustrations typically found in printed books. Or think of a math book with a built in calculator or spreadsheet so students can try out formulas as they read” (CNN.com, 2006).

To the student it may seem as if they have taken the instructor home with them.

Instead of waiting for a new text to be printed, updating materials found in texts would be seamless. “While traditional textbooks in many areas are outdated once they are written, one advantage of an e-book or course pack is that up-to-date information is only a click away. This provides students with more current information
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