Examining Technological Disparities and Instructional Practices in English Language Arts Classroom: Implications for School Leadership and Teacher Training

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ABSTRACT

A considerable amount of research has been conducted about technological disparity within various classroom instructional practices; yet educators have concerned about the chronic underachievement of students in urban school settings. In order for technology to have its greatest impact on our educational system, teachers and student must not only access to technology, but access to technology in a contextual matter that is culturally relevant, responsive and meaningful to their educational practice. Results of this study revealed that socioeconomic status of the school still plays an important role in how well teacher are trained and their ability to integrate technology in the classroom. This study provides a platform for discussion on technology and instructional practices within urban school and to offer recommendations as we begin to rethink technological disparities and the intentional and unintentional affects on instructional practices.

Keywords: computer-based instruction; digital divide; educational technology; instructional technology; social impact of technology; teacher preparation; technology-enhanced learning

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of microcomputers into classrooms during the 1980s was heralded by many as the dawn of a new era in American education. Proponents argued that technology had the potential to fundamentally transform the nature of teaching and learning (Papert,
1980; U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1988). However, over time, it has become apparent that it is far easier to acquire hardware, software, and Internet access (Becker, 1991; Dividing lines, 2001) than it is to capture the potential of technology in significantly meaningful outcomes (Cuban, 2001). Likewise, educators concerned about the chronic underachievement of students often fall prey to the allure of technology as a tool for reversing the historical influences of poverty, discrimination, inequity, chronic underachievement, and lack of opportunity. However, twenty-five years after the introduction of the computer into the classroom, many of the expectations associated with technology in education remain unrealized to some but to other, technology has proven to be an effective tool in the efforts to provide students with opportunities for quality teaching and active student learning and engagement.

Educational institutions have called for instructional and curriculum reform that includes active engagement of students, quality assessments, and the increased and innovative use of technology applications to promote quality teaching and active student learning (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). This is true in the field of English Language Arts where organizations such as the International Society of Technology in Education (2004) and the National Council on Teachers of English (2004) have stressed that technology is essential in teaching and learning mathematics. The underlying assumption of these organizations and English language arts educators alike is that technology will enable students to explore this subject with a greater depth and will allow them to study topics that were previously impractical (Pope & Golub, 2000). However, in order for technology to have greatest impact on our educational system, all students must have not only access to technology, but access to technology in a contextual matter that is culturally relevant, responsive and meaningful to their education. For that reason technology has the potential to narrow the achievement gap of selected groups in the educational system (Roblyer, 2006).

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

English education is an area where technology has the potential to revolutionize the classroom. Whether or not technology should be in the classroom is no longer an issue, the major challenge facing teachers today is how to effectively use technology to help students learn and become activity involved in the learning process (Tulloch, 2000). The use of technology cannot make an impact on learning unless teachers find creative ways to implement technology in their teaching. For this to happen, teachers must be properly trained on how to infuse technology into classroom curriculum and instructional practices. The rise and use of educational technology in the 21st century has become one of the dominant issues and challenges facing diverse communities, business and industry, educational arenas and the larger U.S. society as a whole. Amidst the euphoria and craze over the power and the potential of information and communication technology has to transform the way we learn, the ways in which we communicate, and the ways in which society functions, there is an increasing debate as to who has access and the consequences of access to full participation in a democratic U.S. society. This debate has particular implication for classroom instruction.

Over the past 15 years a considerable amount of research has been devoted to sociocultural disparity in technology availability and use in the classroom (Becker, 2000; Garofalo, Drier, Harper, Timmerman, & Shockey, 2000; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004; Owens & Waxman, 1993, 1994. Past studies conducted by Becker (2001) and Coley, Cradler & Engel (1997) found students from higher income families have been found to use computers in school and in their homes more frequently than students from lower-income families. Students of color from urban schools have also been found to have less access to computers compared to Anglo-suburban students (Becker, 2001). More recently, lower SES schools are only half as likely to have high speed Internet compared to high SES schools.
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