

Boys and E-Learning

Boys (and girls) have taken to technology and multimedia very quickly. We must tap into this in our classrooms and homes by using more digital and audio-visual technology. I have made the comment that Boys must take on more responsibility for their own learning so we must use quality programs to ensure they don't get lost in technology. Monitor the amount of time they are spending behind computer terminals and other devices. Of the various things we need to estimate these days I find that boys have greatest trouble estimating expired time so closely monitor time spent on sedentary activities through use of on-line timers etc. Boys' oral communication can reduce even more if they are spending hours each week on the Internet, but targeted and used correctly it can be a great aid to improving their literacy and communication skills.

There are now some excellent self-instruction programs available as on-line packages and for purchase as CD-ROMs and DVDs. We find that boys get instant gratification and success. With the use of images and interactive screens they are achieving remarkable success. Often they produce more quality work and enjoy it more when it is delivered through technology and on-line learning than they do in a traditional classroom setting with so many disruptions. The pace of their work improves through this medium as well as their accuracy. We are, indeed, fortunate to be living in the "Information Age."

This is an excerpt from the executive summary of the national DEAG (Digital Education Advisory Group) of 2012:

"It is no secret that using social media and digital technology, our children send and receive information in radically different ways to previous generations. The old industrial, "stand and deliver" model of education is long gone. The walls of the classroom and the home have been expanded by social media, the cloud, wikis, podcasts, video-conferencing etc. These are new learning environments and they are local, national and global and populated by whole communities in addition to family, teachers and friends.

Of course, our understanding of the changes to education brought by digital technology is, in itself, not new. Over the last couple of decades it has been recognised that as educators, parents and community leaders we have a responsibility to ensure that we provide educational opportunities to our children which build on and extend the ways in which they learn and communicate.

The challenge for us is to embrace, and respond to, not just the technology, but the extraordinary pace of change. We can't underestimate how rapidly things are changing and we need to make sure no opportunity passes us by to improve learning outcomes. Most importantly, we need a system that caters for differences between learners: those who are racing ahead with new technology and those who are racing to keep up with it; those who have a passion for particular areas; those who are engaged with learning, and those we need to halt disengagement.

We need to harness the transformative potential of digital technology to support new approaches to innovative learning centred around the development of 21st Century Learning skills. These include creativity and innovation; critical thinking, problem solving, decision making; life-long learning; collaboration and communication; ICT literacy; consciousness of being a local and global citizen; and personal and social responsibility."

Finally classrooms and schools are beginning to change in line with technological advances over the past 20 years. Technology has revolutionised all our lives. We are beginning to:

- shop online rather than visiting physical retail spaces
- send and receive mail cheaply and quickly without leaving our homes
- carry out online transactions rather than writing cheques
- see children playing on the Internet etc. when it is too dark to go outside
- catch up with friends on Social Networking sites when meeting up physically is geographically impossible

There is still a place for going to the shops or the bank, playing outside and meeting people for a coffee. It's just that sometimes technology helps us makes these things easier.

There is one area of society, however, where we are slow to see truly revolutionary transformation as a result of technology – our schools. Finally they are beginning to change. E-Learning and online learning is a way that students with designated special needs can work at their own pace without holding the rest of the class back or being labelled by their classmates or schools.

When playing many 21st Century online games, our boys are learning decision making, problem solving, making correct choices and seeing the results of their decisions quite quickly. These are life skills that are essential for living a quality life.

Yes – sometimes boys get “lost” in gaming but in many ways it helps them deal with being rejected by peer groups, being bullied etc. and helps them get through difficult times of their lives. Used correctly and monitored closely, E-learning and well selected computer games can teach our boys and girls very valuable life skills and enhance and improve their learning in a very time effective way.

The days of every member of a class doing the same thing at the same time needs to change. We as teachers are no longer the sole purveyors of knowledge and skills – we need to allow children to access what they need, when they need it, wherever they are. The modern classroom is beginning to make this a reality.

The Boys Forward Institute is working with E-learning and gaming providers to ensure that our boys and girls are correctly lead down the path of quality self-instruction, E-learning and carefully chosen educational computer-based games. We will keep you informed of details in this field in coming months.