

Institutional considerations

15. What considerations influence purchasing decisions? One school of thought advocates buying many inexpensive machines and lending them to students for use at home. Another prefers fewer, more expensive machines kept at school. Whereas microcomputers are isolated stations of electronic wizardry, computer terminals connected to a central processing unit provide communication within, and in some cases beyond, the school. How much is the school willing to invest in products that change so rapidly? How willing is the school to accept guaranteed obsolescence for the sake of a head start?

16. How should curriculum planners and teachers evaluate the avalanche of new software aimed at all ages and levels? While some programs are of high quality, many are not educationally sound. Giving a child a poorly designed program is at best a waste of time, at worst confusing or harmful. Should classroom teachers be responsible for evaluating the language arts, mathematics, social studies, and other programs for their grade level? Where will they find the time? How does one evaluate programs that are heavily protected--products that, once taken out of their wrappers, may not be returned? Will many schools add a computer coordinator to the staff? Might neighboring schools band together to pool their supply of information, and perhaps even their supply of programs?

17. What goes out of the curriculum when the computer comes in? Is the school satisfied with the trade-offs? School A gives computer class half the time once used for science. School B allows students to use the computer instead of going to study hall. School C allows students to choose computer, art, or music as an elective, when the choice used to be just art or music. How do we choose?

Larger philosophic issues

18. Before long, it will be possible, through the computer, for individuals to have access to the entire world of stored information. What should schools be doing to help students make intelligent, creative use of such massive amounts of information? What kind of intellectual training do scholars at all levels need in order to feel empowered rather than engulfed?

19. The history of education is filled with episodes of bandwagons and promises of panaceas. What can schools learn from the past to help keep computer use in proportion now? Are computers tools of the adult world but an educational fad, or are they electronic wings? How should we evaluate their power and their effect?

20. We ask these questions at a time when we are being deluged with reports of educational mediocrity and urged to revive academic excellence. Might the push for quality, accompanied by a push for quantity, foster a climate of going for the sure thing instead of taking a risk? Do we run the danger that computers will be overvalued for rewarding predictability and thereby stultify originality? Might technology heighten the impulse to unethical access to private information and confer status on illegal behavior? Are these genuine perils or fantasies? How do we decide? What do we do?