

Technology vs. the Basics

by

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First, let me say that I am all for the advance of computer technology. I used my Macintosh word processor to write this speech and I rarely use a typewriter anymore. So I think we can all agree that computer technology is enhancing our lives, especially when you consider the possibilities of the Internet.

The big problem, however, is that when you bring the computer into the classroom, you tend to shove aside or downgrade the need to master the basic technology of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The computer becomes an edu-fad and neither teachers, nor administrators, nor students know quite what to do with it.

Apparently, the most important person in the classroom, computers or not, is the teacher. In a report by the Benton Foundation we read that the substantial investment in classroom computers "will be largely wasted if K-12 teachers are not provided with the preparation and support they will need to effectively integrate information technologies into their teaching."

And so, the big problem is how to integrate the computer with classroom education. Homeschoolers find that they can easily integrate the computer with their family learning program because they generally use the computer after they teach the basics. In other words, first make sure the child can read, write, and do arithmetic, then use the computer as a window to the world of information. But information is not education, and books still remain the chief depository of human existence, the chief means of learning anything in depth.

When it comes to schools, the question is: should the computer be used to teach the child, or should the child merely learn how to use a computer? When I was in junior high school I was taught touch typing so that I could learn how to use a typewriter. The typewriter didn't teach anybody anything. The computer, on the other hand, has the ability to teach. All it requires is the right software.

If we review the edu-fads of yesterday, we recall that educators once believed that motion pictures would be the great tool for teaching. But sitting in the dark put too many children asleep, and much of that expensive equipment wound up in closets. The above cited report further states:

"Even the staunchest advocates of computer networking in education concede that in most places technical problems, inadequate training, and insufficient time for teachers to figure out ways to integrate technology with the curriculum have combined to thwart

the dreams of reformers for a technology-driven overhaul of the education system."

Undaunted by these problems, vice president Gore has called for a computer at every desk, which is music to the ears of computer company CEOs like Louis Gerstner of IBM who is leading Big Business to promote School-to-Work reform. Joseph Bauers in an article entitled "Information Superhighway May Be Road to Nowhere," writes:

"The underlying fallacy is that information equals education. . . . The computer . . . is not an information filter but a pump, relentlessly spewing forth an overwhelming barrage of data. To students who are too easily distracted, the computer is the perfect distraction machine. . . . Computer producers have been smart, operating as would any competent drug dealer: They gave away the first machines to the schools. Now hooked, school districts find themselves on a path of endless upgrading. The initial capital outlay, which is astounding, sets school districts on a course of spending that ultimately must take dollars away from other things. . . . Some schools are eliminating entire programs like art, music and industrial education so they can spend more on computers. And in doing so, they are paying homage to a machine that has proved nothing as an instructional tool."

Apple Computer was one of the first companies to give schools free computers in the hope, of course, of finding a great market for their products. But even Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, has had second thoughts about the use of these computers. He *and* stated in an interview in Wired Magazine (Feb. 1996):

"I used to think that technology could help education. I've probably spearheaded giving away more computer equipment to schools than anybody else on the planet. But I've had to come to the inevitable conclusion that the problem is not one that technology can hope to solve. What's wrong with education cannot be fixed with technology. No amount of technology will make a dent.

"It's a political problem. The problems are socio-political. The problems are the unions. You plot the growth of the NEA and the dropping of SAT scores, and they're inversely proportional. The problem is bureaucracy. . . .

"There are solutions to our problems in education. Unfortunately, technology isn't it. . . . We can put a Web site in every school -- none of this is bad. It's bad only if it lulls us into thinking we're doing something to solve the problem with education. . . . Historical precedent shows that we can turn out amazing human beings without technology."

Apparently Mr. Jobs has acquired some wisdom about education which his colleagues in the computer field would just as well keep to themselves. After all, Lou Gerstner is anxious to sell as many computers to schools as possible. In 1996, the nation's K-12 schools spent an unprecedented \$4.34 billion on computers, an amount that is expected to double by the year 2000. There's gold in them thar hills!

Are kids performing better in school with computers? We get conflicting reports.

Debra Saunders writes in a column in the Milwaukee Journal (6-30-97):

"Computers won't help kids who can't read. . . . Some teachers see computers as mind-numbing toys with negative effects on young minds akin to those produced by watching too much television. . . . The Los Angeles Times recently reported how one local elementary school spent \$500,000 and six years in state grant money on computers, [but the school's test scores showed no improvement]."

We get a rosier view of the new technology from a series of articles in the Wall Street Journal (Nov. 17, 97). One article relates how high school students doing research are now going directly to the Internet instead of the library. But there are all sorts of problems kids can get into on the Internet. There's the pornography and pedophiles, and now even gangs have sites. One student observed that the Net is worse than the library because anyone can put stuff on the Net.

Another article glorifies the success of a computer program at Christopher Columbus middle school in Union City, New Jersey, a city with a large Latino immigrant population. The program is called Project Explore and is supported by Bell Atlantic. It features Internet-connected computers and interactive television and is being hailed as a standard for the successful integration of high technology and education. The article states:

"Fred Carrigg, the district's director of academic programs, felt that a whole-language curriculum would be the most appropriate for the district's immigrant profile, since it has been shown to work well in English-as-a-second-language classes. Whole language learning emphasizes research, replaces textbooks with the actual novels and essays they're culled from, and breaks down rigid roles for students and teachers in favor of cooperative student groups. In this arrangement, the teacher is like a coach or a guide for students' own exploration. . . . Even the classroom itself is different, with group tables replacing desks.

"Although the district didn't know it, the last piece of the whole-language puzzle was Project Explore. . . . 'The reason I'm sold on [technology] is because of this whole-language approach . . . which says you need tremendous access to information,' says Mr. Carrigg. . . .

"Starting this year, each student in one seventh-grade class at Columbus is being lent a laptop computer, which they can bring home to use for assignments. In order to participate in the project, students, parents and teachers all had to attend training over the summer, and parents had to insure the equipment. Students will be graded in large part on the basis on their 'electronic portfolios'--the year's classwork and homework stored on the laptop.

"The home-school connection is being strengthened in other ways as well. . . . Wiring students' and teachers' homes during Project Explore allowed communication to flow freely between parents, students and teachers. Parents have to have access. [The]

approach is not just schools--it's the community."

Incidentally, you may have noticed that the establishment now talks about all entities as communities. There's the international community, the gay community, the regional community, the academic community. The word community adds an aura of respectability and social legitimacy to the group. Rarely does the establishment use such terms as families, counties, towns, individuals. They do not refer to the gun owning community, or the Christian community, or the homeschooling community. To them we are gun owners, Christians, and homeschoolers. After all, you can throw Christians to the lions but you can't throw the Christian community to the lions. The establishment has it's subtle way of identifying friends from enemies.

Another article in this special Wall Street Journal edition is entitled "Dewey Wins!" We read: "Dewey's demanding program was based on the theory that schools were at war against the nature of children, rather than enlisting the child's innate qualities in the task of learning. Instead of attempting to hammer facts into students, often with threats of punishment, Dewey wanted schools to present the curriculum as a series of problems, the solutions to which called upon children to employ the methods of the scientist, the historian and the artist.

"And while the push to integrate technology into U.S. classrooms is still in its infant stages . . . many experts involved in the effort believe it could open the way for the reintroduction of progressive teaching methods. . . . Progressive education ideas that didn't work particularly well prior to the technology may prove very effective in an educational environment well-equipped with good technological resources."

Software producers, of course, are anxious to offer the educators what they want. According to the WSJ, "Some educators complain that most software companies produce what is out of step with current teaching methods. They mainly offer 'drill-and-kill' programs that emphasize rote learning, while consumer companies hawk edutainment titles of marginal scholastic values.

"Educators are moving away from rote teaching methods, and they want software to reflect the shift. In general, teachers are looking for products that reflect contemporary thinking about the importance of student-initiated learning, exploration and problem solving."

So what we have are computer companies that want to sell a lot of computers to the schools and an education establishment that wants to use computers to advance their own socio-political agendas. But the computer can also be used to advance the cause of freedom, the cause of educational freedom. In fact, it is giving the homeschool family unlimited access to the world.

After having studied public education for the last twenty-five years I've come to the conclusion that the prime purpose of a government education system is social control. That's what Horace Mann admired about the Prussian education system back in the

1840s: the compulsory attendance laws, the truant officers, the state teachers colleges. All of this was foisted on the American people by a public school movement with great political acumen. They got state legislatures to vote for Prussian-styled centralized, bureaucratized education systems.

What we have learned about government education systems is that they work best in totalitarian countries. The government schools of Germany worked beautifully for Hitler. In communist Russia, East Europe, China, and Cuba the public schools have served as the main vehicle for indoctrinating the children in communist ideals. But it hasn't worked too well in America, because government education is incompatible with the aspirations of a free society.

But there was a time from about 18⁶80 to about 1950 when the public schools were able to educate children fairly well. That was when they taught the basics and were not in conflict with parental values. But as government power and teacher power have grown, the education system has become the chief instrument of changing America into the totalitarians' version of utopia. They want the pleasure that Castro enjoys in owning a whole nation and making everyone a victim of his whims.

You can be sure that they will use the computers to enhance their power. The latest indication of that is the development of their computerized system of tracking students. Most of you are acquainted with the Student Data Handbook which describes the scope of information that will be gathered about each student who enters the system. Well, believe it or not, all of that data can now be put on a lasercard the size of a credit card. Listen to this from a press release from Portland, Oregon:

"Marshall High School is testing a new system of tracking student records and academic progress. Rather than storing and keeping track of paper portfolios, Electronic Portfolios will enable students to save their best work in a computerized format. Marshall High School will utilize lasercard technology to encode information onto a lasercard . . . [which] is a WORM device (write once, read many times) that can store just under three megabytes of information (which roughly translates to about 1250 pages of text). . . .

"The master data for each student will be stored on removable optical disks. Each removable disk can store 1.2 gigabytes of information (or roughly, 600,000 pages).

Information can be put on the card in several different ways: with a video camera, digitizing cameras, such as a Xapshot camera, scanners, and downloading information from a computer.

Various types of data will be tracked with laser cards: Student Records, progress on assessments for Certificates of Mastery, Sub-Endorsements, and Portfolio of evidence. . . . Student records will keep track of schooling history (transcript information, attendance, entry/withdrawal), health records, extracurricular activities, community services. . . . In one glance, one can easily see which assessments were passed,

which ones the student is still working on, and which ones they still need to do. . . .

Lasercard technology is certainly a revolutionary way of keeping track of student records and samples of their best work. . . . All the information is organized in one central place and always readily available as the need arises."

That certainly is as plain a picture of the brave new world as we shall ever get from the totalitarians in our society. And rest assured they are all nice people. Their only problem is that they want to enslave us and we don't want to be enslaved. So what do we do?

Last year, Marshall Fritz, president of the Separation of School and State Alliance, argued that the government education system is beyond repair or reform by those of us who have been meeting, eating and retreating for the last twenty years. The only way to throw a huge monkey wrench into the plans of the totalitarians is to get the government out of education. I've been preaching this from the 1980s when I wrote my book, *Is Public Education Necessary?* Unless we organize to restore educational freedom to this constitutional republic, we won't have this republic for very long.

The plans for world governance are very well advanced, and the planners have billions of dollars with which to carry them out--most of it is our taxpayer money. They also have the military capability of establishing total control and we should not be so naive as to believe that they will not use that power once they decide that that is the only way to finally eliminate opposition to their hegemony. Hillary Rodham Clinton will probably be first to give the order to crack down on the right-wing conspiracy.

Meanwhile, we still have the freedom to meet here and protest, we still have state legislators who must be elected by the people, and we have a growing, vibrant homeschool movement proving that educational freedom works wonders for parents and children. Vouchers and charter schools will keep the government in education by making more parents dependent on government money. Working for them is merely rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

I know that it is hard for many people to give up the notion that public education can be saved. But if you read my book, *Is Public Education Necessary?*, you will see that the original premise of a government education system was flawed and has inevitably led to the very problems we are dealing with today.

I hope, therefore, that all of you will join the movement to get the government out of education. It's the only way that we can serve notice on the totalitarians that we refuse to become their slaves and that we intend to restore this constitutional republic to what it was meant to be: a limited government for a free people.