Too Much or Too Little?

WE are witnessing continuing questioning of the expense of new technologies. According to Greg Thom (HSun, 16/5/06: 35), the ‘enormous amount spent on laptop computers, gimmicky interactive programs from the internet and electronic whiteboards’ might also be accompanied by ‘schools’ love affair with new technology . . . at the expense of effective teaching’. Jamie McKenzie also warns that ‘we have wasted a lot of money in the past decade and people are realising that teaching is more important than equipment’ (HSun, 16/5/06:35). McKenzie makes the now self-evident observation that ‘more people are putting emphasis on professional development, curriculum and good teaching’ (HSun, 16/5/06:35).

McKenzie argues that he is unimpressed by the amount of money being spent on new technologies, increased access by teachers and students to computers and the internet, and initiatives such as the development of more than 1,500 multimedia, digital learning objects being developed by the Learning Federation. He states that ‘they (learning objects) are distant from real classrooms and I am not sure it’s going to make much difference in the lives of real teachers and real students’ (HSun, 16/5/06:35). This is in stark contrast to the more optimistic views of Margery Hornibrook, Learning Federation communications and research manager, who says that ‘there will be a revolution in the use of digital materials in education’ (HSun, 16/5/06: 35). Similarly, Lyn Davie, the Victorian Education Department’s e-learning

manager, Innovations branch, believes that 'teachers and students have embraced the learning potential of new technology' (HSun, 16/5/06: 35).

The key implications emerging from McKenzie's caution is that we mustn't lose sight of effective teaching and learning, and that schools might have bought 'too much junk' and will feel ashamed of having wasted a lot of money (HSun, 16/5/06:35), while other schools that 'didn't jump on any bandwagons, won't have huge amounts of gear sitting in closets' (HSun, 16/5/06:35). Clearly, schools need to be careful that they don't 'byte' off more than they can chew or can afford. However, in an increasingly online world, where students can access and engage in rich multimedia and hypermedia learning environments, the biggest shame for schools and school systems might well be keeping their students and teachers 'sitting in closets', insulated from the rapidly changing world around them.

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