
Subject: Bowles, Andy

The DFES should now invest more of the spending round windfall in on line learning. It should seek to sponsor the development of software to enable all schools to develop virtual classroom and schools. This sort of software needs tools such as synchronus and asynchronus chat, e-mail self assessing tests etc. Rather like WebCT which is in use in HE. Research form the USA is already demonstrating the educational advantages of internet chat for both langauge and cognitive development. Many families in the UK now have computers and internet access. We will never be able to put enough PCs in school to enable all children to have the sort of access they really need.

My proferssional work suggests that all children are doing is meeting the ICT QCA Schemes and that the time they spend as an individual doing something meaningful on computer per week is far too low. The emphasis needs to move towards the home and quickly. Children use computers at home but often spend the hour or so on return from school playing games. Virtual schools and virtual classrooms which are controlled by teachers and NTAs could be visited by children to complete work both individually or as on line groups. Here is how e learning can make sense. On the whole schools should be places for different sorts of learning. Companies such as Dell, Toshiba or Time with cheap credit could provide ways in which all families could have a PC. A PC is a much better investment for a family than a uniform. The DFES could arrange with an ISP provider for say 4-6 to be free for school children. As part of the strategy for inclusion the DFES should could fund a wider programme to provide subsidised PCs and internet connections for socially deprived children.! This would run in parallel to the development of virtual schooling. This is one way to address the divide across social classes. A start could be made with children in care.(90%of these children do not get the 5 GCSEs.). Schools and teachers should be in control of e learning. (Schools are an important focus in any community already but virtual schools could be a hub for the development of community spirit and cohesion as well as a vehicle for life long learning).

Each school would need more kit to do this..

Trained NTAs could manage networks. Publishers could develop CDS of materials for teachers to resource their virtual classrooms and children would have access to web sites such as the BBC and Reeds for on line units of work.

All this would empower teachers, schools and communities to take control of their own learning and development and it would address some of the inequalities associated with an education system disabled by the pernicious influence of social class.

After 30 year of involvement in ICT in Education and now preparing students to use ICT to teach children this is the moment where we can really give children to sort of access to computers they deserve. We would also be first to do this and therefore just as with the BBC computer we could lead the world in the development on on line learning. This time on platforms everybody uses.

Cheers
Andy Bowles.