Pros & Cons: Is Elementary Too Early for 1:1 Technology?

By Mark Pullen

The merits of 1:1 technology in education are so impressive that one question might be raised: How young is too young for students to benefit from 1:1 classroom technology? Specifically, are elementary students too young to have one computing device per child available to them at all times?

The Pros

There are many benefits to allowing students in elementary school to utilize 1:1 technology, most notably the five listed below.

Differentiating Student Instruction: Students can each receive individual math problems to solve, e-books to read, or websites/topics to research through 1:1 technology. With the help of 1:1, both content delivery and students' assignments can be varied based on students' interests and readiness levels. This can all be done discreetly as well; no student needs to know that others are working on easier or more difficult tasks.

Publishing for a Real-World Audience: Just like secondary students, younger students need to see themselves as authors and creators who have valuable things to say to real audiences. 1:1 technology allows students a wider variety of publishing spaces, such as a blog where they can post their writing as well as uploaded presentations, audio, and video files. Suddenly in-class writing mini-lessons come alive as students know they are publishing their work to a potentially global audience!

Extending Learning Beyond the School Day: Students who are allowed to bring their 1:1 devices home can effectively extend their school day and continue their learning in a motivating, fun way. This is especially crucial for students whose home life might otherwise not consist of any form of intellectual stimulation.

Building Tech Expertise: Although the main goal of a 1:1 program is not typically using technology for technology's sake (but rather as a tool for an academic goal), elementary students in 1:1 schools will certainly be ahead of their peers in their expertise and comfort with technology.

Increased Student Motivation: Elementary students in 1:1 environments are frequently more motivated to learn than students in traditional classroom environments.

The Cons

There are a few concerns that tend to arise, except for when discussion about 1:1 at the elementary level takes place. Typically these concerns center around what might be reduced or eliminated if or when 1:1 technology is implemented. This includes concerns like:

Reading a Physical Book: There is something important for young students about holding a physical book and understanding the basic essence of reading from left to right, top to bottom, and page to page.

Movement: Some people fear that 1:1 elementary classrooms will utilize technology every moment, leaving no space for physical education or other athletic movement, and in an ever-increasingly obese society, this causes alarm.

Using Concrete Manipulatives: In math, children learn one-to-one correspondence through the use of physical manipulatives (including fingers). Some 1:1 detractors fear the loss of such manipulatives as a result of 1:1 technology being implemented.

The Final Verdict

Students in elementary school are not too young to benefit from 1:1 technology. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that the benefits of 1:1 are maximized for young students without taking away physical books, manipulatives, and opportunities for physical movement. 1:1 is all about students having ubiquitous access to technology when it is beneficial; it certainly does not mean that students will use technology for every single minute of their classroom experience.

More info at Getting Smart

http://www.gettingsmart.com/2012/01/pros-cons-is-elementary-too-early-for-11-technology/