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# Pages from the Past: 27 Ways to Discourage Children from Using Computers

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# Pages from the Past

## Updated

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### 27 WAYS TO DISCOURAGE CHILDREN FROM USING COMPUTERS

***Editors' note: One of the benefits of changing jobs is the unearthing of buried treasure. This article is an update of a piece of buried treasure discovered by a member of the Equals editorial team. Anita, writing in a personal capacity, has kindly brought her 1988 paper up to date for us.***

The daily literacy hour and mathematics lesson are now in full swing. And, of course, there is ICT to think about. In the spirit of discouraging any enthusiasm for computers on the children's part, and making sure that any effort on your part is minimal, here are some tips.

1. Stick to sums and spellings programs. Kenneth Baker, a former Secretary of State for Education, said in a TES article in 1987: 'I get very encouraged when I see young primary children playing with computers - yes, playing . . . By playing with computers they learn to spell and they learn their simple sums and arithmetic.' A lot of people will have responded over the years to this encouragement from the top, so you will be swimming with the tide.
2. Try to use programs that are competitive, which award points and play loud tunes. They will spur on the clever children to be the first to master their sums and spellings, and become top of the class. They will also help dull children to realise that they are dull, so that they want to do better.

3. Remember the five-minute rule when evaluating a program's suitability for use with your class. The rule says that if it takes over five minutes for you to grasp every nuance of the software, then reject it; it is too difficult for children to use. On the other hand, if you can understand it in less than five minutes, then don't use it; the program is too trivial. Very few programs indeed pass this rule.
4. Try to position the computer outside your classroom in case the children working at it distract the rest of the class. There is no need for you to go outside to question the children about their computer work. The software will tell them whether they are right or wrong.
5. Provide your class with good role models. Remember that only men are strong enough to move any of the equipment. And only men are clever enough to sort out technical problems by connecting things together. You can get the female staff to make them a cup of coffee while they do this.
6. Make sure that the computer is on a trolley or table that is just the right size for the equipment. If people were meant to use a notebook, reference material or a calculator at the same time as they were using a computer, then advertisements would make it obvious.
7. If you teach infants, then buy a set of gummed lower case letters to stick over the capital letters on the keyboard. The purpose is to keep the keys clean and so avoid wiping them.
8. Don't ever attach any kind of concept keyboard to your computer. It would make it easier for some children to access the software, and if you pamper them like that they will never learn to spell. Besides, how will the girls ever learn to become secretaries if they haven't learned to use a proper QWERTY keyboard?
9. Some teachers encourage the children to be responsible for booting up the equipment, getting out their own disks and putting them in the machine. This is a very doubtful procedure which you should only allow if the school is well insured against involuntary electrocution.
10. Use the same program for all the children in the class, which will save you from having to get to grips with any other software. They can all manage it if only they try hard enough. Give the clever children slightly longer for their turn because they need time to exercise their brains. When all the children have had their first turn, start another round to see if they can get one more sum right. This should keep you going for several weeks.
11. Always set a time limit for computer work. Pressure to finish by the time that the bell goes really helps to sharpen up their minds. Never allow the children to go on working with the computer after school, or during breaks, or worse still, tomorrow. It could lead to them wanting to go on with their computer work when you want to get on teaching them the dates of Kings of England and other essentials.
12. Never let the children work together at a computer, or they will copy each other, and then you will never know which children can get their spellings and sums right. Although some teachers prefer children to discuss their computer work in a group, all that talking is a distraction. You need to aim for complete silence if you can. It allows pupils to concentrate.
13. Avoid like the plague any attempt to make you do computer work for more than one afternoon a week. It would mean that you had time for serious stuff, like using a word processor or a database, which would detract from your emphasis on sums and spellings.
14. Remember that a computer is a very expensive device - like the school piano or the football posts. So make sure that when your 'computer hour' is timetabled, the machine is switched on all the time and that children are rotated briskly through having a turn. This will make sure that the head is pleased (there is always someone bowed over the keyboard), parents will be pleased (their Sharon will get her go regularly), and you will be pleased (because the only programs you can get through at that sort of rate are the sums and spellings ones).
15. Don't ever use an adventure game or a simulation. They last for weeks, and anyway are cross-curricular in nature, so you would never know whether you were teaching your literacy hour or daily mathematics lesson.

16. If your colleagues insist that children in your class use a word processor, then make sure that they first use pencil and paper to write out in full what they want to type in. This will save time on drafting and redrafting at the keyboard, and will also mean that their spellings are correct because you can mark them first.
17. Another good idea is to give yourself some typing practice by typing in some text as fast as you can. It will probably contain spelling and punctuation errors, because teachers are trained to teach, not to type. Put this text to good use by getting the children to correct the errors. This saves you from having to mark anything at all. And don't worry if you haven't got access to a printer. It will be good writing practice for the children to copy out their work from the screen.
18. Remember that children cannot possibly interpret a block graph or pie chart until they have drawn loads of them for themselves using felt pens and squared paper. It would be a great mistake to ask them to present and print a suitable graph or chart based on information in a computer database. It would make their brains lazy and reduce the opportunities they have for colouring.
19. If you really are forced to let the children use Logo, do make sure that they know that maths is about getting things right first time. Never allow them to amend what they have done. It is of course possible for children to pose their own problems, to start on one line of enquiry, to back track . . . but this only wastes time that could be used for doing sums.
20. If the teacher in the previous class has been doing some problem solving using control technology, then make it quite clear that you are not going to have all those wires trailing all over the place in your classroom, or children crawling on the floor looking for the lost gear wheel from the technical Lego kit.
21. Don't believe anyone who says that computer work can make a contribution to children's awareness of different cultures. Who on earth is going to pay the telephone bill if they use the Internet to correspond with children in Alaska, South America or Tasmania, or for exchanging data on rainfall? If you have to get involved with multicultural work, just get out a 'flags of the world' recognition program. It's much cheaper.
22. Ignore anything that children have done with computers at home. Parents are bound to have bought the wrong sort of software.
23. Some people go to ridiculous lengths to display children's computer work in the classroom, and even send home examples for parents to see. This only creates more work, and may even make both parents and children enthusiastic about the computer, which will divert you from concentrating on mastery of sums and spellings.
24. Let children know that real computer work is difficult, and that you have to be really clever to be good at it. Explain to your class that it is usually boys who do well, because computers go with men's jobs like being a systems analyst or a programmer. Spur on the boys by giving them the first turn at the computer, asking them what to do when anything goes wrong, and by getting them to show their proficiency with the software to anyone who visits your classroom, especially inspectors.
25. Whatever you do, don't let the children see you or any other teacher using a word processor, spreadsheet or database. It could give them the idea that adults find computers helpful. Some schools are silly enough to arrange visits to the supermarket, bank or railway station to see computer technology in action, which just adds to the impression that computers have serious uses.
26. Don't get involved in any attempt at planning a policy for the development of the use of ICT in your school. If someone says that continuity and progression are important, counter this by talking about the importance of play in early childhood. This is bound to impress someone.
27. Finally, never volunteer to attend a course that might extend your own understanding and knowledge of ICT in primary and special schools. It is quite sufficient that you can plug a computer into the mains. Any course attendance might mean that someone expected you to help other staff, or worse still, install new software, which would take up your valuable time. If anyone insists that you go on a course, point out that your school has just invested in a dozen wacky practice programs, and that you have also acquired a few more from a friend who knows how to copy anything, and it's going to take up all your time learning how to use them and getting them catalogued. You know that if you got to grips with Logo you would only need to worry about one piece of software, but after all, what use is Logo going to be in the national curriculum tests in 2002?

*Andover*