Article Critique # 3: An Analysis of an Ethnographic Study, a Survey, and a Case-study Research.

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Introduction:
This critique examines three studies about the integration of different technologies in the classroom. Each article used different methods to reach their objectives. The first research is about the incorporation of word processors in grade three students to enhance writing skills. The second is a survey that studies the narrowing gap related to access, use and perceived expertise when working with computers in middle school students from ages 11 to 15. The third research is a qualitative study about the effects of incorporating online multi-user virtual environment to support face-to-face writing instruction in grade four students.
**Article Nº1 overview.**

Natalie Beck and Tony Fetherston study is about the effects on year three students’ writing skills by the incorporation of a word processor in their writing lessons. The participants were seven students from split year three/four class of Metropolitan Perth, a school from Western Australia. The students worked through a six-week period during their writing time. The authors concluded that the incorporation of word processors resulted in a better quality of the students’ writing and an increase of their motivation towards writing. By the traditional methods the students were concerned more about neatness than quality. The concern about neatness disappeared when the children worked through word processors. In addition they focused on the quality of their writing and enhanced their skills. The students developed a better standard writing after using the word processors.

**Article Nº1 critique.**

This research is an ethnographic study focused on describing the activities of seven students of year three and the shared patterns of behavior the group develops over a period of six weeks. The article starts with an overview about the use of word processors in writing instruction. However, the article did not provide information about the meaning of writing for education, the benefits and drawbacks of handwriting, and traditional methods to writing instruction. These topics would help to support the authors’ arguments. The article did not report on observations and interviews, which would have enriched the argument. Beck and Fetherston’s study found that the incorporation of word processor enhanced year three student’s writing skills. However, the study was not representative of all year three students because it focused only on seven students.
Article Nº2 overview.

Miller, Schweingruber, and Brandenburg surveyed 512 middle school students to sustain that we are experiencing a narrowing gender gap related to computer access, use, and perceived expertise. The questions were about three major topics: a) self-perception of computer skills; b) exposure to technology at home and at school; and, c) Media style and content preferences. The participants selected were representative of suburban and urban schools and three ranges of socio-economic groups. The authors found that students of both genders and schools of all socio-economic levels have a high percentage of access to technology. This fact explains the narrowing digital divide separating girls and boys in the use of computers.

Article Nº2 critique.

The study reflects an accurate research. Data collection is precise and well structured. The authors provided demographic information about the participants of the survey, which supported their findings and analysis of the results. However, the article is not easy to read. It presented three major topics rather than a single one. The questions were referred to a wide area of interest, which intricate the comprehension of the results. Some questions of the survey indicated that the authors assumed facts that not necessarily were true. The final unstructured item (“who is your favorite famous person?”) was presented to find the effects of media in young people’s life. This item indicated that the researchers assumed a fact that they could not prove. The word famous already indicates that the chosen person is known through media. In addition, the authors did not provide a definition of the term use on the item about knowing how to use computers because “it was clear that in students’ minds they had sufficient command of a computer to respond positively” (Miller, Schweingruber, and Brandenburg, 2001, 129). This explanation denotes that the authors assumed a fact that
they could not prove. The study presented item-by-item description to report the results of the survey, which produced an overload of information and complicated the understanding of the results. Miller, Schweingruber, and Brandenburg’s article is accurate and precise. However, data analysis is confusing due to the amount of information provided and the need of arrangement of some questions.

**Article Nº3 overview.**

Warren, Dondlinger, Stein, and Barab study the use of an online multi-user virtual environment to support face-to-face writing instruction. The study took a case-based approach to compare and examine the experiences of 44 students of two classrooms of grade 4. Through the comparison of two classrooms this qualitative study intended to detect differences between a face-to-face and a virtual environment on writing instruction. The researchers found that a social constructivist design applied through an online environment encourages students’ peer cooperation and reduce reliance on face-to-face direction giving. The authors mention three challenges for integrating multi-user virtual environments in instruction: a) innovation of curriculum; b) encouraging to use technologies in an immersive way to result in better technology integration; and, c) motivating students in regular reading by integrating multi-user virtual environments in instruction.

**Article Nº3 critique.**

This study presents wide information about the research methods and data collection. The setting, the participants, the observations, the interviews and the field notes, were accurately described. The analysis of the results was precise. The authors provided examples to support their findings, which was helpful for the comprehension of the study. However, I had difficulties to understand the findings when the researchers
submitted quotations from authors and similar studies in the analysis of results. The reporting and evaluation of the research was clear and challenged the audience for further research about the topic, to innovate in classroom practice and to improve teachers’ preparation and expertise with the use of technologies.

Synthesis

The three studies that were critiqued used different approaches to study the integration of technology in instruction. The ethnographic study of Beck and Fetherston did not provide a representative sample to support their findings. The article did not provide accurate analysis of the setting and the participants. Miller, Schweingruber, and Brandenburg’s survey presented an accurate and precise data collection and demographic information of the participants. However, some questions were based on previous assumptions, which made difficult the analysis of the responses. Data was difficult to absorb due to the overload of information that was presented. Warren, Dondlinger, Stein, and Barab provided well-structured and precise analysis of their qualitative research and challenged educators to innovate the curriculum and improve expertise in the use of technologies.

References:
