

Do We Know How to Speak Online?

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Abstract: CMC issues are omitted by most educators while integrating computer technology into classrooms. What problems are produced when attention to CMC skills is neglected? From the multicultural aspect, what issues should be examined? How should CMC be integrated into the current instructional technology curriculum? These questions must be answered prior to integrating CMC into instruction.

Entire curricula are currently available through web courses. This useful technology has been introduced into the classroom; but one important step has been omitted, teachers are not educated in the use of this technology. A training program for teachers must include strategies designed for computer-mediated instruction and CMC workshops must be provided for in-service faculty. Students should receive instruction that will equip them to design and teach web-based courses and instruction in using the computer to communicate with students. A major issue when using CMC in instruction is that a facility in writing is essential for the entire curriculum. CMC, if used effectively, motivates students to become involved in authentic projects and encourages them to write for a real audience of people in the larger world community, not just composing assignments for the teacher. Some students are unable express themselves well in writing, and, even for those who can, the act of writing and using online text-based applications can be a time-consuming struggle.

CMC, being a text-only means of communication, avoids such structures as social role, rank, and status. Research suggests that CMC is less personal than face-to-face communication (Hiltz, Johnson, & Turoff, 1986). It is impossible to know how long it took someone to draft an on-screen response. Responses are judged by the ideas and thoughts conveyed, more so than by who is doing the writing. Because the medium lacks social cues and the fact of its asynchronous nature it affords everyone an equal opportunity to participate (Walther, 1992). The CMC user must have some skill in reading and writing. The nature of CMC is currently grounded in its emphasis on English writing skills. From the multi-culture aspect, writing in CMC is an important issue. Written communication can be a tool for either cultural domination or cultural survival. For cultures that have historically transmitted their teaching through oral traditions, such as native Americans, the use of English text introduces a huge disadvantage for the student. The lack of computer writing/typing skills is an important omission in current instruction technology curricula. In virtual classrooms, students and teachers will communicate primarily through the written word. Writing must be emphasized throughout the curriculum. In graduate level classes on CMC, students must examine the medium and assess the impact of CMC on the writing process and its outcome.

Writing skills play a vital role in CMC, particularly in the virtual environment. The virtual classroom has arrived. A growing number of teachers are utilizing this medium in lieu of meetings. Undoubtedly, CMC skills and writing skills must be integrated into teaching education programs.

References

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