Wireless Laptops in Preservice Teacher Education: A Discussion of Problems and Possibilities

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Abstract: A variety of laptop initiatives are being undertaken in educational settings throughout the nation, and preliminary research seems to suggest that there are a variety of benefits to students and teachers who use laptop computers in their classrooms. This roundtable session will allow participants to discuss the potential problems, benefits, and various approaches to using laptop computers throughout the preservice teacher education curriculum.

Catching the Wave

A wave of wireless laptop initiatives in education are spreading across the country. For example, the state of Maine, through its “Maine Learning Technology Initiative,” has provided a laptop computer to some 36,000 students and teachers in Maine’s 239 middle schools (Manchester, Muir, & Moulton, 2004). Some 26,000 middle and high school students in Henrico County, Virginia, have been equipped with laptops (Levin, 2004). The state of Texas recently announced that more than 7,300 students at 13 schools were to be given wireless laptop computers for use at school and home as part of a “Technology Immersion Project” (Texas Education Agency, 2004). And during the 2003-2004 academic year the state of Michigan awarded over $7 million dollars to school districts as part of its “Freedom to Learn” initiative, billed as a one-to-one wireless technology program (Freedom to Learn, 2004). According to a recent 2004-2005 Technology Purchasing Forecast (Quality Education Data, 2004), half of the school districts in the United States have portable wireless labs on carts, and more than 30% of the districts surveyed plan to purchase such technology during the 2004-2005 school year.

Wireless technology initiatives are booming on college campuses as well. According to the Campus Computing Project (2003), over 45 percent of college campuses reported strategic plans for wireless networks in the fall of 2003, up from 34.7 percent in 2002 and 24.3 percent in 2001. Teacher education programs at some colleges have also reported on a variety of efforts to use wireless laptop computers as well (Harlin, Murphy, & Dooley, 2002; Kariuki & Turner, 2001; University of Texas at Austin, 2004), including the college of the presenters of this session (Drazdowski, 2003; 2004). The purpose of this roundtable session will be to give participants an opportunity to discuss and share insights into the many barriers to and benefits from attempting to use wireless laptop computers in a preservice teacher education program.
References


