Coding and Typing: How and Why We Should Teach Both Skills

by Art Willer, M.Ed.

For those who have been around long enough to remember, "coding" is actually a flashback to 35 years ago when Seymour Papert and a growing school technology community embraced the LOGO (LOGic Oriented) programming language. The same turtle drew the same doily patterns on the computer screen in classrooms then, as we are seeing today.

Coding can make a positive impact on the development of logical thinking skills. Coding is also in line with an important value lesson: that computers should do what people tell them to do, not the other way around.

Unfortunately, the same concerns arise with the coding movement today, as arise with many school trends: the placement of a disproportionate amount of importance on one topic, and the displacement of other important skills.

A large number of schools are now devoting all their computer lab time to coding. They are re-allocating typing instruction to the home classroom, where the subject is presumably taught in conjunction with language arts. In too many cases, regular classroom teachers are being asked to teach a subject they are not trained to teach, and little or no school budget or time is being provided.

I am a strong advocate of typing skill development, which I prefer to call keyboard communication. However, I am the first to admit that many schools have spent too much time teaching typing. The skill has to be taught, but it should be addressed in the first six weeks of each school year, preferably in grades two through six. Typing fluency should be reinforced for the balance of each year using relevant skill applications, such as writing and coding and any other processes where keyboarding skill is an assett.

Better typing instruction programs, let teachers incorporate custom content for typing assessment, practice and testing. Why not include coding content in the typing class, so students can develop their coding skills with some efficiency? If some students ever do become actual coders in the workplace, they will need excellent typing skill.

Education regularly claims it does not have the time to teach everything it is asked to teach. When we segment skills into bits and pieces, and delegate the lab to teach one skill, while we delegate the home classroom for other skills, we inevitably create a time problem.

The answer to the time problem, is to teach life skills such as typing, writing and coding, by conveying what we need to convey about them, and letting students apply their talents in relevant projects that integrate the skills, the same way we do in regular life.

Rather than splitting the home class into one universe and the computer lab into another, everything the children do in the lab should be an extension of and integral support for what the children do in their home classroom.

To achieve this, a partnership needs to exist between the lab teacher and the home class teacher. The same kind of integral partnership needs to exist between the home class teacher and the library-media teacher. Preferably all three form a cohesive team. The curriculum strategy is called *integration*, and the teaching strategy is called *team-teaching*. And yes, those terms were also around 35 years ago.

Everything old is often made new again, and there is nothing wrong with that. That is, as long as we carefully consider the whole picture, and make sure we are actually moving forward.

About the author: Art Willer is the founding president of Bytes of Learning Incorporated, which researches, develops and publishes professional online instruction for education. Art is a former classroom teacher who completed graduate studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (U Toronto) with focus on curriculum and language development. Art has written many provocative articles for the education community.
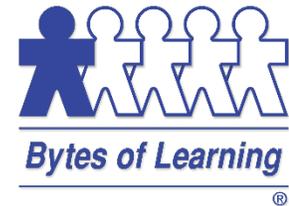
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