THE PROS AND CPNS OF COMPUTER ASSISTED LEARNING

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ANNOTATION

Most kids (and adults!) these days spend a huge portion of their time on their computers, tablets and phones both at home and at school, so it's no surprise that computers are being incorporated into the classroom.

Key words:learning assistant, computer, individual, flaws

Computer Assisted Learning (or CAL) has completely modernized the way that students learn, both in the average classroom as well as in language-learning settings. Computer Assisted Learning can make lessons much more interactive and engaging, and can pique the interest of even the most reluctant of pupils.

This isn't to say that CAL is not without its flaws, however. The same individuality and fun that makes CAL work well can also lead to the isolation of students, as well as distract them from the lesson they're participating in.

Before you can decide whether or not Computer Assisted Learning will become your new teaching methodology, let's take a look at exactly what CAL is, and what the benefits and drawbacks could be of its use in your classroom.

Computer Assisted Learning encompasses a lot of different technologies and ideas, but can be understood easily enough. The Intense School, which focuses on computer and information technology, summarizes it simply as "the use of electronic devices/computers to provide educational instruction and to learn."

It might shock you to learn that some form or another of Computer Assisted Learning has been taking place in classrooms since. CAL doesn't just involve computers, it also includes the use of other electronics such as CD and MP3 players (or record players in the , DVD players, tablets, smartphones and televisions. These tools can be used to better illustrate a point the teacher or professor is trying to make, or to heighten engagement among students.

Just think about it: Wouldn't you learn more from actually watching a foreign film for your language class than you would from just talking about it?

Computer Assisted Learning also includes online courses and supplemental course materials used in colleges, homeschooling and distance learning. Basically, any type of technology that can be used to learn most likely falls beneath the umbrella of Computer Assisted Learning.

The great thing about this teaching method is that it can be implemented in every type of classroom, from a kindergarten art class to a medical school class in which students use computer models to learn to operate on the human body. It can also help students take classes at home either on their own or to supplement their other learning. This can lead to a much more personalized experience, as well as a more in-depth understanding of the knowledge being transmitted.

While the use of CAL can be useful in any classroom, it's especially beneficial in language learning classrooms.

In fact, it's so effective that it gets its own acronym too! CALL, or Computer Assisted Language Learning, is quickly becoming one of the preferred teaching tools among foreign language instructors.

Using CALL, language teachers can help their students retain more vocabulary and grammar by having them watch videos, play computer games, or even navigate the internet using only their target language. It also enables students to use that target language in a more active way, which helps them learn it more naturally than just rote memorization. The words and rules of the language become something more useful to them, so they're able to remember them better.

Many students are visual learners, and benefit greatly from seeing an image or an example of the terms being discussed in class. Computers are a great help with this, because teachers have the entire internet at their disposal. You can easily search the web for pictures of fruits, animals or even colors to help your students see what you mean and have an image to associate with the word you're describing.

You can also use videos from DVDs, YouTube or your own personal projects to help illustrate a point. Seeing something really happening or really being used in a video makes it much more real to the learner, so they remember it much longer.

Listening practice is a vital part of learning any language. CAL helps with this by enabling you to play music or record conversations, so your students can listen to the language being used naturally and in real situations. They can then emulate the speakers or singers and find their own voice in their new tongue.

Tests

Computers are a great way to give students exams. You can either create your own test and have them sit at the classroom computers to take it, or you can find pre-written tests and other exam materials on the internet and use those in your lessons. Taking tests on the computer can help students feel less rushed and can make them feel as if they have more privacy than they would if they were in a crowded classroom

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