Moving toward a new vision of education

September 15 2009

The goals of the study have been to draw up theoretical proposals to help to improve educational practices. Credit: SINC

Successfully introducing Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) into classrooms is one of the biggest challenges proposed by new educational plans. A research group from the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) has studied substituting the current way in which education is structured for a new one that takes full advantage of the potential of new technologies.

Little by little, Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) have started to penetrate the educational sphere. A few years ago, the experts thought that the arrival of computers and the Internet in classrooms would have a drastic effect on the way that classes were given and received. However, "the studies carried out at compulsory education level were not able to show the transformation and

improvement of learning in schools that had been promised as a result of incorporating technology into the classroom", Asun Martínez, one of the authors involved in the UPV-EHU study, tells SINC.

This group of researchers has spent 10 years working with teaching staff from various school levels to look at the role played by technology in innovation processes within education, training and research, as well as in non-school contexts, such as museums.

"We started this work stressing that ICTs have the potential to spread knowledge beyond the physical limits of time, space and the people to whom one has access within the four walls of the classroom", explain the researchers.

Traditional schooling is perceived as being "rigidly organised, with clear objectives, classes divided according to content and directed on the basis of traditional methodologies and evaluation systems". Once ICTs are incorporated into the school setting, there is no other option but for this to be done within this educational structure (this combination of regulations and methods), meaning the new technologies are used in order to memorise and repeat information instead of to create and research. "So the ICTs become a means of expressing the same contents", says Martínez.

As a result, the goals of the study (www.sc.ehu.es/topcogoj/Berril@b/index.htm) have been to draw up theoretical proposals to help to improve educational practices, come up with new study areas to enable the relationship between education and technology to be better researched and understood, and to increase the visibility of research within this sphere, disseminating best practices and research results, as well as other related activities.

José Miguel Correa and his team say: "ICTs have the power to change

these ingrained rules and principles, but as already indicated by many researchers, they are usually integrated in such a way as to continue with current methods, and not to overturn them in any significant way".

So the question is whether the current structure of education can really change as a result of the arrival of the ICTs. According to the study, "schools and the public at large must be more critical with their assumptions about the educational system. The first step towards making a change is to identify and combat the ordinary way in which things are done within the school system, and to highlight internalised rules and principles in order to make people aware of them".

The experts believe that in-depth research is required, as well as for classes attended by students to be combined with other practical experience outside schools. This would allow the traditional educational structure to be transformed into an alternative school model that is "better adapted to the needs of society today", according to the study.

Source: FECYT - Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology