



Call for papers: How computers entered the classroom, 1960-2000

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In historical research, there are now numerous studies devoted to digital change in Europe. The term “digital change” is used to cover all the structural adjustment processes – political, economic, social and cultural – that society is undergoing both as a result of and in response to the progressive introduction of digital technology to our everyday lives. As computers became gradually smaller, more affordable and easier to use, they spread from universities and research institutions to offices, small companies, libraries, private homes and classrooms. Today they are not only used by scientists and engineers, but also by the general public. Digital technologies have gradually permeated everyday tasks and interactions at home, work, education and leisure. This development is often associated with the notion of an emerging “digital society”.

However, in research on the history of education, the question of how computers conquered the classroom, has so far been totally neglected. Almost 20 years ago, in his groundbreaking study on the implementation of new information technologies in Silicon Valley schools, Larry Cuban impressively demonstrated the importance of a historical perspective for understanding the digital present. But only recently did historians take up this challenge. Research projects and historical publications are beginning to address the role of education and training in the emergence of a “digital society”. However, comparative or transnational studies are still rare in recent research and it is almost impossible to obtain an overview of the different regional and national developments. Whilst studies in the USA are now available, the introduction of computers in European schools has not yet been comprehensively analysed. We would like to address this research gap with an edited volume that deals with the introduction of various microchip-based technologies in schools and universities in Europe. National case studies on developments in the north, south, east and west of Europe will be invited, as well as historical studies of transnational entanglements related to the introduction of new technologies in the classroom.

The individual contributions will focus on the driving forces behind the introduction of computers and other microchip-based technologies in education. In a heuristic approximation, government agencies, computer hardware and software producers, telecommunication companies, interested teachers, computer enthusiasts, students, publishers of teaching materials, professional and business associations, can all be included as influential actors or interest groups. Studies on public schools, universities and vocational schools should be considered as they are likely to play a special role in the introduction of computers. Individual historical case studies should not only focus on the purchase and implementation of digital hardware, but also on the acquisition and development of specialized software for educational purposes. However, the history of the introduction of computers in the classroom cannot be told without considering the didactic discussions about the teaching of computer literacy and IT competence.

A further distinction central to this edited volume is that the articles should concentrate primarily on technology or computer education after 1960. The focus should be explicitly on the introduction of computers and other microchip-based technologies that are closely related to the digital change in society. Whilst there are already a number of articles on the history of automatic teachers, technological teaching aids, language laboratories or the idea of programmed instruction, the educational history of new information technologies in Europe has not yet been written. Although there are connections and entanglements between the history of educational



media or technologies and the history of computer education, historical actors themselves do not always make strict distinctions between the two historical lines. However, whilst the history of educational technologies has been well-researched, this is not the case for the history of education in the context of digital change. For this reason, we propose a shift in perspective that takes greater account of the broader history of economic and technological developments in order to understand changes in schools and classrooms.

This distinction explains the limitation of the investigation period. Whilst new educational technologies have been intensively debated and tested since the end of the 19th century, the question of computer literacy only arose with the invention of the electronic mainframe computer. These computers were able to enter the classroom when appropriate terminals enabled access to remote computer systems. However, the real breakthrough came with the invention of the personal computer. This facilitated the decentralized parallel use of microchip-based technologies in business, administration, science and private households. Schools were therefore confronted with the question of how they should deal with these new technological challenges.

We mention here just a few of the possible challenges that the various stakeholders might have faced. Repeatedly, teachers and students had to appropriate the new technologies. They had to manage the tension in the classroom between the logic and dynamics of new technology on the one hand, and established processes, traditional roles and structures on the other. Teachers and students needed to be prepared for the use of computers for educational purposes. They had to learn about computer technology itself and how to use it for teaching and learning. Hardware producers and software developers on the other hand, had to tailor their products to educational needs and convince teachers and school authorities of the value and usefulness of these products. At the same time, the whole educational system was confronted with the threat of an increased corporate influence on public schools and universities. The traditional producers of teaching aids were denied privileged access to classrooms and suddenly had to face fierce competition from the new technology companies. Whilst these examples illustrate just some of the difficulties and struggles that arose from the introduction of computers into the classroom, there is no doubt that new information technologies have affected education, training systems and the involved stakeholders in a myriad of ways.

We invite you to submit a proposal (~500 words) for a case study on how computers entered the classroom in at least one European country. Papers which also consider transnational entanglements are particularly welcome. Please send your proposals to cflury@ife.uzh.ch and mgeiss@ife.uzh.ch by **18th September 2020**. On the basis of the proposals, an invitation will be issued to write a draft of the paper (~20'000 characters) by Spring 2021. This will then be discussed in an authors' workshop (possibly online). Afterwards, all contributors will have the opportunity to revise and extend their draft papers. It is expected that this will be a multi-stage process. The aim is to publish this edited volume in an English-speaking publishing house with a broad reach. We hope to be able to hand over the finished manuscript to the publisher by the end of 2021.