

## **COMPUTER BASED SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this study, the quality of the computer and Internet based social studies course was investigated. A case study design was chosen to understand, a) how computers are used in the eighth grade classroom, b) what the students' and teacher's perceptions are about the advantages and problems of using computers. Qualitative data sources showed that students have positive perceptions about computers and the Internet. Results also indicated that lower level students have attention problems and do not have good study discipline on computers.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social studies represent a content area that encompasses the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994, p. vii).

For the past one hundred years, life in social studies classrooms has remained relatively the same. The teacher dispenses information, and students act as empty receptacles waiting to be filled (Braun, 1999). In social studies instruction, middle school years usually have been devoted to American history and government in sixth and eighth grades, and world cultures and geography in seventh grade (Atwood, 1986; Braun, 1999).

In the new millennium, middle school social studies teachers started to become increasingly sophisticated users of computer-based technology (Braun, 1999). As the number of computers in schools has increased, so has the manner in which they are used to enhance instruction (Nickell, Field, & Roach, 2001). Computer-based learning has the potential to facilitate development of students' decision-making and problem-solving skills, data-processing skills, and communication capabilities. By using the computer, students can gain access to expansive knowledge links and broaden their exposure to diverse people and perspectives (Berson, 1996).

This study was conducted in a Midwestern junior high school. The school integrated computers and the Internet into the eighth grade social studies course. In 2003, a voluntary social studies teacher wanted to integrate computers into the social studies curriculum. This teacher has very strong personal interests and background about the computers. In his classroom, all the classroom activities are done by using the computers. The primary goal of the Computer Based Social Studies Instruction (CBSSI) program is to integrate computers to enhance learning and use of online resources to support learning opportunities.

The purpose of this study was to identify teacher's and students' perceptions about using computers in the eighth grade social studies classroom. The following questions were addressed to reach this goal.

1. How are the computers used in an eighth-grade social studies classroom?
2. What are the students' and teacher's perceptions about the advantages of using computers?
3. What are the students' and teacher's perceptions about the problems of using computers?

### **RELATED RESEARCH**

Willis (cited in Nickell, et al., 2001) mentioned three studies conducted in middle and high schools. These studies suggested that students who use technology in social studies demonstrated better communication and language skills, and discussions that involve higher order thinking.

The Center for Applied Special Technology sponsored a study of the performance of children in fourth and sixth grades in seven large urban school districts. Students were divided into control and experimental groups. The task was researching and writing about civil rights. Computers were used by these two groups but only the experimental group was allowed access to online resources. At the end of the study, children in the experimental group performed significantly better than their control-group peers in presentation of their work, description of a civil rights issue, explanation of civil rights issue, integration of different points of view, and completion of project (Nickell, et al., 2001).

A book by Cuban (2001) reports several findings related to computer use in classrooms. For example, according to survey of computer coordinators, elementary school students spent about 1 ¼ hours per week in labs and classrooms using computers. But when students themselves were surveyed, they reported much less computer time (fifth graders said about 24 minutes a week and eight graders reported 38 minutes a week).

Cuban (2001) reported some unexpected findings in his book. Most students' use of computers was peripheral to their primary instructional tasks. Students used computers in schools to complete assignments, play games, explore CD-ROMS to find information, and conduct Internet searches. They rarely used computers for primary instructional tasks such as participating in on-line curriculum and creating multimedia projects.

Becker (2000) reported a 1998 national survey of teachers, called "Teaching, Learning, and Computing (TLC)" and discussed some of the findings of this survey as they relate to the questions raised by Cuban's critique. According to the TLC survey results, a majority of the teachers said they know how to use a World Wide Web search engine. Most teachers also said they need software to prepare handouts, write lesson plans and record, and calculate grades.

According to Becker (2000), Cuban argued that insufficient technical skills are not holding back teachers' classroom use of computers. Becker found a different result, teachers with above-average technical skills use computers in broader and more sophisticated ways with students than teachers who have limited technical skills.

Pye and Sullivan (2001) examined the effectiveness of computer-based instruction in middle-school social studies. They gathered data from middle school social studies teachers in Missouri. The researchers used random sampling techniques to select 120 teachers. These teachers asked to respond to a questionnaire determining the use of computer-based applications and software during instruction in their classrooms. The research results are below.

1. More than 73 percent of Missouri middle school social studies teachers use one or more computer based instructional strategies on a regular basis.
2. The Internet is the predominant form of computer-based instruction used by middle school social studies teachers. It is used on a regular basis by more than 53 percent on these teachers.
3. The primary reason social studies teachers integrate computer-based instruction in the classroom is school district/school administrative initiative.
4. An increase in student enthusiasm for learning social studies and positive affect on the classroom learning environment occurs when computer-based instruction is regularly used in the middle school social studies classroom (Pye, & Sullivan, 2001, p. 5).

## **METHOD**

I chose a case study design for this research. "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). I wanted to explore and know the teacher's and students' perceptions. I think the qualitative case study is the best way to understand the program, and judge its quality.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted in the Liberty Junior High School (Pseudonym). The school has approximately 650 6-7-8 grade students.

*Classroom:* The classroom has 12 computers, one teacher computer, one projector, and one screen. Two students share each computer in the classroom.

*Students:* The classroom has 24 students. Most of them are upper middle level white Americans. One student is Mexican American and one student receives special education. In addition to the regular social studies teacher, a special education teacher comes to the classroom to help this student.

*Teacher:* Mr. John is a middle class social studies teacher with 19 years teaching experience. He has been teaching in the school for six years. He has one-year experience with using computers in social studies instruction.

## DATA COLLECTION

The main sources of data were observations, field notes and interviews.

*Observations / Field notes:* I observed CBSSI two times a week, Monday and Thursday as a nonparticipant observer. In total, I made 12 observations between 10/27/2003 and 12/05/2003. Each observation was 45 minutes. I took extensive field notes during these observations. Mainly, I observed how students use computers, which kinds of problems and advantages they have by using the computers and instructional techniques that were used by the CBSSI teacher to teach the course.

*Interviews:* I believe there is no single reality, but that reality changes according to people's viewpoint. For this reason, I wanted to learn the teacher's and students' perceptions about using computers in the social studies classroom. I interviewed both students and the teacher to learn if they have different perceptions on the CBSSI.

“The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon.... Instead, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3).

I interviewed the eighth grade teacher and six students- two lower achieving students (Brad & Carlos ), one middle achieving student (Mark), and three high achieving students (Mary, Jennifer, & Steven). I used a semi-structured interview for two reasons. First, it is helpful to have some questions prepared in advance. Second, semi-structured interviews allow more open-ended, flexible responses that might provide a richer source of data.

In the first interviews, the following questions were asked. Due to these questions, I had a chance to learn the present situation of the program, problems and advantages of the CBSSI, effects of computers on students' learning, and instructional techniques that were used by the teacher.

For students,

1. How do you use computers in this classroom?
2. Which computer applications are used the most in the classroom? Are you comfortable to use these applications?
3. How do you feel in general about using computers in classroom instruction?
4. What is the difference when you compare traditional social studies classroom and this classroom?
5. Have you observed any improvement in your learning as a result of using the computer?
6. What are the major problems about using computers to learn?
7. What are the major advantages about using computers to learn?

For teacher,

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How do you use computers in this classroom?
3. Which computer applications are used the most in the classroom?
4. How do you feel in general about using computers in classroom instruction?
5. How would you describe your students' ability to use computers in the classroom?
6. Have you observed any changes in your teaching practices as a result of using computers in social studies classroom?
7. Have you observed any changes in your students' learning as a result of using computer in social studies classroom? Do you think that computers improve your students' learning? If yes how?
8. What are the major problems about using computers to teach?
9. What are the major advantages about using computers to teach?

I also asked some open-ended questions to my interviewees based on the answers to the interview questions. For example, I said, “Tell me more about that” “Please give me an example”. Then, I transcribed, and analyzed the data. After that, the results were verified by interviewees. I conducted follow-up interviews with the teacher. In order to get more information about the research questions, I planned to make my second interview as an open-ended style with him.

In the first interview, students did not give in-depth information about the interview questions. Due to this reason, I conducted a focus group interview with these six students. As Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001) said, “focus group interviews provide opportunities for participants to interact with one another in ways that may enrich the depth and quality of the data. Participants often motivate each other in ways that result in new ideas and insights” (p. 272). I used the unstructured approach in this interview and asked the following three questions. These questions are open-ended and represent the research questions.

1. How do you use computers in social studies instruction?
2. What are the advantages of using computers in social studies course?
3. What are the problems of using computers in social studies course?

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

I used triangulation of qualitative data sources to analyze the data. I compared and cross-checked the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). Mainly, I compared observations (field notes) with interviews, checked for the consistency of what the students and the teacher said over time, and compared the perspectives of people from different points of view.

I used peer debriefing, and shared my interview results and field notes with two of my peers. We talked several times about my data. Their subject was social studies and their etic perspective was very helpful for me. Moreover, I talked several times with two people who have a good background in using technology in the classroom environment.

These two peer-debriefing sessions gave me new ideas and helped me to re-think the problems and issues. For example, one of my peer group members reminded me to look closely at the lecture method used by the teacher. After hearing this idea, I raised following question and observed closely this situation: How did the teacher use lecture method in the technology rich environment?

In analyzing my data, I used pattern codes, which are explanatory or inferential codes that identify an emergent theme, pattern, or explanation that the site suggests to the analyst (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 67). I summarized the data into smaller segments and determined two sub categories. These are Advantages (A), and Problems (P). Then, I divided these categories into two sub categories. These are students’ opinions about advantages (SA), teacher’s opinions about advantages (TA), students’ opinions about problems (SP), and teacher’s opinions about problems (TP).

### **RESULTS**

The results were discussed in terms of the research questions.

#### **I. How are the computers used in an eighth-grade social studies classroom?**

Computers are used as a main educational tool in this classroom. Most of the educational activities are done by using the computer. In the interview, the teacher identified three main computer programs used in the course- Microsoft Word, Photoshop, and PowerPoint. The Internet is also used frequently to search the topics, and to find the answers to the questions.

Observation results revealed that the Internet and Adobe PhotoShop were used quite frequently in the course. Every week students do a collage. They find some pictures to explain the subjects. Every Monday, Mr. John introduces a new topic. He explains main ideas verbally and shows his students related web sites. Students write the URL and go to the web site. He distributes some handouts that include the assignment. Students read the instructions and try to find the answers to the questions. Because this classroom consists of mixed ability students, Mr. John has two kinds of handouts. One of them is for high-level students and the other one is for lower level students. Mr. John checks students as they try to answer questions. At the end of the class, he picks up the assignment to grade them. If the students cannot finish the activity, he picks them up in the following day.

Interviewer: How do you use computers in the social studies classroom?

Mr. John: This year I am using a little different from last years. Last year, I had a small gifted class. Each student had his or her own computer. They are engaged almost every day in an interactive web site... responsible for downloading some files. They are responsible for downloading information from these files. They maintain notes and projects from these files. This year is a little different because I have a mixed ability group in the class. I got three classes of eighth graders and seventh graders... Two students work on each computer. They use websites to answer questions... and interactive CNN site. CNN has a whole series of cold war sites. This semester Post Vietnam. Mainly cold war. Students a lot of times answer questions

from articles, interviews, or just view images and post questions to them. I am beginning this year a little bit of differentiation. That is, not all students do the same things. For example, today probably you will see. Upper level students are going to be reading an interview, General Giap and General Westmoreland. Perspective of American commander and perspective of Vietnamese general commander. They will read the questions and see differentiation and similarities. They will synthesize at the end. That is high performing students. The other students in the class are going to be reading interactive web sites where they gonna be looking at definitions and different terminology of key battles. Kind of the reading level... Learning styles things like that... Actually I write out the answers and they fill in the blanks many of the same terms. I don't expect any of them to finish today.

I asked students the same question. Their answers are below.

1. Mark: He gives us site names. We find web sites and write it down... answers.
2. Brad: Like you go to different web sites and then you can see histories.
3. Carlos: Using computers in classroom is not very difficult. You can go different places from different books. Our room.... there are instruction, I just follow them.
4. Mary: We go to websites. We look up history stuff and information. You can use computers to look up the information.
5. Jennifer: We look up web sites and find out answers... also, we have pictures... and I think that's all.
6. Steven: Well we have topics and we can search the web and get information about the subjects.

Students generally stated that they used computers to gain information and to find the answers to the questions given by their teacher.

The teacher writes the related URL with big font size on Microsoft Word and students type this URL on their browsers. They find the web site and read the information to answer questions. Students write their answers on the handouts because at the end of the lesson these handouts are collected by the teacher. Mr. John reads and grades the handouts and turns them back to students on the following day.

## **II. What are the students' and teacher's perceptions about the advantages of using computers?**

I classified the advantages into two categories: Advantages for the teacher and advantages for students.

*For teacher:* The first advantage with using computers in the social studies instruction was the amount of available material. To learn the advantages of computers in the classroom I asked Mr. John the following question.

Interviewer: What are the major advantages about using computers to learn?

Mr. John: The major advantages to one is say... is tremendous amount of time in searching for material because there is so much out there. Which also becomes a disadvantage because there are so many web sites... The biggest single advantage is amount of materials we have on our finger tips that we can use to teach. This is the biggest advantage. My eighth graders were at the library last week. Do some research and photocopy. They come with probably about one tenth the amount information they can do in a little amount of time using computers.

Mr. John and students pointed to the same advantages of the computers. They think that students can have so much information if they use computers and the Internet. Mark stated that keeping his files on the computer and reaching these files are very easy. Brad, Carlos, Mary and Steven gave similar answers for the advantages of the computers. They thought that accessibility of the information is easy when they use the computers. Mr. John also stated that in a particular time students could have ten times more information if they use the computers instead of library. Generally, students think that studying on the computer is fun. This data suggest that computers are very attractive and give students freedom to reach the information they need.

A second advantage the teacher identified was improved learning. To learn about computers' effects on learning, I asked the following question.

Interviewer: Do you think that computers improve your students' learning?

Mr. John: Yes I do. I think that there is a lot of massive learning takes place where they are learning. They don't really realize that learning through searches. If I am standing up in front of the class lecturing for example the only thing I expose to... they either understand what I am saying and get it down, write it down or they don't, and I cannot really give the kind of background information a lot of times. These computer programs or these websites give a fairly strong amount of background information before they actually

started reading ....and the pictures. I found particularly the lower level kids benefit tremendously from the pictures because they can understand the pictures a lot better.

As we see, Mr. John thinks that computers have positive effects on students' learning. As previously described, at the beginning of the week, Mr. John gives students a short introduction about the subject. Then, he gives them a web site with some activities. These activities can be finding answers to the question, finding the meaning of the new terms, or finding related pictures to make a new collage. Observation results showed that lower level students liked bringing together related pictures and learned more about the topics because of the pictures. For example, they made a collage about the 60's culture. Every group used different pictures and made different collages on Photoshop software. I believe this activity helped students better understand the topic because after finishing the collage, they shared their collages with other students, and so many meaningful question-answer types of dialogues took place.

A third advantage the teacher identified was the students' positive attitudes toward computers. Most of the students like using computers in the classroom.

I asked Mr. John "Do students like using computer?"

Mr. John: Most do. Some do not. Some of them frustrated because they think computers are toys they are gonna play. I get a couple of activities loaded in they can do sometimes when they finish. One called Zip Zap Map which is a Geography game. One is a US map the other is World map. They can go and put all these information in and there is an interactive site from ABC for eighth graders. This is mainly for cultural literacy. That is another thing I found computer helps. Some of the students know very little about the world around... you know some of them think that world in the town line or in the state line...This is very difficult time... explain to them most of the world beyond those limits and I found computers are very good sometimes exposing them to that part of information. So they enjoy. Most of them enjoy....

According to Mr. John, students do not have enough information about the world. He thinks that they just know the town where they live. Instead of explaining verbally, he gave necessary information on these games. I found these two games very useful to introduce students other countries.

One way students may learn more is by asking questions of the teacher or hearing him elaborate about information they are reading on the Internet.

13: 20 - Mike: If a nuclear missile hits the town, what happen?

Suzan: Probably all of us die...

Neo: If they send Indiana.... Can it kill us?

(Silence...)

Mr. John: Not right now, but eventually because of radiation.

As we see, not all of the course time is spent for studying on computers. Mr. John uses the lecture method when students need extra information or when they have questions. He gives verbal information about the topics. For a few minutes, students do not study on computers. They just listen to Mr. John. Students ask some interesting questions after reading the related web pages. I believe these moments are very useful for them to comprehend the topic. Generally, all of the students listen very quietly to these questions and answers. For example, students read on the Internet about soldiers who fought in Vietnam.

Mr. John: I went to Vietnam. I was in the Air Force and I was commanding officer of 160 men.

All of the students were very silent at this moment. All of them listened to his experiences very carefully.

*For students:* One advantage is that students seem to like working on computers. To learn students' reactions, I asked how they feel in general about using computers in classroom instruction. All of the students stated that they liked using computers and the Internet. Carlos stated that regular classroom and this classroom are the same because memorization and reading are used in these classrooms. Mary also liked the computer classroom because many people work on computers everyday. I think she tried to explain the importance of computers in daily life. Brad and Jennifer thought that using the computer is easy. Steven also stated that computers give him more opportunity to find necessary information. Computers are very attractive for students because they can find the answers easily, watch some short movies and interviews about the course topics, and find different type of pictures to use them on their collages.

A second advantage the students identified was improved learning. All of the students thought that computers improve their learning. Students stated that they read and learn better, and find the information easily if they use computers. Mary believes she can have more information than course textbook if she studies on the computer.

Jennifer had a different idea about this subject. She stated that sometimes a book could be a better source to find the answers. In addition to web sites, Jennifer searches books to read about the topics at home. Steven also implied up-to-date information three times in the interview. He told me about his experience on visiting school library. He said, "I spent so much time but could not find enough books in the library. If I spent this time on the Internet I could find so much information". Most of the eighth graders know how to do web searches. They use Google, Yahoo, Library of Congress, Electronic Library, or Britannica Online. After typing key words, they find so many different web sites about their questions. The interview results showed that improved learning, amount of information, and the accessibility to this information are the advantages of computers for students.

### **III. What are the students' and teacher's perceptions about the problems of using computers?**

I classified the problems into three categories. These are problems for the teacher and students, and problems with the technology itself.

*For teacher:* The first problem with using computers in social studies instruction is the time required to search web sites and prepare handouts.

I asked Mr. John about his preparation.

Interviewer: How do you prepare for the following day's course?

Mr. John: I visit the sites at night. I copy the information and save them on my disk.

Sometimes I go to a coffee shop, when I drink my coffee I prepare the questions and write them on my laptop.

This interview passage shows that the teacher needs much time to search and find web sites. Mr. John also spends some extra time to prepare handouts for lower and higher achieving students. He saves the web sites on his computer because if the web sites are down he can project the contents from his laptop to the big screen. In addition to this, he leaves time to grade previous days' handouts. In the school, he prints out the handouts and makes photocopies for students. The teacher makes this kind of preparation everyday. Sometimes finding enough time may be a problem for him.

Keeping the students on task was the second problem for the teacher.

Interviewer: Are there any problems when you use the computer in the classroom?

Mr. John: The biggest problem is that kids have attention problems. I wander and I got to monitor that. A lot of the time I just assign web sites for them to go to. Beginning the second semester, I let them to go to web sites. I just load some series of addresses and put on icon on the desktop so they are just going these sites. Kind of different students... based on abilities.

Mr. John gives students two options when he explains about the web sites. Students can follow him either from the big screen or from their computers. Sometimes, students do not open the web site and do not follow the topic from the screen. They just chat with each other or go to different web sites. Mr. John easily recognizes this situation and tells them "Turn off your monitor and follow me from the screen". I think this strategy is very useful to keep their attentions on the topic.

I wrote the following field note about the problem that students experienced in the classroom.

13: 14 – Mr. John warned students to not enter other web sites. He said, "If you go to image search you can have pub up. This is normal. Do not go to other web sites. Computers have filtering programs. You cannot go to different web sites even if you want. Please do not play games. They can harm computers. You know the rules." (11/19/2003).

The classroom has low, middle and high achieving students. Some high ability students finish their questions or readings easily. After finishing the task, they are allowed to play some educational games by using Zip Zap and Microsoft Map Point 2000 programs. Students find the names of the cities and countries, and match them in these games. They are eager to play the games. Other students also want to finish the task as soon as possible to play games. This situation creates some problems in the classroom.

In addition to educational games, some students find other games on the Internet. These games, however, are forbidden in the classroom. Due to these games, some computers give error messages. In spite of the filtering programs, students can find some web sites to play games. Some students have very good information about these web sites. They generally play war games. Mr. John always walks in the classroom and monitors students. If they play war games, he warns them, and they close the browser.

*For students:* Observation results revealed that some students were very comfortable and liked using computers while others did not know basic computer skills. Accidentally deleting files or forgetting to save files were common problems in the classroom.

I asked students "What are the major problems about using computers to learn?"

1. Mark: Sometimes you can erase your files. Sometimes web sites have trouble and you cannot get the web sites. Sometimes it takes long if you have to write down web sites on paper.

I asked Mr. John the following question to learn his reaction about using computers in the classroom environment.

Interviewer: When you compare traditional classroom and this classroom are there any changes in your teaching practices?

Mr. John: Yes, a lot. To begin in the entire first semester was really rough getting.... starting. Because students were not used to meaning of freedom. Teaching computer discipline. Most eighth graders know how to do web searches reasonably well but some of them still have to have instruction.

Mr. John told me several times that eighth grade students know reasonably well how to do search and how to use computers. In spite of this, I observed that so many students did not have basic computer skills. I think especially, lower level students need some basic instructions to use computers. For example, students frequently lost their files because they forgot to save them on their folders. The following field notes were taken about this problem.

13:20 – Students received their handouts and started to find the answers to the questions. Carlos made a mistake, closed the browser, and lost the web site. He tried to remember the URL but he could not. Carlos could easily see and type the URL from the big screen but he did not. ... All the students finished the questions except for Carlos and his friend. They just talked... (Observation 11/06/2003).

13: 30 – Melissa and Sarah are working on their collages. They bring together post-cold war images that represent sixties culture. I see Coca Cola, Pepsi and Mustang's emblems in their collages... They are talking with each other to better organize the collage.... At the end of the class, they forgot to save the collage. They did a good job but, unfortunately, it was not saved as a product (11/10/2003).

A second problem with using computers was the facilitation of plagiarism.

Interviewer: You give students hard copy. Why don't you use Microsoft Word?

Mr. John: They used Microsoft Word last year. When I checked students, I saw that they were copy and paste 3 – 4 pages from the Internet. They do not read well just copy and paste.

This remark suggests that Mr. John does not use word programs because of the plagiarism. Students can easily copy and paste the text from the Internet to the word processor. Instead of selecting and analyzing the text, they can paste the full text, perhaps without even reading or thinking about it. I think Mr. John wants students to read and analyze the text, and think about the questions.

A third problem was the discrimination between garbage and quality information. Mr. John stated that students could have so much information when they search the topics on the Internet. He also stated that this situation could be a problem if students did not discriminate between garbage and quality information. The following interview passage gives the teacher's opinions about this issue.

Mr. John: You have to wander through all this garbage out there and the kids don't know what garbage is and what is not. So, you have to constantly monitor where they're going if they're on their own. It constantly takes a lot of time to just deciding web sites to go that way... There are some radical web sites.

Some children can... you know the agenda to those sites. They started looking at them (Smiles)...

*Technology:* The first problem the teacher and students identified was the technology itself-faulty computers or problems with web sites. One of the computers had a problem and it gave error messages frequently. Even if the web sites collapse or students cannot reach the web site Mr. John can reflect the necessary information from his computer to screen or he can print it and give students hard copies.

I wrote the following field notes about problems that students experienced in the classroom.

13: 16 – One computer could not open the web site. Mr. John helped students but the computer gave error message.... He gave them hard copies... (11/06/2003)

13: 25 – Mary wanted to watch a short movie about Vietnam War on the CNN web site. She could not open the movie. Mr. John updated the Media Player. Then she started to watch the movie (11/06/2003).

There are limited number of computers in the classroom. Two students share each computer. Sometimes both students wanted to use the computer at the same time. They lost time when they tried to decide who would use the computer.

Inappropriate web sites and malfunctioning web sites are also technology-related problems. In all of my observations, I saw that some students go different web sites and do different activities. Instead of doing course related activities, they play games. These games are not suitable for students and harmful for computers. Students mentioned some accessibility problems to web sites. I think some providers do not make necessary maintenances and students have problems to reach these web sites.



## CONCLUSION

The research results showed that lower level students had attention problems and did not have good study discipline with the computers. Forgetting to save files created some problems for students. The teacher had good preparation for the course and managed well with the problems that students had on computers.

The results also showed that middle and upper level students had good computer and searching skills, and benefited much from computers. In spite of this, the teacher should teach basic computer skills to low ability students. Computers can enhance the quality teaching but not replace quality teachers.

The CBSSI computers have necessary hardware and software (Zip Zap, Map 2000, Photoshop, Word, Excell,..etc) specialties to teach students social studies topics. In spite of this, the classroom does not have scanner, camcorder, editing equipment and applications. As Sherman (1997) noted, successful integration of technology in middle schools will not occur until there is access to equipment and related resources, and school-wide technology initiatives.

Mr. John uses the computer and the Internet as an information source. For example, students use the Internet to read the topics, and to answer to the questions that are given by their teacher. They are not allowed to write on the computers. Word processors can give students freedom to make revisions and editing effectively and easily. In addition, students can develop their keyboard skills if they use word processors. Communication with other students is very important in social studies instruction. Students can learn much about the other part of the world if they use e-mails or other types of on-line communication tools. These kinds of practical applications should be included in the current social studies curriculum and necessary activities should be done in the classroom environment.

In the CBSSI, the teacher uses traditional curriculum. This curriculum does not include goals about the computer based social studies instruction. Technology related goals should be determined and added to the curriculum. In addition, teachers need to balance the assessment activities on social studies content and the assessment activities on the use of technology

There are some limitations to this study. It was conducted in only one classroom with one teacher and six students. The results cannot be generalized to other schools or classrooms. Second, because this was a qualitative study, I have perceptions of learning, but no objective measure of actual learning.

This study was conducted in a mixed ability classroom. Further studies can focus on low or high ability students' attitudes toward computer based social studies instruction. Also, comparative studies can be conducted to learn students' perceptions about computer based and traditional social studies classroom.

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