

Expression écrite n° 1

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Will computers replace schoolteachers?

Cash-strapped school districts, from Florida to Washington, have discovered that minimally supervised students hunched over laptops can outperform their lectured counterparts for a fraction of the cost.

A broader review of research by the US Department of Education in 2009 discovered that "students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction".

As long as schools measure performance simply by rote memorization on multiple-choice tests, no teacher can compete with instant access to the world's information. Unless schools change, more and more teachers will find themselves replaced by computers.

Traditional large-class lectures deliver the same material at the same speed to 30 different young minds. With Internet-based instruction, the pace of learning can be perfectly tailored to students; they can instantly explore points of confusion, then return to the primary material without interrupting anyone else. No more teaching to mediocrity and no more ignoring the least advantaged or the gifted.

Since online teachers are unencumbered by much

of the disciplinary and bureaucratic nonsense of brick-and-mortar schools, they can devote far more time to actual instruction. Fewer teachers are needed to achieve the same small-class-size effect.

Though teachers like Chris Kirchner of Coral Reef Senior High School in Miami have called Florida's e-learning labs "nearly criminal" for removing the human component from instruction, schools teetering on bankruptcy will reasonably look for cheaper solutions to meet federal funding standards. Simply, interactive websites and textbooks can teach fractions and the stages of cell reproduction every bit as well as a lecturer.

Traditional instruction dramatically underestimates the percentage of self-starters whose boundless curiosity has no need for authoritarian direction. In the slums of India, Newcastle professor Sugata Mitra scattered unsupervised stand-alone Internet stations and challenged eager children to teach themselves. In mere months, children significantly increased their math, reading and science knowledge, leading one academic reviewer to conclude that the shocking results were simply "too good to be true".

Gregory Ferenstein for CNN, June 9th, 2011.

Question 1: According to the journalist, what are the fields where teachers cannot compete with computers? Answer the question in your own words. (70-120 words).

Question 2: With reference to your own school experience, do you think it feasible and/or advisable to replace face-to-face instruction with Internet-based schooling? (110-200 words).

Useful vocabulary

<i>the Internet</i>	ø Internet
<i>to have access to the net</i>	avoir accès à Internet
<i>ø computer science</i>	l'informatique
<i>a computer engineer</i>	un informaticien
<i>a laptop</i>	un ordinateur portable
<i>to alter working habits</i>	modifier les habitudes de travail
<i>to upgrade the quality of work</i>	améliorer la qualité du travail
<i>to bridge the digital divide</i>	combler la fracture numérique
<i>to shop/work online</i>	acheter/travailler en ligne
<i>an Internet user</i>	un internaute
<i>to browse the Internet</i>	surfer/consulter Internet
<i>to log on to the Internet</i>	se connecter à Internet
<i>Ø telecommuting</i>	le télétravail
<i>Ø flexibility</i>	la souplesse

Suggested Answer:

In a world increasingly dependent on new technologies and particularly on the Internet it seems human beings will gradually become redundant⁵ and pupils can do without⁶ the help of teachers. Yet is it really so? Can a machine, however clever and efficient, replace the face-to-face relationship with a teacher?

First it is obvious that establishing a dialogue exclusively with a computer and reading a screen all day long may be extremely tedious⁷ and uninspiring; human expressions, reactions, even of anger, irritation or impatience, are useful guides and can act as incentives⁸ for pupils to go forward and feel willing to learn.

Secondly, testing the intelligence of human beings does not merely consist in asking questions on things learnt by rote and the aim of education cannot be to turn pupils into parrots; repeating something parrot-fashion⁹, as it is possible to do with computers, has nothing to do with confronting one's views and reflections with another human being, especially a more learned¹⁰ one.

In conclusion, considering that education boils down¹¹ to training one's intelligence while overlooking¹² human interactions, amounts to¹³ laying the basis of a dehumanised future world, a world from which feelings and reactions will have disappeared to give way to cold and implacable responses coming from machines.

(209 words)

Explications et compléments

1. *To learn sth by rote* = apprendre qqch par coeur.
2. *To pile up* = to accumulate.
3. *Cost-effective* = rentable.
4. *Reliably* = de manière fiable.
5. *Redundant* = superflu.
6. *To do without* = se passer de.
7. *Tedious* = fastidieux.
8. *Incentive* = incitation.
9. *Parrot-fashion* = comme un perroquet.
10. *Learned* = savant, érudit.
11. *To boil down to (+-ing)* = revenir à.
12. *To overlook* = oublier, ne pas prendre en compte.
13. *To amount to* = équivaloir à.