



Rethinking the Relationship between the Materiality of Technology and Educational Practices: Analyzing Redistribution of Competence in Uruguay's CEIBAL Program

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Abstract

This study analyses the extent to which the introduction of laptops as part of the Uruguayan One Laptop Per Child program (CEIBAL) redesigns the shape and meaning formal educational practices among students and their teachers. In order to do so, I analyze the relationship between material affordances of the technology and the resulting innovative forms of practice that emerge within the classroom. In particular, the size, weight, wireless networking and tumble-proof nature of the laptops made it possible for children to move around holding laptops, to engage in more collaborative type of work and to challenge the traditional format of formal education with the teacher at the forefront of the classroom. Consistent observation of classrooms and in-depth interviews reveal that most teachers found it difficult to adapt to these changes, particularly because they felt the technology was rendering their role obsolete. This resulted in laptops initially been used with reference to understandings and aspirations about education that were previously established and therefore reproduced traditional literacy practices even when using the XO. In fact, new practices required a constant renegotiation of previous arrangements, skills and routines, which had significant implications for teachers in terms lesson planning and execution. Only by capturing these processes of inscription it was possible to make sense of constant and continuous redefinitions of “creativity,” “value” and “utility” within educational practices and pedagogical changes, which were mediated by, struggled over and negotiated with, the laptop’s everyday use. I conclude that the device became a real mediator actively re-configuring those using it and the relationships between them. In summary, competence –as the ability to carry out these practices –was in fact the result of the convergence of knowledge embodied and embedded not only in teachers and students, but also on the physical possibilities of the laptop.