

Facts Sheet 5 Computer-based tutoring and on-line learning

Parents sometimes seek tutoring assistance through the use of computer programmes. With many families characterised by two-income earning parents the amount of time parent have to assist their children with their education is sometimes quite limited. Moreover, student these days are comfortable and familiar with computer-based technologies. Thus for many parents the idea of a computer programme to assist in the education of their child(ren) is very appealing. A part of this appeal is the apparent independence that this gives to their child.

Parents need to be very careful and discerning when deciding to use computer-based materials and/or on-line learning as a part of the overall educational experience for their child.

Things to watch for:

Sales tactics

Some businesses use very high pressure sales tactics when selling computer software. Watch for businesses that state an educational specialist will conduct an assessment, but the assessment is actually made by a salesperson with no educational experience or training at all. Be careful to ask who wrote the software, where it was made and how it relates to the local Board of Studies Curricula. Also determine whether there is a local office where issues or concerns can be brought or whether the office is in another State or Territory (or even country). Exercise your right to use the cooling off period prior to signing any contracts. Be very careful about direct debit systems and understand the full implications of any contract before signing.

Costs

Some businesses that sell computer software offer to finance the purchase over 12 months, two- or three years. The applicant needs to be aware of the full cost upfront and should be aware of the large costs generally associated with such purchases. Sometimes upwards of 30% may be levied on the cost of software.

Systems Compatibility

All consumers who opt for computer based technologies should be careful to ask whether there are particular systems requirements which will limit the effectiveness of any software purchases.

Support for the student

Many educational software sellers offer 'over the telephone' or 'on-line' support for students. However, these rely on the student to initiate and are often run by untrained people. Often the call centre is not in the State and is run by people with no familiarity with the curriculum. Thus parents must be very clear about the service to which they are subscribing and ask detailed questions about the nature of the support they may receive if they require such help.

Effective and accountable computer based learning

Computer based technologies which are complemented by face-to-face tutoring have the best returns for students as the student can be guided into the appropriate use of the software, can have effective and immediate remediation and can have problems targeted by an experienced tutor rather than have problems raised by the student who may not know that they have problems with particular aspects of the work.

For more information contact:

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