

## CS92 Reading Discussion – Israel Scheffler, “Computers at School?”

1. One point on which Scheffler questions the “givenness” of using computers in school is on the notion of instrumentality. Calling an object an instrument implicitly references a purpose to which the object is applied, and it cannot be assumed that the object will be instrumental in any other context. Do you agree with this position? Is there anything qualitatively different about the computer that resists this analogy?
2. Do the views of computers expressed in the essay—particularly that a computer is essentially a machine for data storage and retrieval—still apply today? To what extent are the other aspects of learning (“emulation, observation, identification, wonder, supposition, dream, imitation, doubt, action, conflict, ambition, participation, and regret” [90]) lost when using a computer in an educational context? Is there any way to create educational software that does not lose these aspects?
3. Scheffler speaks of the “computer,” but makes little distinction between the computer as a piece of hardware and the software that can be made to run on it. Much of his discussion, particularly regarding the notion of information, revolves around the assumption that information retrieved from a computer is stripped of its context and connotations. To what extent is that the case? In what ways are the abilities of software limited by the realities of the hardware on which it is operating?
4. How does Scheffler’s concept of knowledge and learning interact with Dewey’s experiential model?
5. How does Scheffler’s argument influence your notion of the proper place of computers in education?