

# Professional Ethics

## Choosing New Chairs for a Computer Lab

By Vicki Napper

### Scenario

It was the end of the school day in the computer lab. Jane, the aide, turned to look at Jeff: "Another chair broke. We're lucky no one got hurt."

"We've got new chairs budgeted for the fall," replied Jeff, the computer coordinator. "We'll have to hold out until then."

Jane shook her head and sighed.

The chairs, recycled from Carter Elementary's lunchroom through classrooms and then into the computer lab, showed stress cracks and were breaking. The janitors duct taped several but more were failing.

Last month a third grade boy had fallen when a girl leaned on the back of his chair. Something snapped and a metal leg detached. Luckily, he was only bruised.

Jeff had seen an advertisement for computer chairs in a professional magazine. He pulled it out of his desk drawer and called the 800 number.

The next day he visited a local dealer and was surprised to see how educational furniture had changed. The range of chairs was amazing. There were swivel chairs, individually variable height chairs, and fully adjustable chairs.

When Brenda, the Principal, saw Jeff's bid specs, she suggested purchasing more of the single-size plastic stackable type: "It'll be awhile before they go bad. After all, the price is right for getting a lot of those."

When Jane heard that, she rolled her eyes. In her opinion, using a computer in combination with a stackable, plastic chair was uncomfortable.

Jeff agreed that was exactly what caused the wiggling he saw in class. Further, he speculated that discomfort not only contributed to old chairs collapsing but also negatively affected learning outcomes.

### Principle

#### AECT Code of Professional Ethics

##### Section 1 - Commitment to the Individual

In fulfilling obligations to the individual, the members shall follow sound professional procedures for evaluation and selection of materials, equipment, and furniture/carts used to create educational work areas.

Jeff decided to examine the research literature on children in educational environments: Perhaps he could find scientific evidence to convince Brenda that the relatively expensive chairs would be beneficial.

*Apply the AECT Code of Professional Ethics shown above before going on to read the analysis.*

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### Reference

Ergonomics for Children & Educational Environment: A Technical Committee of the International Ergonomics Association. (n.d.). Summary Table of Research & Applied Papers/References. Retrieved February 2, 2008, from <http://cehd.umn.edu/kls/ecee.html>

**Note:** *Professional ethics scenarios published in TechTrends are fictitious (see TechTrends March-April 2006). There is never any intended resemblance to specific individuals or specific institutions. The instructional purpose is to raise consciousness about AECT's Code of Professional Ethics.*

### Analysis

Selecting school furniture should be driven by educational needs, not just cost. Computer labs need chairs, as well as tables, designed for computer or laptop use.

Traditionally, chairs in schools are at the appropriate height for writing at a desk. They are not designed for keyboarding at a computer station. The height of the chair seat and the height of the work surface are important co-factors. These affect the amount of strain on the muscles and blood circulation of the user. In schools, learning with computers should take into account not only the types of activities but also the physical abilities of children. Having adjustable furniture would help meet these requirements.

Brenda's cost-benefit analysis does not examine long-term changes in student health. A better professional procedure would be to locate research studies. In particular, there is an entirely new branch of ergonomics that focuses on children and educational environments: <http://cehd.umn.edu/kls/ecee>.