Gifted Black Middle School Students’ Navigation of Learning Technology during COVID-19

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Computer-aided instruction has been utilized since the 1980s in K-12 schools to deliver educational content that encourages students to learn in a self-directed and interactive learning environment (Volman & van Eck, 2001). While computer-based learning tools can have several positive implications for learning – including the use of simulations for active and relevant problem-solving among others – their use also highlights preexisting inequities in technology access (Volman & van Eck, 2001). The shift to mandated remote learning in response to the emergence and spread of COVID-19 amplified this inequity. This poster highlights the findings of a grounded theory dissertation investigating the remote learning experiences of economically disadvantaged gifted Black middle school students in Miami-Dade County during COVID-19 school closures. The study revealed how varying degrees of access to resources played a pivotal role in students’ engagement in remote learning when faced with barriers like inadequate WiFi coverage. The processes undertaken by students experiencing significant disadvantage are discussed, as their demonstrated resilience in navigating school-sponsored learning platforms and innovating preexisting online tools – including social media and messaging apps – to enhance understanding despite accessibility challenges is noteworthy. Attention is also paid to students’ recommendations for teachers and school leaders to implement remote learning more equitably and effectively for gifted Black middle school students and for students who experience economic disadvantage. Among others, these recommendations include an emphasis on providing an interactive environment that is accessible in multiple albeit streamlined formats and is flexible in meeting varying students’ needs. Implications for student-centered stakeholders are addressed.

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