

Where do you want to go?

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Magic Carpet Ride or Magic School Bus

In the 1960's Steppenwolf beckoned rock music listeners to join him on an exciting adventure through fun and fantasy on a Magic Carpet Ride. Today, Microsoft Corporation (computer mega-giant) asks the question, "Where do you want to go today?" This question, a simple yet very effective advertising scheme invites computer users of all kinds to enter a world where all your desires are at your fingertips with a click of a button.

For educators, a world of limitless possibilities for learning is at hand. Consider the following situation:

You are a science and computer teacher in the province of Alberta. Alberta Education is mandating that all teachers integrate technology into their teaching. You strongly feel that technology integration will strongly enrich/enhance the learning of all your students. Allowing students to use and master technology will allow them to become masters of their education. Currently in science you are doing a unit on Environmental Interactions focusing on endangered species. The students understand protecting endangered species is important but they do not fully realize the devastating impact it has on the environment. How can you make them understand? You search the Internet and find a virtual field trip site allowing you to take the students through a virtual field trip of Alberta. On this field trip they learn the six major environments of Alberta, the major animals found in each environment, and they are shocked to learn that of the 85 different species found in Alberta 55% are endangered. Out of curiosity, the students search the Internet to know specifically which animals are being endangered and why. You then realize that this would make an excellent cross-curricular assignment. The students must write a report on one endangered animal in Alberta and the causes for it being endangered. The Language Arts teacher feels that this would make for a very good essay assignment. Also, as the computer teacher, this will make for an excellent word processing assignment. The students are excited about doing this assignment; and you feel good because the students have learned more than you anticipated.

Yes, the above situation is overly simplified, but it should not detract from the point that technology is a major tool that can greatly enhance learning. The Internet has paved the way for information to be available instantly on virtually any topic. As an educator, you are able to enter sites that will allow you and your students to view satellite images of Earth and other cosmic bodies, view live atmospheric experiments, join other students in conducting experiments, and communicate directly with experts. Using technology in education is allowing teachers and students to take their learning beyond the classroom.

Perhaps the greatest innovation to come from using technology (specifically the Internet) is creativity.

Want to know more about technology in education? The following is an article written by Davidson & Associates, Inc. 1997 (Senior Producer: Faye Schwartz).

Technology in Education

No one doubts the importance of technology in our future, but we sometimes have difficulty envisioning just how new technology will be used. Technical people are no better at this than the layperson. Computer experts of the 1950's predicted that computers would be used to lock up houses at night and turn on appliances automatically. But they did not foresee that computers would be used to type letters. Alexander Graham Bell imagined listening to concerts over the telephone, but the idea of two way communication did not occur to him. It is the users of technology who will determine the future. The teachers and students struggling to advance learning will determine technology's role in the schools of tomorrow.

It is safe to assume that technology will be used to help solve the most pressing problems in education. The greatest educational challenge that faces our nation today is illiteracy. Statistics show that one third of the adult population is illiterate. Some people can't read at all, while others read at a less than functional level. A very high percentage of prison inmates are functionally illiterate. Illiteracy is a social problem with almost endless ramifications.

Technology alone cannot solve the problems of illiteracy and limited English proficiency, but it can help. Future technologies will better meet the needs of learners by specifically addressing and adapting to different learning styles. These technologies will be able to identify a person as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner and adjust the presentation of the material accordingly. The increased memory, graphic, and sound capabilities of this technology will give us greater flexibility in meeting the needs of various kinds of learners.

Multimedia applications will offer a wide variety of learning environments. Videodisc and CD-ROM applications provide a rich combination of video, sound, speech, and text. These applications provide a learning experience that textbooks cannot possibly equal. Networked computers, which are becoming increasingly common in our schools, offer great opportunities for using technology to foster group interaction and problem solving.

Speech is becoming an increasingly important ingredient in educational technology. Digitized speech and text-to-speech capabilities, which are being perfected daily, generate high quality human-like speech that is quite impressive. Some applications allow the user to speak words or sentences in to the computer and then compare his or her own pronunciation with the model pronunciation of the computer.

Technology is here to stay---in the classroom, in the workplace, and in society. Virtually all-21st century jobs will require the use of computer technology. The more comfortable people are with this technology, the better they will function in society. Those students who use computer technology as a tool when they learn to read, write, and do math will be prepared for the workplace of the future.