A Day in the Life of a Kid in the Year 2020

At 7:30 a.m., on February 4, 2020, my 8 year old granddaughter Jennifer will shuffle sleepily down the stairs and sit down with her Gateway 3000 Ultra Pentahexium 9900 MHz TV/computer and its high resolution flat screen display. Since it's the year 2020, the operating system will most likely be Windows 2018. Actually, there will be no "operating system" that you can see. She'll press a button, and the device will snap on like a light bulb.

While Dad makes lunch, Jennifer will click on her name and pull up her own home page to check some instant messages from her best friend down the street, Amanda, who can see she's logged on. She'll check her calendar of events, family news and updates from cousins around the country. She can check her classroom home page to see a reminder to wear her gym shoes. She also sees that her library book is due tomorrow.

THE BUS is coming, and after a quick toasted bagel, she stuffs her school-issued, raspberry iBook into her backpack and rushes out the door to wait with her friends. Her 3rd grade classroom looks very much the same as it did 20 years ago, with rows of desks, a chalk board, and bulletin boards filled with children's work. Jennifer sits at her "work station" and opens the lid of her iBook, which instantly connects her to the teacher's desktop computer, letting her download the daily assignments and upload her homework and her latest journal entry. Her teacher's computer processes the journal entry first, and generates a list of this week's spelling words from all of Jennifer's misspelled words. She sighs as she see the new set of words. They're hard, but she can always load them into **Spelling Blaster 19**, which makes them into a fun game. Soon, her teacher puts a freshly printed word search puzzle (generated from last night's journal entry) on her desk. Jennifer pulls out a stub of a pencil and gets to work. At any time, she can click on her report card to see a series of bar graphs that represent her progress and accomplishments in each school subject. This information is used by her teacher to plan lessons and select new materials throughout the year. For Jen, school has become a continuous competition with herself, and each step is documented by the computer.

AFTER SCHOOL, Jen comes home and turns on the **Microsoft WebTV** and decides to play **Freddi Fish VVIX** and the **Case of the Lost Submarine**. She snuggles up on the couch with her 22 year old dog who refuses to die, and steers the fish through lush undersea landscapes using a small remote controller. As she plays, she gets an instant message from her cousin in Michigan, who'd like to join the game. Soon, her cousin's avatar is on the screen, and they're exploring together. After a while, her cousin says goodbye, so Jennifer saves her game and runs outside to play with her dog in the backyard.

"A man that encounters the future without vision is lost." *Proverbs.*

The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same

Sure, there'll be some big changes, but the most remarkable thing will be **how many things stay exactly the same** as they are today. There will be still be math, reading, bagels, history, gym and, for sure, recess. School will be held in many of the same buildings as in the year 2000, and there will always be a cheaper, slightly improved computer on sale in the Sunday paper. We'll still need qualified, caring teachers in 2020, and big yellow buses will carry kids to school each day. TV will change dramatically by becoming interactive, but it will not replace the need for portable and desktop computers and children will always love watching long, non-interactive movies at home and in the theater.

So What's Different?

The enriched electronic environments of tomorrow will improve the quality of a child's time at school. School will be hard work, but it will be more efficient, task-oriented work that seems significant and more fun to children. It means that school time can be used for more of the things John Dewey dreamed of— such as project-based collaborative learning, with more time for significant relationships and aesthetics. Improvements in technology driven screening and assessment programs will insure that no kids fall through the cracks. As technology becomes smaller and more integrated into regular instruction, computer labs will be converted back into classrooms. All teachers will be guided by a set of national educational standards, and curriculum will be better integrated. All testing and assessment will be done electronically, and will be used to generate lesson plans and individualized instruction.

Will Life be Better?

Ah…. The crystal ball is getting foggy. I am optimistic for Jennifer and for all the other children who start life with a rattle in one hand and a mouse in the other. In a perfect world, all this technology should translate into one common thread—more humans living up to their potential. It is up to our generation to make sure this happens, however. In my opinion, technology can make the lives of our children much better. But to make this happen, computers will have be cheap and as easy to use as a toaster.

And Finally...

Many of the tools that our grandchildren will use are already here. These include fiber optic lines, LCD screens, the Internet, speech recognition and wireless networking technology. The challenge will be using these exciting new tools to their fullest potential.✪

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