

English in 2001: Technology and the Culture of the Classroom

What will the classroom be like in the year 2001? What changes do you hope to see implemented by then? What do you expect? What do you fear?

This month's manuscripts represent a healthy blend of hope and cynicism, of optimistic and pessimistic forecasts for the future.

Foremost is the realization that the most important element in tomorrow's classroom is still the "live connection"—the communication between teachers and students. No technology yet invented can replace the need for teachers who push, encourage, and nurture. On the other hand, instructors who are more subject-oriented than student-centered can cause more harm than any technology yet dreamed of by writers of science fiction.

April's contributors offer the hope of springtime with the coming of a new century—of renewal, of rejuvenation, of growth in our profession. Even doubting Thomases evince a belief in the possibilities of the near future. *ED*

Humanizing Technology

Chris Boline, Eric Brooks, Angie Dake, Jenny Emery, Russ Kelly, Jess Kruchoski, Monique Oliver, and T. J. Rognes
Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota 55057

We are college students currently studying Kieran Egan's educational philosophy, and many of us will be embarking on teaching careers by the year 2001. It was both exciting and frightening for us to consider the future of the English classroom, because we are foreseeing our own future workplace.

One student told our group that he had recently attended a technology fair for teachers at a local public school. The teachers, he said, appeared mesmerized

by the new computerized teaching devices. This student, however, was not dazzled; he was disturbed. Not only did he worry that he would walk into his future classroom only to find a computer chip already controlling the class, but also he feared that such technology would be extracted from the learning experience of the student.

Our group decided that these technological advances call for an expansion of the teacher's role. Teachers must not only utilize technology in the study of literature but also use literature to explore the realm of technology. The future English teacher must be "technology literate" as well as "literature literate," for both sub-languages will certainly be vital to the classroom as well as to the rest of society by the year 2001. Exploring intricate aspects of a novel through computer work can involve as much imagination as sitting amidst nature and pouring one's soul onto paper. The teacher must find a balance between these two types of activities.

Technology cannot replace active experience, but it can be humanized through the careful guidance of a teacher. Just as the Romantics saw nature as the catalyst to self-discovery and understanding, teachers, in accordance with Egan's philosophy of fostering a sense of wonder, must have the insight to emphasize the catalytic, imaginative processes inherent in technology.

Communicating Down the Street or Across the World

Cindy Wilkerson
Troy State University, Alabama 36081

Although many teachers fear being replaced by the computer, I feel that the teacher will remain vitally important to the learner. The teacher's role will change from lecturer to guide—to someone who helps the student through the learning process.

Students will be able to communicate with other students in schools down the street or as far away as Japan. Telecommunication systems will make the audience seem real to students by enabling them to instantly send text by a modem and computer. The teacher's role will also change with the implementation of the new tech-

nology with students writing individually and the teacher having more time for conferences during writing workshops. The computer in combination with appropriate programs can guide the learner through the stages of writing. The computer can also provide ways to insert notes into the margins of text. The laser disc will also make reading more "real" by providing animated texts. Teachers will no longer need to pass out papers because they can save notes, handouts, or any other information the students need on their computer disks.

I hope that these changes will be accepted by teachers rather than feared. The students will need supportive guides and encouraging teachers to help them survive and excel in the computer age.

If Taxpayers Tighten their Belts . . .

Brett S. Gayer

Carterville Community High School, Illinois 62918

Because of a lag time of ten to fifteen years between innovation and implementation, it is uncertain whether or not new ideas will actually be a reality by the turn of the century.

If monies are made available, more personal computers will be introduced into the English classroom. These could be used by teachers for everything from drill and practice with grammar exercises to sharpening writing skills through word processing. As computer prices become more reasonable, I expect that most if not all students will acquire their own for home use. Fewer and fewer assignments will be written longhand on paper. Instead, students will do their homework at the computer keyboard, save it on a disc, and turn the disc in to the teacher for grading. This would certainly appeal to environmental activists concerned with our current consumption of paper.

In respect to the physical arrangement of the classroom, I conceptualize the room divided into various learning centers—a regular classroom seating arrangement for lecture and discussion purposes; a computer lab network consisting of at least five units; an audio-visual listening lab; and a reading and writing lab which could be divided into isolation booths for research, writing revision, thought incubation, or pleasure reading. This sort of facility would satisfy all of the needs of English teachers who will be held accountable for student mastery in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

None of these dream classrooms will become a reality if taxpayers don't tighten their belts as their parents and grandparents did and demonstrate willingness to finance the schools of the twenty-first century.

Composing in More Than Words Alone

John J. Sweeder

La Salle University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19141

By 2001 the English classroom will become more "technology-infused" in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diversified student population with a wide array of learning styles. The degree to which that classroom will change depends to a significant extent upon teachers' willingness to incorporate converging com-

puter and video technology into English/language arts instruction, particularly with respect to student communication skills.

Word processing, along with its spelling, thesaurus, and grammar-checking capabilities, will have become widely adopted by students and teachers alike; however, more sophisticated forms of electronic desktop publishing will supersede simple word processing. Teachers capable of creating classroom environments in which students learn how to incorporate a variety of symbol systems in novel and inspiring ways will be better positioned to ignite their students' creativity and, thus, motivate greater numbers of them in composing. *Composing* will be broadened and redefined: no longer will it be limited to the inventing, arranging, and styling of words alone; rather it will be seen as the creation and interactive manipulation of still and motion pictures, sound effects, music, oral utterances, charts, graphs, data, and so on.

Classrooms equipped with wireless, networked computer banks replete with peripherals such as video spigots, image scanners, color laser printers, and modems will empower students, either individually or collaboratively, to conduct library research as well as retrieve, store, and reconstruct information they glean through a wealth of electronic bulletin boards. Students will compose *for* and share their work *with* a variety of authentic audiences such as electronic pen pals, distant peers from around the globe, teachers, parents, politicians, and others from whom they can receive timely, if not immediate, feedback.

Promise and Pitfalls of Communication Technology

Christopher Shamburg

Hudson County Area Vocational School, Jersey City, New Jersey 07302

In the English classroom of the future, technological communication will be given the same weight as written and oral. Students must be taught to write with word processors, conduct long-distance modem dialogues, and make multi-media presentations. As we become part of the "global village" through advances in communication, we must teach our students to communicate in this new world.

However, several pitfalls could accompany these developments. Already, with regard to the uses of computers in education, there is a tendency to cater to a student's desire for immediate gratification and to a short attention span in an effort to relate content. Several educational software programs, along with Channel One, use the methods of popular culture, Nintendo, and MTV, to communicate their message. Allowing the students to be passive viewers or Pavlovian dogs will have drastic consequences—for in education, often the means itself is the message.

The rule of integrating computers in the classroom should be that the students must be able to use computers to improve productivity, not to discourage it. An analogy that can serve as a good maxim is "the computer is to mind power what the engine is to muscle power."

The Integrated Approach

Weston R. Falk
St. Regis School, Montana 59866

"Get back to the basics" was screamed loudly for years. Many English teachers boned up on their grammar, dusted off their diagramming charts, and changed their curriculums. For years the basics were taught again. But were these basics in tune with the real world? At least they addressed the focus of the standardized tests. Now, a new wave (or is it an old wave?) is washing the term basics aside, and many teachers are hoping it does not leave education purged in its wake.

The integrated approach offers a method using literature to teach grammar. Teachers expose students to different types of literature, and students learn grammar as they write their own papers or answer essay questions. Studying various types of literature helps students to understand that writing isn't a one-step process. This approach is not new, but it is viewed by some teachers as a cure-all and quick-fix for public schools that are not turning out good writers.

Sure, a teacher can give a worksheet and have the students find and label subordinate clauses. But until students write, they do not really know how to use subordinate clauses effectively. A teacher must have students write; clauses will appear automatically; then the teacher can work with the students if there is trouble: fragments, run-ons, or incorrect comma placement. Consequently, a teacher can steer away from giving too much information in one session by concentrating on problems as they occur.

With this approach, teachers shouldn't be afraid to try different methods. The only thing that may be non-traditional is that students will have to think on their own and help each other in the classroom, instead of over the phone or in the halls.

Not in the Equipment, but in the Culture of the Classroom

Geraldine A. Richards
West Genesee High School, Camillus, New York 13031

The universal availability of computers will alter the physical appearance of a typical high-school English class in 2001. I fear, however, that this technology may become the master by dictating the form and substance of thinking and, worse, become one more obstacle between teacher and student or student and student. Nothing is more important in a classroom or in any community than contact among its diverse members. Without that human element, education is reduced to a jumble of dislocated facts.

The change, then, that I most hope to see is not in the equipment, setting, or surroundings but in the culture of the classroom. Imagine students who admire peers who think carefully rather than act impulsively. Imagine students who see reading, writing, and thinking as an integral part of their day rather than as an annoying interruption. Imagine students who come to class not in herds but in discussion groups that remain in contact (electronically?) between physical meetings. Imagine students who neither resent nor idealize their

mentor-teachers but are traveling companions with them in the continuing journey of education. Imagine students who can enjoy because they are respected and cared for.

In the year 2001, I will be happy to do without all the technological marvels possible if students arrive at my classroom ready and willing to learn.

2001: "Familiar Only Worse"

Jim Brewbaker
Columbus College, Georgia 31907

Mr. Lopez, Principal of Limbaugh-Angelou Technology High, and the Time Traveller entered the computer lab. "Is this where the kids write?"

"Hold on. You'll see." One hundred computers filled a windowless room where students watched one hundred cartoon teachers on monitors. "All right, people," said the screen. "Log in and get to work. Several of you, I noticed, are making real progress on Punctuation Packet IV. Soon you'll be ready for Miniskills Mastery Cluster II and the next series, Punctuation Packet V."

The students logged in, and the cartoon teachers disappeared. At the cubicle nearest her, the Time Traveller read on the screen, "Good morning, Tonya. Ready for commas in a series? (Y/N)" Tonya, a slender girl with long, black hair, sighed and touched Y.

The Time Traveller squirmed. "Can we move along?"

"Sure. This lab serves Lows or At-Risks mostly. Standardized tests blow them away without considerable individualized work. We've bought the new Solo-Lang Package. It's state-of-the-art stuff."

"I'm not familiar with it."

They passed into a corridor. Lockers slammed. Kids jostled. Soon they were in a tenth-grade class. "This fall," the teacher intoned to thirty semi-attentive teenagers, half African American or Hispanic, "we begin as usual with grammar—parts of speech and sentences. Then it's on to literature—Shakespeare, the *Odyssey*, maybe a novel."

Later, they returned to Lopez's office.

"So you're from 1994—the Clinton years."

"That's right."

"2001, not exactly a giant leap into the future."

"The process is experimental."

"Was experimental, you mean." Lopez smiled at his small joke.

"Right. Listen, are you sure this is 2001?"

"Of course." He picked up the morning *Times*. The headline read *President, Congress Deadlock on Budget*. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, it's all so . . ."

"Familiar?" Lopez prompted.

"I guess so . . . familiar, only worse."

Teaching Is the Name of the Game

Andrea E. Mayer
State University of New York, Oneonta, New York 13820

I stand outside the doorway to Mr. Clarke's ninth-grade classroom, absorbing the buzzing, productive noise of students working together on a thematic unit titled "Show You Care." Lively posters, daily progress charts

kept by the students, instructions on using the computers, samples of student work and reminders of the writing process cover nearly the entire wall. Students work busily, some grouped at a table, some reading, some writing, four acting, three standing up. Most talk to their peers, not about the weekend, but about their projects.

One man hastens from student to students, offering encouragement and suggestions. I hear, "How is it going? Can I help? Great job! What happens next? Did you talk to Roberto about this?"

Worried about tomorrow's deadline for the class publishing project, Deborah beckons to Mr. Clarke as the laser printer expels another page of the class book on saving the world's rain forests. Ms. Marks, the science teacher who team teaches with Mr. Clarke, stops by to inspect the final text before it goes to the printers. She remembers that she has to check with the art teacher to see if the computer art will fit the empty spaces.

Mr. Clarke smiles when he sees Nathan searching for a good title for reading workshop, one novel already peeking from his jeans pocket. Nathan was hard to mo-

tivate until Mr. Clarke suggested that he read an S. E. Hinton book.

Jackie writes in her literature response log, almost ready for Ming's written response. Darren signs out to the library to use the interactive videodisc about the environment.

Lured by the clacking of keyboards, Mr. Clarke steps to the row of computers edging a wall. Emilio, an Ecuadorian immigrant, types hastily to his pen pal in New Zealand. Mr. Clarke smiles, knowing that Emilio takes more risks with his writing since he began exchanging compositions with the New Zealand class six months ago. Sabrina searches a database in the Midwest for her report on the extinction of marine species in the Great Barrier Reef.

After roaming from student to student and group to group, Mr. Clarke aligns a chair next to Robert and asks him about his portfolio submissions for this quarter and writing goals for the next.

The bell signals the end of class, and Mr. Clarke checks his watch, not believing that the time has disappeared.

EJ FIFTY YEARS AGO

Better Books and Gardens: Emily Post, Fannie Farmer, Shakespeare, and Rand-McNally

They would graduate within three months. It was difficult to keep their minds on the regular English program. Many of the boys had deferments that would last only through commencement day. Nearly all the others would be eighteen soon after. Several of the girls were engaged. Marriage was in the air, the inevitable combination of war and romance. Here were the adults of a too-close tomorrow. Only the future was real. We talked of the homes that young people would establish after the war . . .

. . . [Y]es, there should be better books. Should be? There *would* be. From the vague "better books" we turned to *what* books and so set upon our last work of the year. We would determine the books that would comprise the basic library of the young couple—high-school graduates both—who were just establishing their new home.

* * *

A mere perusal of the final list appended could never tell the story of the fun of picking and choosing—the lively squabbles and the really serious efforts of the more earnest pupils to get the most reliable and accurate books in each field. [The final class list of twenty books, all of which could be purchased for \$74.15, included the Bible (with concordance), the American Red Cross's *First Aid*, Morris Fishbein's *Family Medical Adviser*, Emily Post's *Etiquette*, the Funk and Wagnalls *College Standard Dictionary*, the Rand-McNally *World Reference Atlas*, *World Almanac*, *Fannie Farmer's Cook Book*, Louis Untermeyer's *Modern British and American Verse*, the complete works of Shakespeare, *Great Short Stories of the World*, *Victor Book of Opera*, and *Art through the Ages*.]

Isadora W. Miles. May 1944. "Seniors Plan a Basic Library for High-School Graduates," *EJ* 33.5: 254–59.