

From the Oregon Trail to Online High School



When I relate the way technology has influenced my life there are those who will look at me as a dinosaur but I know that I was on the cutting edge of technology. It was an exciting time in my life. I got the best of both worlds. I was raised and educated in an old-fashioned way by reading books and taking written tests in the days of ditto machines.

And then technology took over....

I remember in Junior High anxiously waiting for the day once a month when our class got to walk over to the high school to work in the computer lab. The computers were very large. Each one took up almost an entire table. The monitor, the keyboard and the CPU were one solid unit and pages we printed out were on dot matrix printers and on greenbar paper. Our class would play a game on the computer. It was called "The Oregon Trail."

There were no pictures, no graphics, no sounds and I didn't even know what a mouse was. It was just one long list of decisions and after making all of them, you found out if your expedition team made it to the Oregon coast like Lewis and Clark or if you perished in the wilderness. I can remember playing that game like it was the most exciting thing I had ever done in school.



A more updated version of the Oregon Trail game complete with colors and graphics. The original version did not include these upgrades.



This computer is the first utilized by the Choteau School District in Choteau, MT in the early 1980's.

Somewhere around the mid-90's I was thrust into the world of the world-wide web. Gone were the days of huge DOS-based computers with no pictures. Now I was overwhelmed with images and advertisements as I explored this burgeoning internet. Since that time, our lives have only gotten more and more visual and the necessity to be able to navigate technology and be visually literate is paramount.



The Visual Impact of Technology

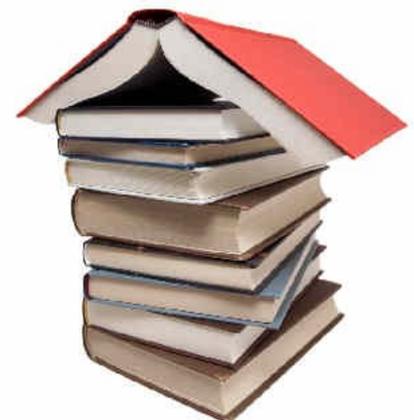
I am a teacher and I always tell my students to write what they know. What I know best is education. Visual literacy is the ability to interpret and find meaning in images. It is based on the idea that

pictures can be read and that meaning can be communicated through this process of reading images. I would contend that this idea of visual literacy has derived out of necessity to inform and communicate with a world that is becoming more and more visual.

haps every fifth or sixth page, there was a picture, a table or some kind of visual – if we were lucky. The words communicated the ideas. I found meaning from reading. This was the predominant way that information was disseminated.



Thinking back to when I was in school as a child, a textbook was filled with writing and per-



“A computer terminal is not a clunky old television with a keyboard in front of it. It is an interface where the mind and body can connect with the universe and move bits of it about.”
—Douglas Noel Adams



Today technology rules and runs our lives. No one wants to sit and read a computer screen. They want their information fast and easy. The most efficient way is through visual technologies. We watch news clips on the internet instead of read the newspaper. We don't read books for pleasure; instead we watch movies. Those in search of humor don't read a joke book but go to YouTube and watch comedians or regular people tell jokes.

visual images have a way of speaking directly to our emotions; to our hearts. Oftentimes, a picture or a painting can move us more deeply than ten thousand words ever could. When I am trying to get a concept across to my students, I will often use a visual such as a picture or a video clip, etc. I see the value of technology in the classroom and I take advantage of it. My only hesitation is that it seems as though technology is taking over our lives and dictating many of our actions. My daughter is in third grade and since she was in first grade, her teacher has used Power-point slides to

teach the children in the class. So instead of listening to and looking at the teacher, a good portion of my daughter's day is spent in a dim classroom staring at a projection on the wall. We are teaching our children to discount the way we were taught. In this way, technology has been taken too far.

Progress and change are not bad things but we should not forget where we have been and the value of those things in our history. Balance in all things including technology is fundamental.

