

# *Electronic Materials for Youth*

Technology use is not an issue -  
Contextual use for human development is, however.

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## *Abstract*

*Technology use has established itself as an informational tool for many generations and instructional technology has become a prominent component of educational design - both in schools and in corporate settings. Why then would anyone resist the idea of electronic materials for use by children and young adults? It seems few and the issue then becomes one of quality instructional design that advances the development of human qualities of intuition, rational thinking, and responsible thinking/acting; and attributes that promote kindness, goodwill, and understanding of self and others. The essential realization is one of context, which takes into consideration historical social, cultural tendencies and self-awareness.*

## **Quality Design - Materials as Learning Tools and Instruments**

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) Definitions and Terminology Committee has agreed on a definition of Instructional Technology (IT): "The theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management and evaluation of processes and resources for learning." (Seels, B. & Richey, R., 1994). IT can be traced back to World War II when the US Army needed to mobilize and train a work force to produce the supplies needed for its war through its *Training Within Industry* (TWI). It was further influenced by B.F. Skinner (Behaviorism and Operant Conditioning), Benjamin Bloom (Taxonomy of Learning), and Robert Gagne (Conditions of Learning) until the 1960s when IT began to utilize evolving audio-visual technologies and then later, computer tools to interpret new philosophies of education and learning. Now instruction is designed for use on all forms of technology, from cell phones to hand held devices to accommodate learning near and far.

IT is generally guided by a systematic design process referred to as the *ADDIE* model - an acronym that means: **Analysis** (problem recognition) | **Design** (objectives with corresponding technology) | **Development** (creation of product) | **Implementation** (teaching procedures) | **Evaluation** (formative & summative feedback). [NOTE: Some IT specialist's wisely evaluate after every step.] This ADDIE process intends to improve the learning process and at the same time, observe how learners and technology interact to successfully address particular

problems.

Gary Morrison, Steven Ross, and Jerrold Kemp have declared that “The Instructional design approach considers instruction from the perspective of the learner rather than from the perspective of the content, the traditional education and training approach” (Morrison, G., Ross, S. & Kemp, J. 2006). This is the significant aspect of IT because it introduces the element of empathy into the teaching process.

### **Beyond Quality Design: Intent on Human Quality**

“Uncommon thinking for the common good... It’s not about information. Or technology. It’s what we do with IT that counts.” So says the organization *EDUCAUSE*, “a nonprofit association whose mission is to advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology.” Intelligent use of technology means that knowledge is used for the benefit of people and not the swelling of corporate coffers. In many developing nations, the growth of technological industries does not necessarily mean the local population benefits from this knowledge. There is still a great *digital divide* abroad and within the USA as studies have shown that lower income families have fewer technological devices and skills. This might even indicate that schools, who have become the experimental labs for the technology industry, measure success by those who can conform to socially dominant inclinations. Technology and schooling are certainly ripe to be havens for forms of cultural and intellectual hegemony under the guise of promoting national education. Nonetheless, and without a doubt, it is clear that schooling and technology greatly favor the more affluent and those who conform to social trends and the school indoctrination process (Becker, H., 2000).

Criticism of technology and IT is that it is not entirely socially responsible (Reeves, T., 1995). It could be said that new technologies do not make old concerns irrelevant, and in the case of many (most?) *developing nations*, they fail to decrease poverty, illiteracy, nor address other pressing social problems. The social benefits derived from technology in the country I know best, Thailand, is negligible. Electronic game-playing and texting abounds, but little of it is utilized for the benefit of the public good. What is worse, there are no instructors who take the time to mentor students or lead innovative instruction - there is a lot of moral heavy-handedness by instructors and censorship by the government, but little, if any, guidance in how to use technology “smartly.” In fact, some have made a very good case that technology is damaging and takes children from their innate abilities to learn easily and deeply.

Among the alternative schools, home schools, homeschoolers, and alternative teachers I studied in Thailand, all of them were quite adept at modern technologies,

but do not place the most importance on it. They see the need for schools and/or learning environments to, first and foremost, mentor kids to be good humans - something at which most schools utterly and completely fail. One school, Panyotai-Waldorf School does not allow students under the 6th grade to work on computers at school as they believe it is more important for children to learn to play, be social in groups, and learn from indigenous sources of knowledge. The seventh grade students I have observed at Panyotai have not shown any signs of being disadvantaged by this technological “curfew,” and they are extremely bright, sensitive, and most importantly, kind and good kids. Perhaps those who favor technology for children may be reluctant to see this, but technology may not be a panacea for the lack inherent in school settings and most likely, technology does not lead to personal or social transformations, or as the Royal Bhutanese government refers to as “gross national happiness.”

### Examples of Potential Socially-Responsible Electronic Materials

The Internet and various communication devices has increased the level of possible technological interactivity and holds the promise for richer (and sometimes more elegant) learning environments, but also presents more dangers to children in the forms of *techno-mesmorization*, the over-awed attention grabber effect; easy exposure to illicit and/or unhealthy sources of knowledge; over-reactionary parents and teachers who over-control and prevent forms of self-discovery; criminal elements and advertisers who prey upon the naivete of young people; the social pressure to learn technologies and endless applications while forgetting perhaps the more significant aspects to life; and the simple unquestionable belief that modern technology will bring more benefits without commensurate self-reflective activities and life experiences.

Four examples of electronic materials that might be beginning points for further socially-responsible public goods are given below. A short description of their use accompany a picture of their banner or front page.

#### The Amazon.com Database Guide

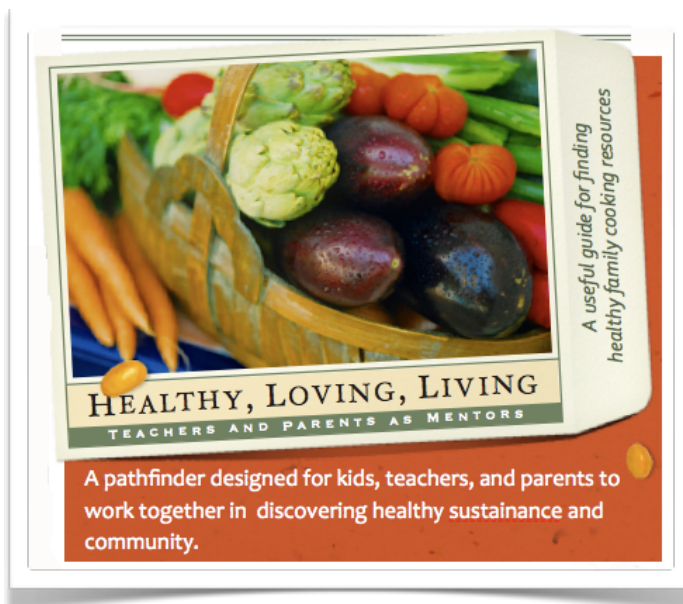


Since so many kids are exposed to rampant consumerism and Amazon.com is the largest e-commerce company in the world, it was thought a guide to engaging the Amazon.com database would be a better approach

that to preach or admonish about the potentially delusional aspects to a consumer site. Know it and use it wisely were the goals of this guide - one of a series on responsible commerce in ones life.

Healthy Cooking With Kids

This pathfinder - expert guides on a particular topic - designed for kids, teachers, and parents to work together in discovering healthy sustenance and community. It was designed to assist kids in becoming aware of nutrition and the vital life forces needed for their well-being; confidence in becoming self-responsible; encouragement to parents to become mentors and not authoritarians; and developing ideas on how to develop community and family bonds.



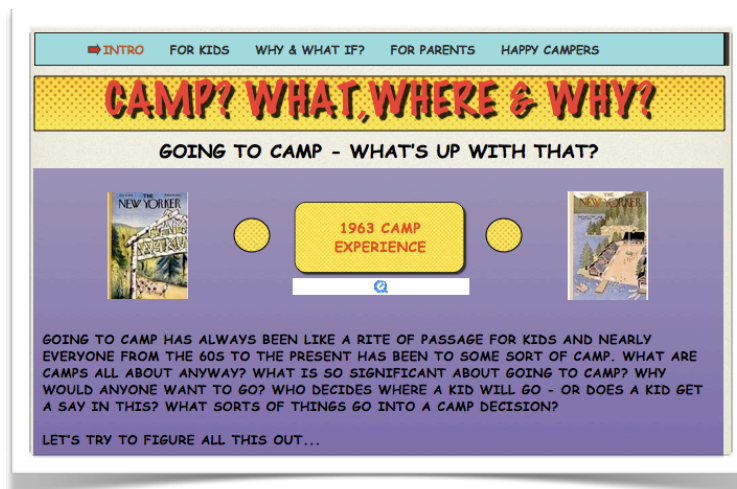
RAPPOETREUM Promotion



This was a promotion at the local library for the celebration event of a new collection of 20th century "literary sound" - forms of poetry augmented with music. It was an event intended to include many youth who become disenfranchised or left out of the academic world due to their unconventional intuitive grasp of life rhythms and social tones.

## Summer Camp? What, Where, & Why?

Summer camp is a great rite of passage for so many youth and can be a great learning experience. But what is the camp experience? With so many camps to choose from, what are the considerations for choosing a camp? How do you make summer camp a learning experience for children and parents?



### **Closing Comments**

What strikes me about all the new electronic materials being developed is how alluringly promising they appear, yet how they never really seem to address the really deep problems that beset humanity. We have developed elaborate educational and commercial structures around complex interactive communication tools, yet we personally fail at interpersonal and intercultural communications. I ask: why not just develop interpersonal interactive skills - the ones we sorely lack? Why is there the belief that technology will somehow remedy the problems we have in this area? I believe we cannot make our knowledge potent because it lacks deep insight through reflection and observation of the movement of our minds.

A famous Thai Buddhist monk, The Venerable P. A. Payutto, in interpreting the lineage of Buddhist sutras on economies and the nature of being human, wrote, "Modern economics and Buddhism both agree that mankind has unlimited wants. As the Buddha said, "There is no river like craving." [Dh.186] Rivers can sometimes fill their banks, but the wants of human beings can never be filled. Even if money were to fall from the skies like rain, a human's material desires would never be satisfied. [Dh.251]" So true is our ever running flow of beliefs that modernity and technological advance will finally shut off the valve of our ignorance and provide us with the means to develop a healthy and peaceful society. Westerners particularly believe that education is the viaduct that will transport the waters of knowledge to fill our barren lakes of ignorance. But try as we might, we find new technologies and new theories spawn ever new ones and create new forms of the same old problems we have faced for tens of thousands of years. Yes, we must learn and use electronic materials as tools, but not because they will redeem us or develop us, but because they have the potential to show us that our mind has no form, but like a mirror, can reflect objects. The objects we need to observe are our own limitations and weaknesses without celebrating our ignorance and delusional states.

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