

Recycled and green on the screen

Environmental and ecological literacy are educational and political commonplaces. Meantime the virtualisation of learning is around the corner.

How might green education use the new media without losing connections with wildlife, nature and ecosystems? 'Recycled Places', a research CD-Rom points a path.

The rapid, if not frantic, wiring up of the school education environment is a phenomenon well recognised in the public mind. Each new generation assumes the ever-increasing ubiquity and normality of the digitally mediated realm as just that; the norm of everyday living and everyday school. The equally ubiquitous involvement of large scale players in school futures, from BT to Microsoft, to the particular of Apple and Tesco deals to help bring computers into the classroom all underscore, that on the post-industrial planet, tooling up is the fast track to competitive edge.

Alongside the process of learning, its facilitation, may be on the cusp of far-reaching, quite possibly irrevocable changes, so that within a hundred years, if humans are still around, the complete basis of education may well be unrecognisable.

The green education world, in as much as there are claims to common ground, gives the impression of being, or having been, deeply ambivalent about the question of computer technology in learning. The debate has been divided and fractious so groups which some might have thought share degrees of similar ends, find themselves on different sides of various educational arguments. For instance, quite a few years ago the educational disagreement between Theodore Roszak, long-time alternative 'counter-cultural' advocate, and MIT's doyen of Piagetian computer learning, Seymour Papert, seemed wholly inconclusive as to how to resolve and move on from their diametrically opposed views on the benefits of introducing computers into the school. Roszak wrote a full book *The Cult of Information* forewarning a gloomy, almost apocalyptic scenario where the experience of learning had been abandoned and teaching had been given over to the faceless duties of machines a hundred years hence. By contrast, Papert attempted to show that computers freed up cognition. Green educationalists of Roszak's hue, with a deep suspicion of digital technology, find it difficult to accommodate the mainstream educational theory which originates out of modern developmental and cognitive psychology. Yet where Roszak saw threat,

other greens – McLuhanites, viewed the coming of computers, alongside television and video, as a step in the liberation of education, interactive and able to deliver a reconceptualisation of being in class and classrooms. Whether the debate has moved on is unclear, but the technology has of course arrived, erstwhile visions have faded, subsumed to the mundane, and today the mainstream aim appears to be making the entire population grow up knowledgeable, and if possible, specialist in computer literacy.

For the green community, changed circumstances have forced changed questions. From arguments against computerisation as part of the green revolt against scientific consciousness, the how and whether the digital can be used effectively and practically in environmental education learning contexts, seems to fit the zeitgeist. The younger education community, already immersed in and relating to computers, sees the connection as an opportunity. In scattered and disparate form, small trial attempts are being made to explore how new digital technology can be brought helpfully to bear on children being drawn into supporting an awareness about, and receptivity to, the fabric of environmental and ecological questions. If in different times both ecological literacy and the potential of the computer as tool for learning were both seen in utopian colours, today this has been replaced by the exigencies of managing potential human resources and capital, and the need for 'tooling up' a population to face the stresses of the Darwinian Global economy.

Still there's a broad political/educational consensus that the rudiments of ecological literacy are necessary and perhaps crucial for preparing the informed child to become the ecologically informed citizen of the early twenty-first century. Given this, environmental multimedia could still be used for the imaginative dissemination of ecological ideas. But with technological change, fast moving enough at present, experiments in a particular technology are quickly superseded by the sense of their outdatedness. There is only a slight time-window to get a sense of how a technology may best be applied to any number of contexts, including environmental