

Seeing Technology Through Metaphor

Technology is like a...

Overview

Teaching through metaphor. Whenever teaching something new, whether math concepts or software or poetry, it helps to compare the new activity with something familiar. This is often referred to as teaching through metaphor. This allows students to have one foot on solid ground while they venture into new learning territory. This is why the use of metaphors can be such an effective teaching tool.

Developing a technology metaphor. To help students understand the deeper nature of technology, I have them develop their own metaphor about technology. It is often a ground breaking and poetic experience for them. It almost always helps them get in touch with their overriding concerns, hopes and perceptions of the role technology plays in their lives using a new kind of language - metaphor. Below are some examples.

Robert Frost said, and I paraphrase, that a metaphor is explaining this in terms of that. When "this" is something new, and "that" is something familiar, students can compare and contrast them in meaningful ways.

Note: Strictly speaking, the use of the words "like" or "as" constitute a simile rather than a metaphor, but it is an unimportant distinction for the purpose of this activity.

Technology metaphor examples...

a fog...

Technology is a fog. It covers its inventions so that when one gets close to them, they are seen clearly. But the pathways leading to them are cloudy, sometimes completely concealed. (Like the)... automobile. I see it clearly and use it well, but if something was "pinging" under the hood, I'd have no idea how to get the sound to stop. ... This fog causes me to move carefully, unsure of where the next step will take me, hiding the "big picture." I want someone else to see through the fog and find my best path.

a chameleon

Technology is always changing its hardware and components but its intended purpose or reason for being does not really change. There is always the chance that something bigger or better will come and destroy its existence. Technology moves quickly and stealthily and never stays in one place for long.

a fountain of youth

Technology is like the fountain of youth. Sought after since the early days of time... (it) promised health, vitality, and even immortality. In other words, the fountain of youth is

equated with the perfect life...we buy a bread machine to bring back the aroma and flavor of homemade bread- something we had as a child without the fancy equipment. Today, we have the fresh bread minus the memories of baking with mom or grandmother...Like the various charlatans of the 1800's traveling around in their wagons touting the latest elixir that would cure all ills and in a way be someone's "fountain of youth," technology promises things it cannot always deliver.

a can opener

Technology can open the world to us through the television, video, radio, and computers...but technology can also open some really rancid stuff, like pornography and violence.

a tug of war

...because you can't pull on your end without pulling on someone else's end. That is, while technology gives on one end (for example, in the form of a car), it takes from another (for example, through the depletion of resources...)

chocolate

Technology is like chocolate: It's rich, sweet and satisfying, people crave it; it comes in a variety of forms. Technology can add a rich variety to instruction and allows infinite possibilities of applications. However, chocolate is fattening, caffeinated and eating a diet consisting only of chocolate could make you sick.

a double-edged sword

it can be doubly useful, speeding up a task, but you have (to be) doubly careful not to get cut...

a life style choice

...like the food and drugs we decide to consume or not consume, the exercise we decide to engage in or forgo, the energy consumption patterns we perpetuate or re-evaluate and change...