



Move over, iPod

There's a new gadget topping tweens' lists—the FLY Pentop, a computerized pen from Leapster that “magically” understands what kids write and draw on special FLY paper. We're fans of the old-fashioned pencil, but when Hannah, our associate editor, drew a calculator with the FLY and was then able to use her sketch to solve math problems—wow! “What a motivating tool for the classroom,” she says. You'll agree. Craig Munsart, a FLY fan at Creighton Middle School in Colorado, gives a thumbs-up to the fact that kids can take charge of their schedules with the pen's built-in calendar. (No more “When's our book report due?”) Find out more at www.flypentop.com.



An a.m. eye-opener

Now when teachers at three elementary schools in New Jersey arrive in the A.M., they'll need to put down their morning coffees and look straight into the camera. The Freehold school district is testing a new iris scan identification system funded by a school safety grant from the Department of Justice. Teachers, school workers, and parents dropping or picking up their kids must all stop at the door for a digital iris scan before heading in. The Department of Justice calls the technology nearly one hundred times more accurate than fingerprinting. “The idea is to improve school safety,” says Phil Meara, superintendent of the district. Will the extra step be worth it and cut down on unwanted guests? Keep your eyes peeled for the results.

Learning in the palm of

Lighten that tote bag

Imagine leaving that stack of essays behind when you go home for the weekend—and coming back to find them graded. Sound like a dream come true? It may not be far off. Automatic grading software is getting better—for math tests and even that pile of “My Favorite President” compositions gathering dust on your desk. Earlier this year, Pearson Knowledge Technologies announced a new Web learning tool, WriteToLearn, which includes, among other features, an “Intelligent Essay Assessor” that scores students on their structure and grammar. Not ready to ditch the red pen for “Jetsons”-style grading? Why not use the software for extra input on the first couple of drafts? Go to www.pearsonkt.com.



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> FUTURE report

Which technology will change teaching the most?

We asked tech expert Bryan Alexander, of the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education, which are going to have the largest effects on classrooms.

>> RICH MEDIA

Forget book reports. Now kids can make their own movies, radio shows, and multi-media presentations. With MP3s, audio recorders, and audio-editing software, it's easy to create lessons that use audio in creative ways. "Microsoft now has a free download called Moviemaker," says Alexander. "You'll see more and more of this. Soon kids will send each other video clips like today they send e-mail jokes."

>> PERSONAL RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Know instantly who is grasping the lesson and who is falling behind. "The teacher gives clickers to the class and has a computer up front that can receive signals from the devices," Alexander explains. "You can ask a question, and the kids all answer simultaneously through the clickers. They allow you to mandate that everyone reply, saving you the pain and time of making every kid physically give the answer."

>> AUGMENTED REALITY

"The term is ugly," admits Alexander, "but it refers to taking a digital object and associating it with a physical object." Still confused? Alexander tells of a group who collaborated on a piece of historical fiction set in turn-of-the-century Los Angeles, broke it into chunks, and cued each chunk to a city block by using a tablet PC with a GPS card. When viewers walked from block to block, the computer would feed them the next section of the story. Wow—and that's only the beginning!

>> BLOGS AND WIKIS

Blogs and wikis are simply self-published Web sites. Wikis allow anybody (say, all of your students) to contribute whenever they like. "Wikis would have taken over the world by now," Alexander quips, "if the name wasn't so stupid." Some teachers, including Alexander, require their students to create class blogs, where they can post homework assignments and engage with each other's work.

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