



Teachers Use High-Tech Methods To Help Students Pursue Engineering, Electronics Careers

JULY 21ST, 2003

Some New York City teachers are hoping to bring all sorts of high-tech concepts into their classrooms next school year to inspire more students to pursue careers in engineering and electronics. As NY1 Tech Beat reporter Adam Balkin explains in the following story, students won't just be hearing about those concepts, they'll be building them too.

Classrooms have certainly come a long way since the abacus and the quill. How far? Polytechnic University in Brooklyn is running a new program this summer, educating area high school teachers on how to bring mechatronics into the classroom. It's a program funded by the National Science Foundation called SMART.

"SMART stands for 'science and mechatronics aided research for teachers,'" says Vikram Kapila of Polytechnic University. "Mechatronics is marriage of mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, electronics, computer science and computer engineering to make smart products."

These projects aren't just designed to look neat or be like high-tech Erector sets - they're built to actually do something eventually in the real world. A hexapod, for example, could be used for disaster recovery. After a building collapse it could be sent in to look for possible survivors.

"These could be robots, smart jet engines, automotive hybrid systems, rockets, missiles, or what have you," says Kapila.

"This is like a simulator for a jet pilot, and what they'd do before they actually become jet pilots, but most of it has to do with the fact that I'm controlling the helicopter basically by using sensors," says Clay Davis of Manhattan Comprehensive Day/Night High School.

The teachers all agree, students are more eager to learn when they can use concepts and equations to actually make something they can touch and use.

"It's tangible," says Paul Friedman of Seward Park High School. "You look at a differential equation and it's a differential equation. It just sits there, and this is real. It's live, and it has applications."

Michelle Carpenter-Smith of Packer Collegiate Institute says, "I think this is a way for me to bring projects back that will interest females as well as male students so that hopefully more female students will go into engineering, go into math and science professions, and they'll bring their way of viewing engineering from a creative perspective, from an artistic perspective, so that there can be more representation from both genders."

The program runs for four-weeks. After it's over, each teacher is given supplies to build some of these projects back at their high schools.

For more information on the program, including a list of which high schools are participating, visit mechatronics.poly.edu/smart.

- Adam Balkin