

Editors Podium:

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The futurist will tell you many factors influence change, ranging from innovations in science and medicine to war, pestilence, earthquakes and natural disasters.

The most powerful and pervading source of social change throughout history is *technology*. Technology is an enabling mechanism for doing things faster, better, different. It triggers paradigm shifts – changes so pervasive they transform the rules by which we operate and invalidate whole segments of previous knowledge and experience. The life cycle of products – and knowledge – grows shorter as the pace of innovation increases.

This acceleration, coupled with fast transportation and electronic communication, enables a person to live many lifetimes within the space of one lifetime. Nutrition and medical science have increased life expectancy up to five generations. Adaptation to this changing environment requires more education, better education, lifelong education. The alternative is to be job-poor or jobless, and ultimately homeless. Education plays a crucial role in our success in the information age.

Instructional technology is an asset for enhancing teaching and learning. Learning is becoming interactive. Answer this question true or false:

Is it possible for almost everybody to access almost any kind of education anywhere and at any time?

If you said **yes**, that is true – it *is possible*. Learning opportunities are available in schools and colleges; on radio, television, the internet; in the workplace, at home, and anywhere a newspaper, telephone or television signal can penetrate. With satellite communications, there are few places on the surface of the earth that are not bombarded with educational messages.

If you said **no**, that is also true. Until there is universal access to the tools of communication, with opportunity for feedback and interaction, there are two classes of citizen, the haves and the have-nots. Under this system, the have-nots rarely get well-paid jobs. The result - the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

In the last four decades of the twentieth century, the United States made tremendous advances in its educational programs for people with disabilities. It increased educational opportunities for minority and immigrant groups. The fruits of technology are widely distributed and increasingly lower in price. Universal access will be achieved, even in the poorest communities, states, and countries.

Distance learning has its own paradigm shift. It is disappearing, not because it occurs less, but because it is being accepted and absorbed into the fabric of education. The interactive technologies used in classrooms, laboratories and libraries are available everywhere - in the workplace, at home, and even in places of recreation. The all pervasive cell phone is a symbol of the new connectivity and the thirst for interaction with other people and new ideas. Where there is a thirst for learning, the tools are available. In the future, poverty will be

redefined as not knowing the joy of learning and the fulfillment and economic advantages it can bring.