

Editors Podium

At the end of World War II, parents had the option of public and private schools for their children. Most private schools were operated by religious organizations. Home schooling was illegal. . .

Today there are many alternatives to fit the diverse needs of our complex society. The educational landscape offers charter schools, home-schools, and a plethora of specialized private and public school programs. Into this environment came two new elements that affect all schools – the computer and the Internet. With the increasing pace of change, it is mandatory for **all** students to be computer literate and skilled in using the tools of the information age. Societal changes fragmented education into many pieces. The Internet is weaving those pieces together into a new fabric of communication and learning.

Schools have received extensive funding to upgrade the communication infrastructure to incorporate digital technologies into the libraries, classrooms, and laboratories. We pride ourselves with having 87% of the schools connected without asking how many students have access at a given moment, and how the technology is utilized. Does “connected” mean having one operational computer with Internet connection in the library? And how many hours of the school day do students have access? On the 87% statistic, one occasionally used computer counts the same as a school with innovative learning environments where students have continual access to computers for communication and learning.

U.S. Government reports indicate the four out of five teachers are not comfortable with using technology in the classroom. Teacher-training organizations have been slow in responding to the need for improved training of new teachers and re-certification of the teaching profession as a whole. They are now updating and accelerating training to meet new state and federal standards.

Government statistics indicate that 50% of students K-College have access to computers in their homes, and approximately 50% of these are Internet connected. Of the 25% that are connected, students from lower income groups and minority ethnic groups have much less access than those from affluent families. The implications for Universal Access are clear. There is a need for lower cost computers and cheaper Internet connections, and there is a need for programs to help the “have-nots” to participate in the new communication paradigm. Computer costs are coming down, there are free Internet services, and web-computers offer easy entry to the world of the Internet. We may need additional e-rate type programs to provide telephone connections for families in the lowest economic sector, whether rural or inner city.

The challenge for educators is to be flexible, innovative and proactive. We may not have budgets to hire all of the teachers we need for the traditional teaching

model, but we have new tools to customize the curriculum for individual learner needs. We do not have teachers to teach all of the subjects that need to be taught, but through interactive technologies and distance education, we are equipped to teach a full range of courses in even the smallest school. Perhaps the challenge is how to use the new technologies to give us more time for meeting individual student needs - in diagnosis and prescription, motivating and guiding, tutoring and mentoring, assessing and evaluating.

The face of education as we knew it has been shattered by technology, and in the process it has given us the opportunity to know the faces of our students – one-on-one. The new tools incorporate interactivity, multimedia, motivational devices and tracking to improve teaching and learning. We are the professionals who understand the needs and the process and manage the assessment and evaluation. The new technologies professionalize the teacher by providing new tools for learning.

Donald and Elizabeth Perrin
Managing Editors