Afterword

Teaching, Learning, and the Net Generation: Concepts and Tools for Reaching Digital Learners is one of those books that needed to be published, as the topics addressed are important, interesting, and timely. The anthology amplifies and builds on a body of literature that seeks to better understand the dynamic and complex processes involved in teaching and learning in our modern era. The chapters, although varied in perspective and purpose, share the theoretical and pedagogical positions that how we teach and learn is not only technologically-influenced, but simultaneously situated in cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts. Through interdisciplinary and applied research, the authors have questioned, studied, and analyzed common assumptions about Net Generation students, including learning expectations, preferences, course performance, and outcomes. While Net Generation students may have distinct new tools, skill sets, experiences, and attitudes toward learning, they are far from monolithic, and they share the historical bond of previous generations in negotiating and co-constructing with professional educators that which will constitute knowledge and link our present to the past.

Despite educational institutions generally lagging behind in adopting and implementing new technologies, there can be little doubt that our ways of teaching, learning, and knowing are changing more quickly than in the past. Perhaps, because of differential access and usage, these changes might still be better described as evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Use of information technology in courses can result in improved, with more engaged student-directed learning, convenience, and/or better preparation for the workplace. As this book goes to press, Net Generation students and their instructors are increasingly making use of Web-based textbooks, word processing and spreadsheet applications, simulations, wikis, blogs, bibliography and citation tools, video-sharing, and social networking. The research on technologies and their pedagogical applications presented herein offer not only relevant and practical possibilities for current educators but also provide a valuable historical document for the future. My own generation learned mostly face-to-face in a classroom, sometimes aided by noisy 16mm motion picture projectors, slippery overhead transparencies, and mimeographed printed handouts. Who can predict what the post-Net Generation, the children of the first digital learners studied here, will be like and what new tools they may have as they engage in knowledge acquisition and learning?

On a recent visit to the Gartner Group headquarters in Connecticut, a higher educational consultant joked that today’s digital learners are incessantly hungry for new information technology in the classroom. Today’s tech-savvy students say, “More please. Now please!” Yet Gartner estimates that only approximately 20 percent of faculty expends the considerable effort to use new information technologies in their teaching. The majority of faculty continues to be challenged, if not stressed, in trying to keep up with information technology, in an environment where there are few, if any, rewards for integrating information technology into existing courses. Therefore, while the Net Generation may be digital natives, for many, their day-to-day schooling harkens back to yesteryear.
Afterword

One of the areas that I currently oversee at my University is a grant-funded community center that assists high school students in the Bronx to make up lost credits via online coursework during evenings and weekends so that they might graduate on time. For many of these teenagers, this is their first encounter with a digital, self-paced learning mode that is student-centered instead of teacher-centered. For their parents, who are invited to the center for basic computer training, the experience is a step toward narrowing the digital divide. For both Net Generation students and parents, it is about gaining access to tools and possibly life-changing educational opportunities. And, after all, that is the message behind Teaching, Learning, and the Net Generation: Concepts and Tools for Reaching Digital Learners -- to understand purposefully how the relationship of people and technology can help us re-conceptualize education for a more advanced society and a better world.

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