

Foreword

“... the way up is the way down and the way forward is the way back”

The Dry Salvages, The Four Quartets (T. S. Elliot, 1941)

Society harnesses technology in astounding and unpredictable ways. Internet and cell phone technology can help us to understand and solve problems related to the environment, sustainability, medicine, education, security, food distribution, and finance, if used well. But for this to happen we need educated citizens, well-designed and accessible technology, and highly skilled specialists. In other words, we need education systems that motivate students to develop the understanding and skills necessary for tackling big societal issues.

Today billions of people use the Internet. No one knows how many computers and cell phones there are in the world. Some people say that half of the world’s population will use a cell phone by the end of 2009. Others talk of 3 billion cell phone users by 2010. No one really knows. What we do know is that our world is changing and changing fast. Today’s students, many of whom are characterized as “the millennial generation” – those typically born in the 1980s and after - have different social norms and expectations from earlier generations. This generation has grown up with technology: for them surfing the web, sending a quick message to friends on Facebook, or a photo via their cell phone is as much a part of their life as the air they breathe. But this is not so for their parents and educators; even those who have been technology users for many years don’t have the “technology smarts” seen in most students, teens and even younger children, who adopt new technology with ease.

Millennials know the way forward, and the way backwards, and they are not afraid of all the different ways of getting from here to there on the Internet. They are surprised that technology is held in awe and handled so clumsily by many educators and parents, because to them it is how you keep in touch with friends, plan events, coordinate activities, do homework, have fun, express yourself, and get noticed. For this generation the problem is not what you can do with technology it is what you do when you don’t have it because you lost your cell phone or have been barred from the Internet. Without a cell phone or Internet access to Facebook or Myspace, you are not connected, you’re not part of the group, you might as well not exist – at least for now.

This timely, well-written collection of articles addresses the need for educators to understand today’s students and to work with them to harness the Internet for education, so that students develop information searching skills and, more importantly, the information literacy skills that will enable them to evaluate the information that they find. This requires students and teachers to work together in mutual respect. Students can help teachers to learn the mechanics of the applications, while teachers can assist students to evaluate what they do and find. By entering into their students’ world, teachers will

have greater opportunities to motivate and engage students in meaningful projects that enable them to better understand the complex world in which they live. Well designed projects can engage students in the world's most pressing environmental, political and humanitarian problems. In addition students and teachers can work together in teams locally, nationally and even internationally facilitated by the power of applications such as Skype which enables free voice conversations across the Internet, or texting applications like Twitter and Jaiku, or by sharing photos and videos using Flickr and YouTube. Of course, there will be dangers too that educators must look out for. Pornography, online bullying, and plagiarism are, unfortunately, already well-known to educators. There are even more dangerous threats that include kidnapping, involvement in terrorist activities, drugs and more. Educators need to be aware of these dangers as well as the abundance of good opportunities: their involvement in learners' use of technologies is therefore essential.

Dr Stylianos Hatzipanagos and Dr Steven Warburton have collected an ambitious and broad collection of articles that cover a wide range of topics. The book explores the "disruptive nature of new media" and discusses "learning design and pedagogical frameworks" and "digital literacies and Web 2.0". There are also chapters on "tools, a broad range of "case studies", and a discussion of "social software and knowledge management". Other themes of the book explore "blogs and identity", "communities" and "presence" – prescient topics that will certainly engage readers.

Whether you are an educator, an engaged citizen or a parent and whatever you teach, you will enjoy and learn so much from this book. There is something for everyone. For those who like to read cover-to-cover, you will get good value for your money. If, like me, you like to dip in here and there, you will find many riches to feed your mind, challenge your imagination, and influence how you interact with people. This book should be kept close to hand. It is a gem that should be read by everyone!

Jennifer Preece
University of Maryland, USA