Chapter VI

Cybercamp: A University/Community Partnership for Universal Empowerment

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There is an ever-growing need for technology training for the many stakeholders (teachers and students) in our schools. There is an abyss created by technology, which is a medium that is moving forward rapidly within an institution that is bound by tradition. In this chapter, the reader is introduced to a program called Cybercamp, a means to bridge the abyss by having the producers and consumers of education build a bridge together. A partnership between the University of Cincinnati and numerous community organizations is presented, which provides for universal empowerment through technology training.

INTRODUCTION

Cybercamp was the result of work begun by two individuals from a university and a public school technology cooperative to address technology and its deployment toward the goal of universal access. In this chapter, you will meet the two individuals who developed this idea, understand their motives and feel their excitement as the entire approach became implemented. In addition, the existing conditions and the infrastructure required for the partnership are also presented, to help the reader who is interested in forming similar partnerships. We believe that technology in the schools is in reality a partnership between the students and the teachers. An interesting quote describes this:
“The test of a good teacher is not how many questions he can ask his pupils that they will answer readily, but how many questions he inspires them to ask him, which he finds it hard to answer.” (Rollins, 1997)

Since the 1960s, when universities had utilized computers for research, the proliferation of technology was restricted to large institutions that could afford the cost of implementation: business, government and universities. In the 1980s, primary and secondary schools were experimenting with technology, but widespread deployment was expensive and required more staff, something that was a luxury for most public and private schools. Two things occurred in the late 1980s-early 1990s. The personal computer became powerful enough to allow individuals to be able to effectively process information without being connected to a large mainframe-type computer. Computer networks such as the Internet, as well as network-based software, allowed for the sharing of information across the world in an inexpensive way. Information that was localized could now be shared with everyone. What was exclusive could potentially become inclusive.

The application of computer technology in schools had frequently begun as a series of programming courses for talented students taught by mathematics teachers. When software applications changed to allow “anyone” to manipulate a template to write (word processing), compute (spreadsheet), organize data (database) or present information (hypermedia), the mystery of technology had been changed to a mastery of tools to present information.

THE NEED FOR TRAINING

The learners became the learned when it came to technology. When it came to technology, students frequently had an insatiable desire to master the unknown, unlimited amounts of time and no fear of making mistakes. In some cases, the students became more familiar with the technology than the teachers. However, the level of familiarity with the technology was related to the level of access that students had to the technology. Students at schools in more economically advantaged areas might have access through school. Students from more economically advantaged families might have access to technology at home. However, the dream of universal access to technology was just a dream.

Schools realized that the use of new technology and the Internet could serve as a renaissance for learning because of the accessibility to vast stores of knowledge and its acquisition. The belief was that if students were exposed to a variety of different resources, they would be more successful. Teachers who
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