

The 21st Century School

By W. Reid Cornwell

MySpace has been in the news because of the potential and reality of sexual predators exploiting its openness for their nefarious purposes. However, it is estimated that 60 million young people have embraced it as a place to exchange ideas, write creatively, seek information on nearly every subject imaginable and to talk, talk, talk.

The U.S. public education system matriculates approximately 45 million annually.

The internet is the agent of an astounding revolution in the way young people communicate and find information. Evidence of this is that the word "Google" has become proper noun, noun, adjective, and a verb. Wikipedia has challenged the synthesis of information, normally the reserve of encyclopedias such as the sponsors of this forum.

Young people love the internet, their computers, and the people that help them exploit the use of them, Geeks are no longer social outcasts, and rather, they have become branded by a major retailer of electronics.

Simply put, kids are reforming the way they learn. The internet has emerged as a social force that liberates them from the social control that comes with the classroom. They walk around happily humming Pink Floyds, "We don't need no education, we don't need no thought control." Educators, parents, politicians and educational researchers are stunned by the loss of control over the learning that takes place out of school.

Most adults just don't get it.

The digital divide is generational. The divide widens everyday that educators do not exploit this difference for the purposes of formal education. As one Colorado State Professor has put it, "My colleagues think using technology in the classroom is doing a PowerPoint presentation."

Let's imagine a school that kids would create.

1. Every kid would have a computer.
2. Every one would have high speed access to the internet.
3. All curriculums would be online and available 24/7/360.
4. There would be no grade distinctions.
5. Teachers would be mentors not bosses
6. Attendance would be optional.
7. Learning would be self-paced (fast or slow)
8. You could finish High School at seven if you are smart and motivated.

9. Classes would be learning labs with access to subject matter experts (teachers)

10. School would be a gathering place for communities of learners.

11. Home schooling would be the rule not the exception.

Far fetched you say. It is the future. This technology and capability is being developed as I write. Centers of innovation all of the world are working to perfect what I have just described. The state of Florida has an on line accredited high school right now. You can get an accredited bachelors, masters and doctorate and never leave your home.

Traditional educators and academicians are white knuckled over the changes that are coming from outside the system.

They are riveted to incremental change when the revolution has already marched past. They keep trying to apply technology to tired old thinking.

They know the future is now.