As I began to think about what education should be like in the New Millenium, I can’t help but remember many years ago, in 1968 to be exact. I was a student at the University of California, Davis, and also working as a dispatcher for the University Police Department. Senator Robert F. Kennedy had just been assassinated when a custodian called to ask if he should fly the flag at half-mast. I said, “What do you think?” And his reply will forever be etched in my memory, “I’m not paid to think.” Wow, what a novel idea – needing to be paid to think! Isn’t that what separates man from the animals?

I have now been a junior high teacher for nine years. I am paid to teach young people how to think. I have been trying new things every year. I have taught science, math, and now introductory computers. I introduced computers into my math classroom six years ago, and have been learning more about them ever since. I am awed by the changes in the computer field during this short time span, and the impact it has had on education. I am also amazed by how many of my colleagues have absolutely no interest in learning about how computers have become an integral part of the lives of our modern day students, or how they will change the face of schools in the near future. I hear comments that sound similar to that janitor of many years ago…”I’m not paid to learn computers on my own time.” “I’ve been teaching this subject for twenty years, and I shouldn’t have to change it now. Medieval History is the same now as it was twenty years ago, and computers can’t change that.”

I have read the following description of a stream, and believe that education for the new millenium is similar
Running water is strong, turbulent, active, fresh. It carries with it rejuvenating elements drawn from upstream, and everything within its grasp is in motion.

Standing water looks peaceful, calm. But without motion, the water grows stagnant and dark. The elements within it decay and die. Without an infusion of new water, it shrinks and eventually vanishes, a lost relic leaving behind an empty river bed once filled with promise.

Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, has said, “If the rate of change inside an institution is less than the rate of change outside, the end is in sight.” Is the end in sight for education as we see it today?

Yes, I believe the schools of tomorrow will look much different than the schools of today. If I were to design the school, then….

Wendy’s School of Tomorrow

The school of tomorrow is in perpetual motion. Not only are the students learning, but so are the teachers and administrators. With the size of the World Wide Web doubling in size every ninety days, Dr. Thornburg mentions that a pivotal skill will be to find information we need and be able to determine its accuracy and relevance. Being in the midst of that strong, turbulent, active, fresh, running stream will rejuvenate even the most died in the wool traditional teachers. (Hopefully) Dr. Thornburg states that “in technology we are ‘white water rafting.’ Some of us are in the raft. Others are the driftwood that is being pulled along. Others are rocks, and are not moving at all. And then there are the boulders that hold every one back.” In the schools of the future tenure will be gone. Teachers will be retained based on how well they inspire students to learn, and by how much they personally are growing. If they are boulders, saying they will not grow and learn, then they are dead and will be set aside, no longer able to hold back the future. If they are rocks, they too are dead, refusing to learn the new technology, and they also will be set aside, allowing the water to run more smoothly. And the driftwood, if willing, will be shown how much fun it is to learn and teach. They hopefully will join the raft and be riding the rapids or the new education.

Tyron Edwards stated that “To waken interest and kindle enthusiasm is the sure way to teach easily and successfully.” All teachers who desire to be in the raft, are looking for ways to interest their students. We all want to be successful, and if teaching becomes easier that would be an extra treat.
Our schools in the future will be using the computer as a tool, and as the major method of communication with teachers, fellow students, parents, and the global community. All students will be given small portable computers as they enter school. No longer will we experience the digital divide that Dr. Thornburg speaks of now. The bridge over troubled waters is to give each student, and teacher, the raft to traverse the rivers of the now present Communication Age. The schools of the future will be the entrance points to the rivers, allowing all to have anywhere, anytime access to the net. Then, as students and teachers explore the shores of the river, finding new places of interest the further they go, they will lead others to these destinations. Together they will discover online resources, museums, virtual tours of places only dreamed of, and research centers from around the world. As the teachers and students of the future enjoy this rafting adventure through the internet river, they will be finding ways to utilize the tools of this new Age to build the future. They will find that the river never ends and that learning is a lifetime adventure.

Secondary Schools no longer need to be situated in the physical structures now seen. Schools will be “available” 365 days a year. Teachers will be available through video programming, chat rooms, and e-mail communication. Class assignments will be posted on the web, so students can access them anywhere and anytime. Homework will be sent to teachers by e-mail, or projects will be posted on the web. Not only will assessment be done by teachers, but also by peers. Students will be encouraged to work on projects with partners from around the world, no longer will we hear of the United States falling behind other nations, we will all be working together.

Teachers will come to “schools” to meet with groups of students at mutually agreeable times, as well as in chat rooms. These “schools” will not look as schools do today. They need only be meeting rooms equipped with multimedia equipment, so that the students who do not have their own can come together and produce multimedia projects. Teachers will be guides along the way, helping students find “context” and meaning in their studies. Students will come together to help one another learn about the latest hardware and software available, to “teach” each other new things they have learned. No longer will the belief be that teachers need to know everything first. Individuals of all ages will be valued for the knowledge they have, and they can share this with others. Students will be encouraged to
start their own business on the web. They no longer will be concerned with age limitations, because nobody will know their age. Thus math lessons can truly be based on “real life.”

School districts will save money on transportation, on the necessity of having as many schools as they do now, on food services. They will be able to use the finances to pay teachers as the professionals they are, as consultants to students. No longer will the public be forced into bond issues to pay for run down buildings. No longer will schools need the number of administrators that were so costly. For all of these reasons the schools of the future will be much more cost effective than the ones of today. Secondary schools no longer will be buying books, paper, office supplies. The cost of computing is coming down almost daily, the small personal computers given to students when they begin school, will easily be paid for by the money saved closing down the many secondary schools we have now.

Thank you for taking the time to read my visions for the future.

Sincerely,
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