

y Robert C. Lewis

[Life on the Internet, in the Classroom, and Everything Else](#)

Very often when I am browsing through the different forums found on AOL, I find myself drawn to the education chats. The one thing I hear from the teachers and other people who attend the education forum is how great the Internet is and how they think it to be such a great educational tool for their students. I agree it is a great wealth of information but how is it good for the average student? True, when it comes to doing research papers and reports, the amount of information that can be obtained can either make or break that paper. But my real question is, does the Internet really help a student in their academic skills? Although a great deal of you would say yes, I must disagree and say that except for the accessibility of information and communication, the Internet does very little in developing critical academic skills in our kids.

True the Internet can help to teach our kids how to do research and develop topics for reports, but what about the kid who is reading 4 years below level or still cannot do simple addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division? Can you tell me how the Internet can help these kids? You may find information that may help you as a teacher teach in the classroom, but there is no direct way that the Internet can help the underachiever. The only way the computer can help an at-risk student is with the right interactive software. If a student has the savvy to be able to cruise the net at will, then the odds are very likely that he/she already has the correct academic skills.

As I said in an earlier editorial, we need to empower our educators with the technology available in this day and age. Yet, I still see teachers getting computers in the classroom with no idea of how to incorporate them into their curriculum. Education software companies have come a long way from the days of just using repetitious drills to help the kids learn. They know that they have to create some type of hook to capture the attention of our youth. Now the only problem is making our teachers aware of the ever growing library of software that exists for them. It's a pity that education catalogs are not included with each computer that goes into the classroom.

One such catalog that comes to mind is called the Edutainment Catalog. It has one of the best mixing of PC and Mac software for all ages and academic disciplines. At least this

catalog can give a teacher a starting off point as to what type of quality software is available. But sadly, giving such a catalog to the teachers would be like hanging the proverbial carrot in front of the donkey. In this case we would be giving our teachers the information needed to help their students but refusing to spend the money needed to buy the software due to lack of funds. It is a bit like buying a Lexus and not being able to afford the gas.

I mean I do not want to get off into a “rant” (ala Dennis Miller), but it is times like this where one must wonder where our academic priorities are. Why is it we can spend 100’s of thousands of dollars on sports and yet when it comes to academics we are so cheap. People are willing to spend extra money on sports equipment and other sports related material, but when it comes to academic supplies it becomes let them make do. Look what happened when states (like Texas) tried to adopt a “no pass, no play” rule. Instead of worrying about why Johnny cannot pass math, the parents decide to sue the system for depriving him.

When I went to high school in New York City, I had to take a statewide final in each of my academic classes. No matter what my grade was in class, if I did not pass the state final, I would not receive credit for the course. In a city as diverse as NYC, do you think people cried racism if a given group did not fair well on these tests? No, the exams told the parents that their kids needed to do better if they wanted to graduate. In other words the parents took the scores at sight value and did not try to make excuses for their kids.

Now I cannot deny that for me this was over 20 years ago, but as far as I know these exams are still given with the same expectations that were anticipated of me. Maybe that is why some of the highest scores in the country tends to come from the northeastern part of the U.S. For over 13 years I have taught middle and high school students and over that time all I have seen is a drop in motivation and desire to do well in school.

We are so quick to blame the teacher for the failure of our students but at the same time we refuse to give them the tools available in this day and age to help them succeed. The average child today is far more complex in needs than a child of 10 or more years ago. Yet life in the classroom has barely changed. Unless you are lucky enough to send your child to a well endowed district, odds are the district your child is attending looks no different than it did 20 years ago. If anything, we may be looking at retrograde evolution than really improving the standards in education.

Many states now give statewide exit tests to make sure our graduating student meet a level of academic proficiency. The irony to this testing is when we get the results back. God forbid any one race of children should come out on the low end of the test scores. Then instead of looking for a solution for the scores, we say the test is racially bias and demand that the test be adjusted to cultural variations. How much longer are we going to keep pouring salt over a gapping wound?

By now some of you are wondering what we can do to solve this dilemma. First, more parents need to tune in and take the responsibility for how their kids are doing in school. With the complexity of single parents and/or both parents working, we have become a society where our kids are getting their smarts from MTV, video games, and their friends on the street. In some cases it may be too late but try to reel your son/daughter back into your lives and make them feel like they are part of a family and not a gang.

Next, quit blaming the teachers and start finding ways to help them succeed with their students. It is said that the squeaky wheel gets action so start squawking at the people who run the school district. Join your local PTO/A, start petitions, do anything you can to get the bureaucrats off their duffs and start supplying the teachers with the tools needed to

motivate and ignite the desire in all of us to learn and allow us to truly move into the year 2000. So write your congress person, send petitions demanding academic change to the district superintendent, or the only thing we may be dishing out in the future will be mediocrity and ignorance.

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