

## JUST BECAUSE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IS COMPLEX IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE CONFUSING

### Position Paper 5

Writer David Gardner in an article on stock forecasting wrote about the fallacy of analyzing stocks by looking at past performance. This approach to analysis is what he called “Losing track of the road.” He wrote, “Motor down an interstate highway with your nose pressed to your rearview mirror and you won’t make it very far before you crash. You’ve lost track of the road. You were looking backward.”

So often, that’s exactly what we do when we apply the earlier patterns and practices of our education to our children. We basically look backward. The truth is that in many ways the children of today are already far ahead of most of us adults, since they are already **tomorrow’s children**. Most children born after 1996, just ten years ago, have no idea about a world without the following:

- HIV/AIDS as a disease,
- The Hip Hop culture,
- Cell phones,
- Computers and software,
- The Internet and weblogs,
- E-mail and text messaging,
- Cars without air bags,
- Lasers (for lights and DVDs),
- Video games, and
- Microwave ovens.

**Today’s and tomorrow’s children** have become so venturesome they now freely combine one technology with another to form entirely new products and processes on their own. Children today are

- **Modular**--they readily snatch elements from a number of sources and see few borders,
- **Connected and Viral**--they freely and innovatively incorporate communication technologies in their everyday lives,

- **Fast Moving and Time Shifters**-they compress time and space (Who now doesn't understand zapping commercials and recording shows for later viewing?).

The fact of the matter is that it is no longer necessary to restrict informational intake to words. Hence simultaneous audio/visual inputs born of TV, CD, and DVD experience can speed up the learning processes, if only teachers were equal to the task and their classrooms suitable. This can also allow students to advance at individualized learning paces, without locked-step progressions involving an entire class or grade level.

A radical adaptation of the old factory-like model of "one-size-fits-all" education is required. At the heart of the process is the need to retool teachers and classrooms to be more user friendly to today's and tomorrow's children. And it means getting teachers to comfortably learn from their students. More than incremental change is called for, we need a change in the culture of learning to make DC the flagship of urban education in the country.

The most critical task for today's public education leader has to be the "bridging" and "translation" work between *ours* and *our children's* world. Instead of merely making judgments about the novel and seemingly unacceptable lifestyles of our children, we need to appreciate better the origins of the differences between them and us and that there are pluses and a minuses on each side.

We need to accept children where they ARE and then show them how the things they may not care to do today can lead to more productive lives in their future, if they connect a bright line from the labors of today to the rewards of better results tomorrow through a radical shift toward quality learning instead of quantity information intake. They need this hope to be willing to commit themselves to a new direction. Theirs is a "show me" generation.

Here I am reminded of the story of the famous Olympic Greek athlete, Milo of Croton. Milo was said to be the strongest man of his time. The story of how he gained his strength is legendary. When Milo was young, Milo's father placed him in charge of a small bull calf. One day, Milo's father asked him, "How big is your bull today, Milo?" Milo ran outside, picked up

the calf and carried him inside to show his father.

Each day thereafter, Milo's father asked him, "How big is your calf today, Milo?" and each day Milo ran outside picked up the bull and carried him to his father. This went on for a number of years. As the bull grew, so did Milo's strength. Our children can be like Milo. They can rehearse simple to more complex tasks to become masters of highly sophisticated systems through practice and intellectual growth. The child that "plays with those video games all the time" . . . and who through TV understands his rights to get "Mirandized" before talking to a law enforcement officer, just might only need an educational bridge to become the next leader in a new technology or the inventor of a revolutionary IT application, instead of being a problem child in the classroom, or a thuggish *wanna-be* revolutionary on the streets.

One of the roles I wish to play as a School Board Chief is to draw together the diverse citizenry and leaders, who believe in children, and those with technological expertise to plot paths from restless "problem behavior" toward self development and then to find "real world" ways in today's technology through which those integrated skills can be used for the good of the community. Here it is useful to take note of the ground breaking decision of McKinley High School to plumb the waters of electronic games to the many mansions of software development, systems analysis, dramatics, graphic arts, business management and marketing, as an example of education from the streets to the suites--all driven by the simple love of electronic games!

The message often sent to our children is that they are failures, when they do not conform, before they even start on a path. And they often miss the connection between what went on before and what's happening now. What **they are NOT told** is that many of the low skill traditional jobs and occupations from which their forebears escaped have now been professionalized and to allow for high earnings and entrepreneurship using technology for which they can qualify as the lucrative side of today's and tomorrow's service economy.

My special purpose as a candidate for president of the D.C. Board of Education is to reach the leadership potential for all children, and to link them with their new roles and new jobs in global markets and our technological economy. Moreover, my purpose is to accept them

where they are and to include our children in the joint planning of their future.

Toward this end, I spent time collaborating with a colleague a few years ago to write a still unique book called **Black Futurists In the Information Age**. With or without its targeted racial identification, this is still the only book of its kind with an integrated perspective on the foreseeable power of technology as a social and political force. In that book I spell out the importance of technology mastery for ensuring a level playing field among all social and economic *strata* in the future as long as this is coupled with a humanistic style of teaching.

That's why my campaign adopted as one of its planks, "Early High Tech and High Touch Education." Contact me directly at the e-mail address below if you want to purchase a copy of the book.

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