

Envisioning Transformation



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How do you envision the future course of education? You can focus on emerging technologies and try to predict what life will be like with new tools and all the other forces—ecological, economic, political, and societal—then think about what education will be like under these conditions. Maybe it changes drastically; maybe it doesn't. Maybe government-supported education diminishes in a world with other opportunities. Or you can focus on what students will need to face, cope, and succeed in an ever-changing world, what we know and have some hope of learning about the art and science of teaching, and how to transform the current system to get us where we want to be.

I really like the second approach. We have the new NETS for Students as a guide to what students should know and be able to do to learn effectively and live productively. We will soon have the refreshed NETS for Teachers as a guide to what teachers need to know and be able to do. But as usual, the real challenge is transforming the system. How do we do that?

It will definitely take leadership, and the NETS for Administrators is next on the list for refreshing, beginning at NECC 2008 in San Antonio. The NETS•A will need to be as transforming as the student and teacher standards.

It also seems to me that certain technologies cause transformations for teachers under the right circumstances—namely, adequate infrastructure, support, and training. Good administration and leadership are necessary to provide these essential conditions.

One additional idea that ed tech folks are uniquely positioned to contribute is identifying

the transforming technologies for all teachers and for specific subject areas. Tools that have been around for a while include graphing calculators for math, digital video of scientific processes and simulations for science, word processing for English, and digitized primary resources available on the Internet for social studies teachers. Recent examples of transforming tools for English language arts teachers are online collaborative writing tools such as blogs. Other promising ones that I am hearing about are podcasts of lectures for teachers who want to focus class time on projects, labs, and doing the processes of a curricular area, and electronic exercise equipment such as Dance Revolution and stationary bikes with built-in screens and video games for physical education.

By identifying the transformative technologies, the curricula and essential conditions for their success, and sharing what works, we can contribute further to transforming education for students.

Transforming education involves transforming teachers and administrators in addition to transforming the public and the politicians who control the purse strings—a daunting task. ISTE is operating on a number of fronts—standards that capture the vision, essential conditions to capitalize on technology, advocacy to educate the public and politicians, publications and conferences to spread the practice and contribute to the body of knowledge, and outreach to other educational organizations to promote the vision and leadership. If we can keep our eyes on the goal of transforming education to create 21st-century learning environments for students, we can change our world! ■

By Anita McAnear

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