EDITOR'S CORNER

Some people say that the digital revolution started in the 1980s. Others claim that it spread like wildfire only at the onset of the 21st century. For an average person, the revolution begins with the first PC, SMART Board, or personal iPhone. Whatever may be the case with you, these are exciting times indeed with over a billion users of Facebook alone already.

In 2001, I was invited to write on the global digital divide for the International Monetary Fund’s Finance & Development magazine. I then calculated that nearly 400 million people were online at the turn of the century. Perhaps by the time this century ends, almost everyone will be online in some way, even those living in the deepest Amazon or remotest hamlets.

Hence, our excitement about this issue which sheds a new light on games and online experience. We are grateful to the experts who contributed to this issue or took the time to speak with us about their experiences and expertise and what they envision for the future. We have learned a lot from them, and I hope you will too.

We are also grateful to our supporters whose help sustains this wonderful publication and keeps it free of commercial advertisements.

Ashfaq Ishaq, Ph.D.
The Web of Creativity
Professor Curt Bonk, School of Education, Indiana University

Thinking back four decades to when I was your age, there was no Internet, no discussion of how technology could be used to increase creativity, and no interactive games on mobile devices like iPhones and Droids. In fact, there were no mobile devices at all. Personal computers would not even exist for a few years. Apple Computer had not started yet. So how did I express my creativity? I would do impressions of people while I washed dishes every night—it sometimes drove my father mad. I also liked to play with words and come up with new expressions, or change song lyrics in creative ways.

I became a certified public accountant twenty-five years ago. I was terribly bored with life because every day was the same old routine. Creativity as an accountant was highly limited. It is quite painful when you realize that you have selected the wrong career. Then in January 1985, the five years of perpetual boredom was about to end. I became accepted into the educational psychology program at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. It was my minor in educational technology, however, that truly changed my life.

I became extremely interested in how new technologies could creatively be used in education to change how students learn. So, I explored all sorts of new technologies and started to contact companies who developed them to see if they would send me free samples of their software packages to try out with kids in schools. Most of the people I contacted said sure, except for one person at IBM who was spying for Apple Computer. Soon my home was filled with many software packages designed to foster critical and creative thinking.

Each new package that I opened up got my mind racing as I thought about all the future learning possibilities. There was immense potential for using technology to break schools out of boring rote learning. Overnight, the whole notion of using computers in schools changed from drilling math facts and grammar rules into kids’ heads, to problem solving and decision making games that required the learner to think deeply and not just memorize information. Also starting to appear were computer games that encouraged kids to make choices, see patterns, collaborate, and solve problems. The evolution of the personal computer was resulting in a new age of learning.

What I found interesting at the time was that many of these software packages that I was sent were for children’s art and design. I called these divergent thinking tools. Others were for sequencing information, logic, and doing analyses. I called these convergent thinking tools. For my master’s degree, I explored how these divergent and convergent tools could foster critical and creative thinking with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in four summer youth camps near Madison. My dissertation a little over a year later focused on how critical and creative thinking might foster better writing.

Fast forward to 2012. Today, companies and government agencies want to hire young people who can solve problems, think on their feet, organize information, logic, and do analyses. You might also produce a podcast show of weekly school news or sports performances. And your teachers might use a tool like a wiki to have their class design a book (i.e., a wikibook) of student papers and ideas.

Creativity comes in many forms on the Web. What is important is how the audience for that content is changed. Overnight, the whole world is alive and having to leave your classrooms or homes. You might use a simple tool like Popplet to show what you are learning and link it to videos, pictures, and articles on the Web. There are portals you can browse through online devoted to famous scientists, political and religious leaders, inventors, and writers. Another learning portal—the Google Art project—offers thousands of images from famous museums around the world. You can interact with much of it without having to leave your classrooms or homes. When online, you can also find old newspapers, census records, and interviews of people coming to America from the 1800s and 1900s. Imagine the wealth of creative ideas embedded in these images. You might find creative ways to remix and extend that work. With global education, your collaborative learning partners today might not be other kids in your school, but from countries like Singapore, Korea, Chile, Ghana, or Ireland. The Internet is the spark for that to happen.

You can add ideas or comments about books you read or add to teacher lectures. The Web offers such creative power. It is not a static container like a poster, on a school wall. It is alive and changing all the time. The creative spark of one idea can lead to another and yet another. You might use a simple tool like Popplet to show what you are learning and link it to videos, pictures, and articles on the Web. There are portals you can browse through online devoted to famous scientists, political and religious leaders, inventors, and writers. Another learning portal—the Google Art project—offers thousands of images from famous museums around the world. You can interact with much of it without having to leave your classrooms or homes. When online, you can also find old newspapers, census records, and interviews of people coming to America from the 1800s and 1900s. Imagine the wealth of creative ideas embedded in these images. You might find creative ways to remix and extend that work. With global education, your collaborative learning partners today might not be other kids in your school, but from countries like Singapore, Korea, Chile, Ghana, or Ireland. The Internet is the spark for that to happen.

Many of the hopes and dreams about using technology for critical and creative thinking that I had before entering graduate student over a quarter century ago are definitely happening today. But no one envisioned all the information and resources and technologies that now exist on the Internet. No one imagined this ‘Web of creativity.’ These truly are unique and exciting times. Think about what might be possible in a decade or so when you will be completing college and considering going to graduate school. What might emerge to spark your interests? How will you be using technology to express your creativity or to help others do so? Best of luck.
In the next ChildArt issue for Oct-Dec 2012, learn about “Creativity & Innovation” from experts such as Dr. Vinton Cerf, co-founder of the Internet, Antonio Patric Buchanan, co-founder of TBG, Inc., and David Croslin, author of Innovate the Future.

You can subscribe online to ChildArt at ICAF.org.

Check out information on the 5th Arts Olympiad (2013-2016) as well.

To post comments, visit www.facebook.com/ICAF.org.