

In the Neighborhood Column for December

Next month will start 2010, the second decade of the 21st century. I recently had a startling revelation of how we have been launched into a new age information explosion. A school presentation on technology, and a video from U-Tube brought some amazing information on where we are headed full-steam into this information age.

If you are a frequent visitor to You-tube you may have encountered the ***Did You Know...Shift Happens*** videos. Starting as an educational video for a high school teaching staff, this video has been adapted by many different groups on many continents. Over 60 video postings now exist based on this original video. The information presented has been constantly updated and expanded to reveal the astounding progression of knowledge, information and technology. This presentation highlights just how much information is altering life on this planet. According to this video, technology information has been doubling every two years and by next year it will double every 72 hours. One-point-five exabytes (1.5 times 10 to the 18th power) of new information will be generated worldwide this year, which is more information than has been generated in the previous 5,000 years. In just this month there have been 2.7 billion searches on Google, (not counting the myriad of other search engines.) Google started in the mid-nineties, so where did we go for information before Google?

Last year, more than forty-seven million laptops were shipped, and the fastest growing age group for internet users is two to five-year-olds. There are over seventy-million blogs now accessible on-line. This explosion in technology and information is changing everything, changing how we communicate and to whom, bringing the world together and in touch like never before. It is altering commerce and economics, education and international relations and politics. The top ten jobs in demand this year didn't even exist in 2004. Technology makes outsourcing much more prevalent and is changing many countries in the world into our economic rivals for the future. The biggest export in India is now human

capital. India has more than double the English-speaking college graduates as we do, and China has nearly three-times our rate. China will soon be the largest English-speaking country in the world. Twenty-five percent of China's high IQ students are equal to more than the population of the United States. In other words, they have more gifted kids than we have kids, or people for that matter.

How are we going to compete with that? Here we have cut funding for higher education to an obscene level. I have two children in college and I don't know how anyone will be able to afford college for their students who are now in middle or high school. Low to middle-income students will have little hope of being able to afford an education. How will we be able to compete in the world economy if we cannot sustain even the current graduation rates? K-12 funding is now also being cut. How can we hope to keep up with the technology education our students desperately need to survive in the coming decades if we do not fund education? We need to be preparing students for jobs and new technologies that don't even exist yet so they will be able to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet. If we don't, there are millions of exceptional, bright people in China, India and other countries who will take the lead, be willing to work for a fraction of our salaries and leave us in the dust. Maybe we should rethink that mill levy override.

Bio; Beverly Wallace is a fifth grade teacher. She can remember when self-correcting typewriters came out, let alone PC's. She is proud to say she now has an I phone, has learned to text, and has added words like, twitter, wiki, podcast, blog and Skype to her vocabulary.