## CHAPTER
# 1

# Understanding the Age of "i"

*If there is technological advance without social advance, there is, almost automatically an increase in human misery.*

—*Michael Harrington, American writer and theorist*

The speed of the technology evolution is nearly impossible to fully comprehend. Recall for a moment the world without social media. No Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Pinterest. How did you keep up with the daily routines of family and friends? Where did you get your news? The answer to both questions is word of mouth or telephone and newspapers, magazines, or television. Now, go one step further. Think back to life without a smartphone or, even more incredulous, a simple cell phone, designed only for calls and text messages. (If you are in your early 20s, this may be impossible.)

In the past 20 years, society has evolved from a basic cellular phone (the early models weighed about two pounds), to the Internet-ready Blackberry, to today's smartphones complete with nearly one million applications (apps), amazing cameras, video calls, thumbprint security, and more music than we could possibly listen to in a lifetime. When my son was born, I captured his first steps with a fairly small video camera that recorded movies onto a 2.5-inch DVD (digital video disc). That very high tech camcorder cost $900. Today, I record family picnics, upload the video to YouTube and share it with friends and family on Facebook, while maintaining it for posterity in a folder on the cloud-based library, Dropbox. The entire project takes about four minutes, using my iPhone. Just ten years ago, this would have seemed like science fiction. To today's learners, it's a simple routine that many have been doing since about age five—at least the video part.

To truly grasp how rapidly technology evolves, reflect on the fact that the previous video-sharing example will likely be archaic in a few short years. The validity of that statement serves to underscore what educators face when teaching the iStudent. Consider for a moment how you teach and the materials you use. Answer these four questions:

1. How often is paper and pencil part of your class routine?

2. Do your students use workbooks?

3. What role does the Internet play in your classroom?

4. How often do your students use web tools, social media, or mobile devices?

Although there is certainly a relationship between the four questions, the latter two are the focal questions in this book.

The iStudent, beginning in about third grade, walks into school with some kind of device, whether it's an iPod or other music player, a smartphone, an eReader or, in rare cases, just some type of headphones. In one way or another, virtually every one of your students is connected to the Internet, an application, and social

media. Yet, many schools are so caught up in standardization and testing that they continue to ignore the iStudent's need to be connected. As a result, the bridge between these infinitely powerful tools and genuine learning remains at best tenuous, and at worst completely crumbled. As a 20-year classroom teacher, and now full-time consultant working with educators around the world, it is my experience that the average teacher and school administrator fail to fully grasp the needs of the iStudent.

In what can aptly be called the "age of i," society has become dependent on technology, in general, and on electronic gadgets, in particular. The aforementioned disconnect between technology and learning is a threefold issue caused by:

1. A school's or district's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)

2. Educators' inexperience with using the technology for teaching and learning

3. Students' misunderstanding of how to appropriately use the technology at their fingertips for learning

The first problem may preclude the second: if teachers are unable to access the necessary technology, then the experience becomes difficult to acquire, and for all intents and purposes, obsolete; as educators are blocked from using websites and mobile learning tools, they have no reason to understand them—at least when related to their positions at school. Although I certainly have recommendations for the first issue, chiefly educating school policymakers about the value of the technology and about appropriate classroom use—it is poorly written AUPs that often make teaching the iStudent nearly impossible. This is when many effective teachers resort to traditional methods, like worksheets, text questions, and multiple-choice tests. Assuming your district has progressive policies that encourage mobile learning devices and lenient network firewalls that don't block the majority of useful websites, the second previously mentioned problem with disconnected educators becomes imminently important. All 21st-century teachers must educate themselves on the tools

of the iStudent, prior to dealing with the third issue—teaching those students how to efficiently use the Internet and their technology gadgets for the purpose of learning. The following sections investigate what is most important for the iStudent to learn, as well as how teachers can maximize digital learning in their classrooms. Along the way, the three issues outlined in this chapter are answered more thoroughly.