



SouthEast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium

NEWSWIRE

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Volume I Number 1

A National Network of Regional Technology in Education Consortia

Six funded regional technology in education consortia (R•TEC) have been established by the U.S. Department of Education through its Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to accelerate school reform initiatives in America’s schools through the integration of advanced technologies into the instructional process. The purpose of the consortia listed below is “to help states, local educational agencies, teachers, school library and media personnel, administrators and other education entities successfully integrate advanced technologies into kindergarten through 12th grade classrooms, library media centers, and other educational settings (including adult literacy centers).”

- NetTech Consortium
- North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium
- Northwest Educational Technology Consortium
- Pacific and Southwest Regional Technology in Education Consortium
- South Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium
- SouthEast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium

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SouthEast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium

The SouthEast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium (SEIR•TEC) is a partnership of national, regional and university based organizations that work collaboratively to help communities of learners use technology effectively. SEIR•TEC is part of a national network of six consortia funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It works to provide technology-related assistance through awareness, policy development and planning, as well as staff development and evaluation. SEIR•TEC serves states, jurisdictions, school districts, preservice training institutions, adult and family literacy programs, and other educational organizations in: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Partners:

- Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL)
- Learning Innovations
- National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL)
- Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)
- Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)
- SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
- University of Central Florida (UCF), Instructional Technology Resource Center (ITRC)

Message from the Director

This is the first issue of **NEWSWIRE**. It will be one of several ways the staff and partners of the SEIR♦TEC consortium communicate with the teachers, community members, and others who are our constituents. We anticipate distributing as much information as we can through as many media as we can, including a print brochure, telephone Help Line, several CD-ROMs, and a World Wide Web site. Such variety is necessary because we wish to reach as many people as possible, and not every teacher or school is yet equipped to use the Internet or multi-media systems. There is a need for us to open as many doors as we can to share successful practices.

The legislation which created the six Regional Technology Consortia across the nation focused heavily on the integration of technology in the school curriculum. Embedded in the design was the assumption that if we are truly to accomplish that goal, it is necessary to develop effective methods for the integration of technology in teaching and learning. We will be focused on this in our plans and services. We will seek to meet the educational needs of the children, which are broad in scope, deep in intensity, and demand solutions. There are effective means of addressing those needs, and regional collaborative support agencies are a key method of successful delivery of solutions.

Those of you who are participating in project activities will find yourselves and your school included in the dissemination of effective practices through portrayal in print, CD, and the Web. The consortium members are pleased to have the opportunity to describe for the broad audience what many teachers already are accomplishing in the direction of integration. I hope you are as eager to share as we are to provide the avenues. I look forward to pursuing with you, during the next four years, the goal of using technology as an integral and indispensable part of daily work and progress by all teachers and learners. ❖

Don Holznagel

*Director,
SouthEast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium*

SEIR♦TEC Book Review

by David Foster

***New Community Networks: Wired for Change.* Douglas Schuler.
ACM Press. 528 pages. Indexed. \$26.85 paper. (1996)**

“Communities are the right scale for many human endeavors,” writes Douglas Schuler in the preface of *New Community Networks: Wired for Change*. Schuler’s community is not the classical “and static” community, but a “new type of community that combines aspects of old and new.” And to take advantage of their hybrid vigor, Schuler asserts that such communities must develop an important community resource—community computer networks.

As a matter of fact, community networks supported by computer bulletin board systems (BBSs) or the Internet are springing up around the country and around the globe. Communities are using computer telecommunications capabilities to support dialogue, interaction, accountability, education, entertainment, community services, and government and to promote economic development, information dissemination, and cultural activities. These factors make *New Community Networks* timely. And since Schuler looks at communities and the issues of community development and not at technology for technology’s sake, his book will remain a valuable source of ideas well beyond the next networking innovation or breakthrough in broadband services.



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Schuler is concerned about education, health care, government, culture, economic equity, and—especially—democracy. Many of his ideas address educators' concerns such as cooperative group learning, life-long learning, systemic reform, critical thinking, school-linked services, engaged learning, learning communities, and an entire spectrum of equity issues. Schuler envisions community networks that support an “educational system [designed] to help every individual develop intellectual independence and a sense of empowerment”; he states that “any community network that is intended to support the community must help address the crisis in equity and access in education.”

Schuler brings impressive credentials to his topic. A software engineer, Schuler has worked on the social issues of computing for nearly 15 years. Current chair of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, he helped found the Seattle Community Network. He is credited by Apple librarian Steve Cisler with writing “the definitive article on community networks.”

Schuler's book is not armchair reading. The author is concerned about the state of post-Cold War society. He argues that the so-called peace dividend has evaporated and that democracy, which he views as a key tool for public deliberation and decision-making, is “increasingly misunderstood, underused, irrelevant, and blunt.”

But Schuler is a self-proclaimed “meliorist,” a person who believes that society has an innate tendency toward improvement and that this tendency may be furthered through conscious human effort. He describes communities as “the heart, the soul, the nervous system, and the lifeblood of human society” and stresses they are the “right scale” for many human endeavors. Although Schuler senses that a certain malaise and lack of identity—a certain existential nausea—have swept our society, he feels that communities and technology just may offer the prescription for a cure.

To this end, Schuler examines six core societal values: conviviality and culture; education; strong democracy; health and human services; economic equity, opportunity, and sustainability; and information and communication. He illustrates these concepts with in-depth analyses of functioning community computer networks and discusses the implications that technology and community networking have for the future. An especially useful chapter deconstructs the stages in the life-cycle of a community network. Finally, Schuler includes an extensive set of additional resources culled from print and electronic media.

Community Networking and Education

Schuler is clearly hostile to institutionalized education, which he describes as “intellectually stultifying” and “like a prison sentence.” As an alternative he advocates individualized education where respect for the student is a given; an approach to the three Rs that includes listening, speaking, and new media-based forms of communication; critical-thinking skills; and a process that supports “exploration and development of new syntheses, paradigms, and perspectives.” Computer networks, Schuler points out, are especially suited for this type of learning because information and resources can be freely disseminated over a distance to selected or diffuse groups of people. Equally important are the growing and powerful new technologies that support a broad spectrum of collaborative activities.

Lest this seem pat, Schuler provides pragmatic examples that support his proposals. He describes how networks can provide homework help, resources for rural schools, forums to engage students while they hone communications and critical-thinking skills, and other relevant, engaging educational environments. The reader learns about some great educationally constructivist Internet resources such as the Science Learning Network and the Academy One program.

Schuler feels that the community must support education and that education must support the community. And he concludes that “we can go further in the direction of establishing an educational system that is responsive to people's needs: a university that is universal—education for everyone, everywhere.”

And What of the Future?

Schuler asserts that “technology should serve culture and society—not the other way around!” And he envisions people using computer networks in ways that support culture and society.

Continued from page 7

Today, computer networks such as the Internet are creating a powerful synergy among globally linked individuals who are empowered by computers. On the horizon are further technological advances: inexpensive bandwidth that will provide richer, more powerful virtual worlds; hardware that will have built-in intelligent agents and powerful, economical multimedia capabilities; and software that will deliver information that updates itself and knows how to be found by those who need it.

These enormous leaps in bandwidth, imaging, and computer intelligence will provide better, more accurate virtual representations of the real world. They will introduce tremendous sophistication to virtual communities while making them more appealing to larger numbers of people than they are now. Technology will offer even more exciting ways to reinvigorate our communities—and this will make Schuler's ideas for community networks more relevant, more important, and more easily achieved than they are today. ❖

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More Resources

- **The Science Learning Network**
Constructivist Internet resources for educators
<http://www.sln.org/index.html>
- **The Morino Institute**
Advocates of community empowerment through electronic networks. <http://www.morino.org/>
Has a Web site for Schuler's book at
<http://www.scn.org/ip/commnet/ncn.htm>
- **Schuler's groundbreaking paper** Community Networks: Building a New Participatory Medium
http://www.cpn.org/sections/topics/networking/civic_perspectives/comm_networks.html
- **Addison-Wesley Publishing Company**
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