USING TECHNOLOGY: WHAT DOES GENDER HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

When one begins to evaluate technology training at an institution and what those coming to the institution bring with them in terms of technology background, many people do not automatically ask questions about gender. In spite of the fact that all of us have gender-based experiences and they color our ways of thinking about all kinds of issues, when we put on our "educator" hats we try to be gender-neutral. Unfortunately by doing this we are missing an important segment of individualized instructional design. Sherry Turkle (1984) emphasized the need for gender differentiation in technology issues in her book The Second Self and since then numerous authors have continued to address the subject yet today there are many questions about gender and technology that still need to be answered. The focus of this issue of TechTrends is to bring out new ideas about gender and technology; to address questions about where we are today and what we need to consider if instructional and technology design are to be more affective for women.

Much current literature on technology and learning discusses the need to pay attention to the needs of girls and

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women in the with regard to technology. Margolis and Fischer (2002) state that although "At the turn of the century, women are surfing the web in equal proportion to men, and women make up the majority of Internet consumers... few women are learning how to invent, create and design computer technology." (p. 2) Although Margolis and Fisher's study focuses on women's issues, it is clear that the need to consider gender in the use of technology is important for all ages. A recent article by Julie M. Wood (2000) in Instructor discussed challenges in the use of technology among elementary school children and suggested programs that may help girls to be more comfortable with computers. Even journals read by a more "techie" audience are featuring information about the importance of gender and technology such as the article by Melymuka (2001) in Computerworld. If gender is such an important component in the use of technology then it is very important for those of us whose specialty is instructional design and technology to pay attention to women's needs.

The first theme that emerged in this issue was how to create effective computer instruction. My conversations with women about their preferences in technology training (Fidishun, 2001) point to specific learning preferences that make learning more effective. These kinds of issues can be addressed in many ways but one of them is the use of female-only technology classes. Swain and Harvey discuss the advantages of such classes while pointing out additional considerations as they are implemented. These classes would not be affective without the sensitization of teachers to gender-based issues and in her article Jennifer Gilley investigates how this topic is included in teacher preparation programs.

One would hope that if we can teach girls to use technology in ways that make sense to them they will be
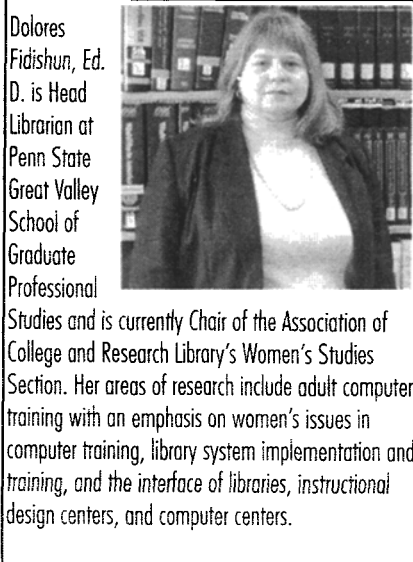
better prepared technologically when they enter higher education. MacLeod, Haywood, Haywood and Anderson discuss their findings about incoming classes at the University of Edinburgh while Mathis discusses an important program that was implemented at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey to help women students feel comfortable with technology.

Finally, the importance of designing technology learning continues to be important beyond K-12 and higher education. Kathleen King brings the adult learning theory of transformational learning into the world of technology while David Carey describes the implementation of such a transformational program. Carr-Chellman, Marra and Roberts focus on the design of computers from a women's perspective helping us to re-think how we literally look at technology.

In all, the goal of this issue is to help us remember that all learners are individuals, and that girls and women may have different perspectives on how they use and learn technology. I believe that the articles included will make us think and maybe help us to change instructional paradigms and practices to include gender considerations.

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