

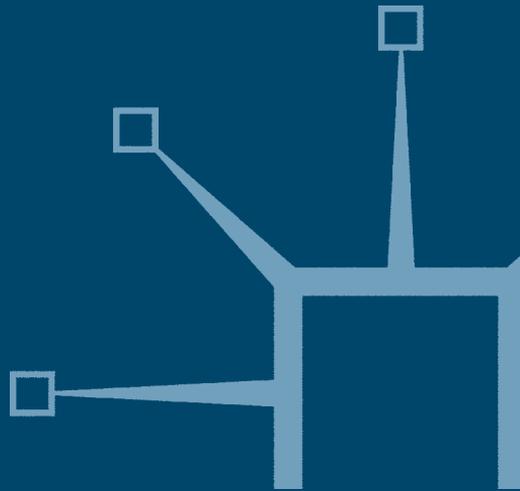
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# Rewired

Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They  
Learn

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Larry D. Rosen, L. Mark Carrier and Nancy  
A. Cheever



Rewired

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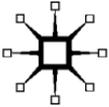
*Me, MySpace, and I: Parenting the Net Generation*

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Larry D. Rosen, Ph.D.  
with  
L. Mark Carrier, Ph.D.  
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Nancy A. Cheever, M.A.

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First published in 2010 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN: 978-0-230-61478-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rosen, Larry D.

Rewired : understanding the igeneration and the way they learn / Larry D. Rosen.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-230-61478-9 (pbk.)

1. Computer-assisted instruction.
2. Computers and children.
3. Computer literacy.
4. Educational technology.
5. Learning strategies.
6. Cognitive styles in children. I. Title.

LB1028.5.R575 2010

371.33'4—dc22

2009036678

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Letra Libre, Inc.

First edition: April 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

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*To Vicki, who always amazes me by how she truly encourages me to be me. I love our life together, including our NYT crosswords, zillions of movies, concerts, vacations, sunsets from bed, and our mutual love of anything that Jon, Stephen, and Rachel have to say.*

## Chapter 1

# Why Tweens and Teens Hate School

*Despite the revolutions wrought by technology in medicine, engineering, communication, and many other fields, the classrooms, textbooks, and lectures of today are little different than those of our parents. Yet today's students use computers, mobile telephones, and other portable technical devices regularly for almost every form of communication except learning.*

—National Science Foundation Task Force on Cyberlearning<sup>1</sup>

*I absolutely hate school. They make me sit and listen as some old, stuffy teacher drones on and on about stuff from a book written like in the dark ages. We have to read pages of facts and then barf them up on tests that will make or break whether we get into a good college or not. Oh sure, they have pretty pictures on all the pages, but the book is so one-dimensional. Geez, pictures? Don't they know anything about video and what kids like to do? We get to go to the computer lab once a week for like an hour—if that—and even then most of what I want to do is blocked. I can't wait until I am out of this place and I can go to college where they let us bring computers to class and know how to treat wired kids like me.*

—Vanessa, age twelve, New York City

I was visiting my daughter's high school and decided to peek in on her Spanish class. From what was written on the blackboard, the class was working on an assignment translating a passage from English to Spanish—at least that's what they were *supposed* to be doing. I counted nearly

half the students clearly doing something else. They appeared distracted. When I looked more carefully I discovered that many had their cell phones in their laps and were rapidly moving their fingers. After class, my daughter and her friends told me they were bored with the lesson and were texting each other across the room. Two of her friends bragged that they could text blindfolded.

Fast forward to the same day, after dinner: I see my daughter, sitting on her bed with the television on, iPod earbuds firmly implanted, her laptop showing one window with a school report beside a browser window open to Facebook, several instant messaging alerts flashing at the bottom of the screen, and her phone vibrating, signaling a text message. Can she really study with all these distractions? How can she possibly get good grades while she is chatting the night away?

Welcome to the iGeneration. While the previous generation, referred to as the Net (as in Internet) Generation, was born in the 1980s and 1990s, the iGeneration children and teens are in elementary school, middle school, and high school.<sup>2</sup> They spend their days immersed in a “media diet,”<sup>3</sup> devouring entertainment, communication, and, well, any form of electronic media.<sup>4</sup> They are master multitaskers, social networkers, electronic communicators and the first to rush to any new technology. They were born surrounded by technology, and with every passing year they add more tools to their electronic repertoire. They live in social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and Second Life gathering friends; they text more than they talk on the phone;<sup>5</sup> and they Twitter (or tweet) the night away, often sleeping with their cell phones vibrating by their sides.<sup>6</sup>

On the one hand it may seem like they are just using too much technology. In the research my associates and I have conducted with thousands of parents, children, tweens, and teens,<sup>7</sup> parents tell us that they are very worried that their children don't seem to want to go outside and

play anymore.<sup>8</sup> They would rather chat online than visit with their friends at the mall. They are happiest when their cell phone is vibrating and their computer is beeping. It troubles their parents who grew up playing in the street, hanging out with friends, and having a life outside of the cyberspace cocoon their children have created in their rooms. On the other hand, their children achieve higher grades in school,<sup>9</sup> create tech businesses before they even graduate from high school, and apply to and enter college at unprecedented rates.<sup>10</sup>

So, what is the problem? *They hate school.* Why? Education has not caught up with this new generation of tech-savvy children and teens. It is not that they don't want to learn. They just learn differently. Gone are the days when students would sit quietly in class, reading a book or doing a math worksheet. Literally, their minds have changed—they have been “rewired.” With all the technology that they consume, they *need more* from education. The educational content is not the problem. It is the delivery method and the setting. Today's youth thrive on multimedia, multitasking, social environments for every aspect of their lives *except* education. As aptly put by Professor Paul Gee, a member of the National Academy of Education, “Given that the digital age is enveloping our world, and its influence is not likely to decrease, educators need to meet the emerging challenges on two fronts. Educators must determine the new learning styles of students and develop educational methodology and teaching strategies to meet the learning needs.”<sup>11</sup>

In the United States 56 million K–12 students are being taught by nearly 4 million teachers.<sup>12</sup> A whopping 25 percent of the U.S. population is currently under seventeen years old.<sup>13</sup> More than 8 in 10 schools have computers with Internet access, with an average of four students per computer.<sup>14</sup> Sounds great, doesn't it? The problem lies not in the number of computers, but rather in how they are being used. Schools have the tools to provide a good, motivating education for our children. The