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Chapter 1

The Threat of Security and Its Effect on Access

A few years ago, a dedicated high school science teacher, "Tom," shared a story regarding his allegedly inappropriate use of the Internet:

> I spent last Saturday in my classroom, getting ready for back to school. Before I left, I ordered half a dozen bulbs from an online flower company. Don, the personnel director, sent me an e-mail and stopped by my classroom to inform me that I was now being monitored for inappropriate uses of the Internet. He said that repeated violations would be noted in my personnel file.

Tom also shared that new computers purchased for his classroom were equipped with inoperable CD-RW drives. When he inquired as to why he could not burn a CD of a PowerPoint presentation, he was told, "The drives will not be made available for open use.

Teachers may violate copyright laws if they are allowed to freely burn CDs." Tom has decided to avoid the use of computing technology in his classroom; he no longer cares to deal with the conflicts and increased permissions needed to use the available technological resources:

> I am a good teacher. Sure, technology may be beneficial, but it is much easier to continue doing what I know works than to attempt to use technology that is riddled with roadblocks.

Unfortunately, this teacher's story is similar to the experiences of many others. When we shared these two incidents with several colleagues, it turned out that they, too, had been collecting stories. Since first hearing stories such as these, we have been gathering examples of how perceived "threats of security" are hampering the integration of technology in teaching and learning (Robinson, Brown, & Green, 2004, 2007). After examining many similar reports from PK–12 schools and institutions of higher education, we asked ourselves the question: Could concerns over security be generating a fear that is now hindering the integration of technology? Our goals in this book are twofold: to help educators examine and analyze the challenges of increased security demands related to technology and to suggest ways that security measures might enhance rather than detract from the use of technology for learning.

We want to state clearly that we believe security is important. The safety of our children is of paramount concern, and our huge financial investment in networks, hardware, software, and infrastructure should be protected. Most of us have experienced the grinding halt to productivity that occurs when a system is attacked by a virus. We know that the reports of young people hurt by cybercrime are real. Other threats to our computer systems

Common Misperceptions of the Threat

The major misperception regarding the viewing of inappropriate content is that content on the web can be completely controlled. As you'll see, the majority of measures are not 100% effective. A concern among people who work with young children is that they will be exposed to highly inappropriate content when they browse the web. The very young may inadvertently type in an incorrect web address or follow an innocuous link and find themselves presented with pornography, racist/hate sites, or sites that promote terrorism. The misperception is that this can be controlled. When individuals fail to realize this, major fears arise. For example, some administrators have fears that any inappropriate use of the Internet will jeopardize their school's funding. Teachers also fear that their association with an inappropriate site, even when accidentally opened, may be cause for a reprimand. Neither is usually the case.

Additional concerns surround intentional viewing of inappropriate sites by students, particularly adolescents. The misperception is that the majority of young people, when left to their own devices, will discover and dwell upon inappropriate content on the web.

There is a great deal of discussion about software that filters or blocks inappropriate content. Many individuals who may not fully understand how these software programs work have the misperception that the use of filters and blocks will fully protect students and schools.

The Realities of the Inappropriate Content Threat

Teachers have a variety of concerns in the classroom. The first mission of any teacher is student learning; teachers want to do