

Book Reviews

Diane Janes

Editor

Technology and Education Reform: The Reality Behind The Promise by Barbara Means (Ed). San-Francisco: Jossey - Bass Inc., 1994. ISSN: I-5554-625-5, 232 pp. (\$29.95 US)

Reviewed by Modest Levira

My reaction when I first saw the book was a quick reflection of annoying experiences I have had with similar titles which considered educational technology to be a warehouse for audio visual equipment as opposed to a system. However, before I finished reading the preface I realized that I had prejudged it wrongly.

Readers of CJEC will appreciate a book that articulates basic questions and suggests answers to why educational television of the 60's, computer assisted instruction of the 70's, and a whole array of recent educational technologies like the multimedia systems, interactive video discs and the computer systems have not accomplished the expected miracles in education.

Technology and Education Reform is a part of a project report of the National Study of Technology and Education Reform, conducted by the office of Educational Research and Improvement in the United States. The editor succeeds in the difficult task of putting together into a coherent pattern eight chapters contributed by different authors who also constitute a part of the research team. Each chapter is enriched with a substantial amount of supportive background literature blended in a straight forward language, style and humour that makes the book both interesting to read and simple to comprehend.

Chapters 1 to 7 give accounts of specific topics, namely: the use of technology to advance educational goals; multimedia for developing literacy for at risk students; computer networks; integrating technology with teacher education; using technology to support innovative assessment; evaluating the effect of technology in school reform and realizing the promise of technology. The last chapter describes in detail the project activities as performed in two of the sample schools fully provided with the necessary equipment and ideas and the teachers providing the students with experiences advocated by education reformers. The authors finish the chapter with what they foresee to be 'tomorrow's school in the United States. A bibliography is provided at the end of every chapter, while name and subject indexes are provided at the end of the book.

The title of the book carries two different terms, 'technology' and 'education', but the content successfully blends the two together to assume a fair concept of educational technology.

The authors present excellent arguments on an ideal two way relationship within and among subsystems of education needed before the sophisticated technologies such as multimedia and microcomputer networks that have invaded the classrooms can effect any positive reform in both the process and the product of education. Authors in most chapters also question the contention that knowledge flow assumes a one-way direction from the teachers to the students. They argue that such misconceptions of the term deny the rights of a give-and-take relationship and the reality of education as a process of knowledge sharing. Unequal distribution of resources, ill-prepared teaching personnel, teachers shying away from the technology explosion, questionable validity of our evaluation instruments, inadequate funding and unequal involvement of the sub-systems have allegedly been held responsible for any noticed failure in education reform. The authors urge educational technologists and planners to rethink more realistic socio-educational systems, enrich study programs and improve learning environments to create a more conducive atmosphere for generating knowledge. To use the editor's example; "Teachers who rethink their curricula, replacing short pieces of didactic instruction on separate topics in discrete disciplines with multidisciplinary projects in which students tackle meaningfully, complex tasks over extended periods of time, are establishing the prerequisites that will allow them to apply technology meaningfully to support students work" (p. xii).

On the negative side, this book neither provides detailed technical definitions and configurations of educational software involved in the Education Reform Project nor does it exhaust the long list of educational software currently available for school use.

The primary goal of the volume was to synthesize issues of technology and educational reform in a way that would help future innovators to avoid the potholes of the past. The authors finish by confirming that when technology is integrated into a broad effort, not as instigators of a course-all but as a set of tools to support intellectual inquiry, then educators, students, parents and communities have a powerful combination that may, indeed, bring necessary, positive change. In my opinion, this volume has accomplished its mission.

REVIEWER

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Software by Design: Creating People Friendly Software by Penny Bauersfeld. New York: M & T Books (division of MIS Press), 1994. ISBN: 1-55828-296-3, 325 pp. (\$29.95 U.S.; \$37.95 CAN).

Reviewed by Dan Fontaine-O'Connell

The title, though accurate, does this book a bit of a disservice. In lay terms the author has captured the fundamentals of project management, formative evaluation and iterative design between two covers, only three hundred and thirty easily read