

REVIEWER

Cathy L. Bruce-Hayter is a Training Development Officer in the Canadian Forces (CF). Prior to commencing her Masters of Education degree at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland (her home province) in 1994, Lieutenant Commander Bruce-Hayter was the Chief Instructor of the CF Training Development Centre at CFB Borden, Ontario. She is currently working on her thesis in the area of CMC in Distance Education and will return to active duty in the summer of 1996.

Kids, Computers & You, by Frank Edwards and Thomas H. Carpenter. Kingston, ON. Bungalo Books, 1995. ISBN 0-921285-38-8, 180 pages, \$12.95 (CDN).

Reviewed by Gary Karlsen

To review a book with a cartoon on the cover, more cartoons embedded in journalistic prose, and a title and subtitle that are meant to catch the eye of the not-so-serious reader: would such a publication be worthy of review in a scholarly educational technology journal? The answer is in the affirmative. The authors have done their research, and most importantly, they have addressed a host of problems that plague educational technology researchers and teachers. This book will be a useful resource for educators whose job is to promote understandings and applications of media and technology to those who have little or no computer knowledge. The book's subtitle, *What Parents Can Do Now to Prepare Their Children for the Future*, is rather misleading, for while the authors claim to be writing for parents whose children are in the school system, their audience is much larger - it also includes teachers, educational administrators and school trustees, and teacher college faculty.

In their *brief Introduction* the authors raise many questions about computer use in schools and about the importance of computer literacy. The *Preface* expands on these questions and establishes a dual theme that runs throughout the book. The authors challenge society's blind faith in the positive role of computers, and they debunk a sort of myth that our education system has everything in hand with respect to computer education:

Surprising, few schools in Canada seem to have a workable computer policy in place. Effective computer use in a classroom is more likely to be the result of an enterprising teacher than a master plan.

This book is divided into five chapters and a conclusion. Beginning with *Kids in the Classroom*, Edwards and Carpenter provide an historical view of

how computer use has developed in Canadian schools. They go on to outline important computer issues which range from philosophical and political machinations to gender equity and technology resource allocations. This chapter is a good primer for the person who is completely ignorant of the status of computers in the classroom.

In *Schools and the Information Highway* we are offered a clear explanation of the Internet and a credible presentation of the debates on electronic access to information in our schools. Included, is a discussion about Canadian content and public involvement in media and the use of the information highway; for example, the Rogers Cable - Specialty Channel revolt. In the section dealing with SchoolNet (the wiring of Canadian schools), the authors urge us to be supportive, challenging, and cautious all at once.

The *Teachers* chapter is one of teacher advocacy and a call for teacher empowerment. Conversely, the authors are critical of educational administrators and universities for their role in the creation of a variety of computer problems that are prevalent in our schools. In this chapter, practical suggestions are offered to teachers for instructional uses of computers, and to parents for involvement in the development of computer resources and related curriculum.

Administration is a chapter that describes for the non-educator, how local school boards work, and the leadership role of the principal as computer facilitator. The Ontario school system suffers a critical review with respect to educational computing policies, and the Carleton Board is held up as a model of successful technology implementation.

The closing chapter is called *The Home Front*. In this section of the book, parents are given suggestions ranging from how to become involved with school computer policies and curriculum development, to how to select a computer for the home. This chapter is rather thin. More could have been said about computers in the home, and about problems with and solutions to parents and children sharing the same computer.

Kids, Computers & You is a good primer for parents who lack knowledge about computers in general, about their status in Canadian schools, and even about how our school system works. The book is current, though it is pre-*Windows 95*. While any publication about computers is sure to be dated even a few minutes after it is released, the useful information provided in this book by Edwards and Carpenter will continue to be valuable for several years. And that usefulness will not be for the lay parent alone. The educational technologist would find the book a very quick read, but would also find some interesting references to media critics like Pappert and Roszat. References to the *Report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning* and citations of other reports and articles of professional associations about computers in the classroom will be useful leads for further investigation and analysis. Certainly,

the many questions raised in this non-academic publication are worthy of additional treatment.

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Gary Karlsen is Director, Western Canada, for Magic Lantern Communications and the president of AMTEC for the term, 1995-1996.