The State of Educational Technology: Responses to Mitchell

Editor's note: In the first article of last issue (See "The Future of Educational Technology is Past") P. David Mitchell argued that educational technology has failed to change the landscape of educational practice dramatically. Further, the current manifestation of educational technology, he claims, will never propel us beyond the present. Hence, the future of educational technology, as we know it, practice it and teach it, is past – more accurately, our field has no future unless we alter the underlying premises that guide inquiry into and the development of learning technologies.

In an effort to spark dialogue on the range of issues surrounding Mitchell's article, we invited publishable responses from the general readership, and simultaneously sent copies of the article to some of the individuals in the U.S. and Canada who have expressed interest in the topic through their own writing. This section features the eight responses that were received. We extend our sincere appreciation for the time and energy that is evident in them.

Mitchell'sWake

Andrew   Agostino

Mitchell's article, "The Future of Educational Technology Is Past", should more appropriately be titled, "Mitchell's Wake."

In a most enlightening eulogy at the death of educational technology as a field of endeavour, the author has stood over the corpse and stated that the cause of death was an "incurable, terminal illness." His reasons for such a pessimistic view are ostensibly irrefutable. As a profession, the field has become inordinately disparate. Many of its practitioners have been absorbed by other organizations whose purposes are more bureaucratic than educational. University courses in this area of concentration have become reductionistic, espousing new technologies for the sole purpose of exploring what the author calls, "lower-order problems" of curriculum design and activities which are only capable at arriving at solutions to micro-educational problems without ever addressing larger, societal and even global concerns. Unequivocally,

Mitchell's discourse cuts deep enough to jolt even the most placid proponents if it were not for the fact that, after reading the article, it is difficult to discern whether the author has indeed come to bury this corpse or, approximating Shakespeare's Mark Anthony, praise it.

Mitchell stands behind a paradoxical podium. Being one of the field's strongest advocates (at least in the past) and not having yet resigned his position as a professor of educational technology, burying the corpse might also imply leaping into its casket. At this realization, the author seemingly relaxes his positions and WAKEns to optimism (although slight) by outlining the possibility that the corpse can indeed be resuscitated. This feat, the author states, can only transpire through what he delineates as a radical transformation, a paradigm shift towards systemic thinking. However, this is more of an affirmation of control system theory, already deeply cemented in the field , than a re-orientation of focus. Graduate programmes in educational technology have (in the last few years) attempted to embrace systemic thinking even when engaging in such activities as media production or instructional design.

As Mitchell very knowledgeably explicates the ins and outs of Cybernetics Revisited, he seems to be falling in love all over again with the corpse. His refurbished viewpoint is further heightened when he conceives of educational technology as a metasystem which (although not viable in itself) comprises many viable systems, namely its proponents and practitioners who can offer it consistency. Moreover, his endorsement that the likelihood exists for arriving at some underlying principle, some overall schema that will organize the field of educational technology furthers the belief that the corpse can indeed be revived. Finally, Mitchell pays great homage to educational technology as a field of study capable of solving educational perplexities of global proportions. "Opportunities for educational technology seem endless." How can one morn at such a wake?

In the end, Mitchell's article is more of an impatient call for coherence (and rightly   in the field, rather than a post mortem analysis. If not, it can only be a case of cerebral necrophilia.

AUTHOR

Andrew Agostino is a high school teacher with Jerome Le Royer School Board in Montreal and a graduate of the M. A. Program in Educational Technology at Concordia University.