

Book Reviews

Suzanne Daningburg, Editor

Two books are reviewed: *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and *The Videotex and Teletext Handbook - Home and Office Communication Using Microcomputers and Terminals* by Paul Hurly, Mathias Laucht and Denis Hlynka.

The Canadian Encyclopedia (1985). Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 3 Vols., 2089 pages.

Reviewed by Denis Hlynka

Everyone is talking about it. Canada finally has, once again, its own encyclopedia. At the pre-publication price of \$125, it was the best book bargain around. Even at \$175, if you can still find one, it's worth the price.

Educational technologists in Canada will of course want to know what is in it for them. The quick answer is, "a lot," although there is never quite a specific mention or reference of a field of educational technology or even educational media in Canada. Certainly this is one omission which Mr. Hurtig and company should consider for a future edition.

Three sub-domains of educational technology do get an entry in the encyclopedia, namely "educational broadcasting," "computer assisted instruction," and "distance education." Of course, practitioners in those fields may not necessarily consider themselves within educational technology. Such has often been the case.

The *Educational Broadcasting* article provides as good an overview as any of both the history and state of the art. Three minor points however deserve comment. The author equates distance education with "learning by yourself, in the home." On the contrary, distance education is NOT a contemporary term for *correspondence education*. "Distance education" more often takes place in a classroom where a small group can take part in a course at-a-distance, offered usually from some central institution, often a university. Although broadcasting media may indeed provide an adjunct to distance education, the major medium of distance education is in fact the amplified telephone. There is, as we have already noted a separate entry in the encyclopedia on "distance education." Oddly, neither article refers to the other. Obviously both were written in isolation.

The same paper also makes reference to *Sash Media*, without mentioning that that experiment is now defunct, and has been for several year.

Finally, other articles of the size of this one include at least a short bibliography. This one has none, even though the literature on Canadian educational broadcasting is quite substantial.

Computer Assisted Learning is a second article which has direct relevance to Canadian

educational technologists. It provides an excellent overview of a rapidly changing and developing field. I do take issue with the author's attempt at distinguishing between CAI and CAL: "The first is often called computer assisted instruction, and can best be described as learning through a computer...the second major use of CAL is one in which students tend to write their own programs to solve problems, this is described as 'learning with computers' or, more simply, using computers as tools." While the distinction of learning *through* and learning *with* as related to computers is a neat one, it unfortunately does not reflect historical reality. There is no doubt that several authors have attempted to distinguish between the two terms, just as twenty years earlier, attempts were made to distinguish programmed instruction and programmed learning. Yet when all is said and done, it is quite arguable that the terms are synonymous, and reflect only a cultural difference. Ivor Davies in particular has convincingly argued that the word *learning* is simply the preferred term in Britain, while the term *instruction* is preferred in the USA. Whether there is any real philosophic rationale behind the use of each term is debatable. I recall once reading an author who tried to distinguish between programmed instruction with two m's and programmed instruction with one m, in much the same way. What the writer (who shall go unidentified) didn't realize was that the differences reflected purely a cultural difference (this time spelling), between Britain and the US. So it is with CAI and CAL.

A last comment on the CAL article: The narrow title excludes any potential discussion of "computer literacy," which certainly is equally important today in terms of educational use of the computer.

Distance Learning receives detailed and adequate treatment, and provides an excellent overview of what in many ways is a uniquely Canadian solution to an educational problem.

While the above articles are the only three directly relevant to educational technology, there are a host of entries of indirect interest. Some of these can be found under headings of computers and society, curriculum development, copyright law, communications studies, communications, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, National Film Board, satellite communications, Telidon, McLuhan, media ownership, photography, radio programming, and communications in the north, to name only a handful.

Two quick points in passing: 1) The "communications" article erroneously refers to videotex as videotext. 2) The copyright article quotes the classic understatement which every educational technologist knows by memory, namely that copying is acceptable when it is "fair dealing with any work for the purposes of private study, research, criticism, review, or newspaper summary." We all know that such a statement tells us absolutely nothing. The article does go on, interestingly, to suggest that under Canadian law, audio and visual recording at home "would most likely be considered (an) infringement of copyright." Another statement suggests that "the technology of reproduction that includes photocopying is an infringement of copyright in literary work; the difficulty in detection arise..." One is tempted to suggest that there is no problem in detecting someone sitting at a photocopy machine at all, the problem is in the ridiculousness of an unenforceable law which takes no consideration of the needs of education.

If the above comments seem picky and detailed, it is only because this reviewer believes in a good Canadian encyclopedia, and applauds the efforts of its developers. Some errors have crept in; some contradictions exist, but these can be corrected next time round. There are also a few missing articles. *Educational technology* is one of them, especially since the parts of educational technology do get included. Again, this can be corrected in a new edition.

In general, the encyclopedia is necessary, it works, and it is very needed. Congratulations to all those involved in helping Canadians to better know themselves. And if educa-

tional technology is not yet given the prominence it deserves, perhaps that is an issue for AMTEG to address in the near future.

The VIDEOTEX and TELETEXT Handbook - Home and Office Communications Using Microcomputers and Terminals, by Paul Hurly, Matthias Laucht and Denis Hlynka. New York: Harper & Row, 1985. 404 pp. (\$21.95 US, paperback).

Reviewed by Gary Boyd

Probably the first question to ask when reviewing a book is: "Who can be nourished by this book"? In the context of *CJEC*, the question becomes; who among our readers will be nourished by the *VIDEOTEX and TELETEXT Handbook*? The communication services discussed are of a public nature; potentially everyone is a user. These systems have been used experimentally, and are being used for delivering distance education. The alpha-geometric graphics encoding techniques (and the NAPLPS standard) are applicable to many forms of computer-generated instructional graphics, and to the production of graphics for television and for optical videodisc media. Consequently, if you are an educational technologist working in distance education or in media production, this book may be valuable to you.

The preface says: "This handbook will introduce readers to the facts and the myths, the potential promises and the perils that videotex information technology offers." In other words, it is a handbook for *beginners* and for those wishing an introductory overview. It is not intended as a handbook for advanced workers in the field, although it does have much information which should be of value to them. In actual fact, the book gives a good introductory coverage of facts, exemplifies some of the myths and exhibits a few of the promises and perils.

This book is about public computer-mediated communication. The authors re-define VIDEOTEX very broadly as "a generic term for systems that provide easy-to-use, low cost computer-based services and communication facilities." This is a curiously broad definition of VIDEOTEX, since the term actually was defined by the CCITT¹ to cover such systems as PRESTEL, TELIDON and ANTIOPE (which have not been notably successful). To use the term in such a broad way as to include the PC-oriented successful networks (e.g., The Source, COMPUSERVE, etc.) in with the stumbling, TV-oriented systems is rather as though a hundred years ago some influential people insisted on using the term "telegraph" to include the telephone as well! The trouble with this is that it blurs over a profound distinction in *accessibility* between VIDEOTEX and PC telecommunications. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that what this handbook does *not* do is relate these new technologies to the underlying politico-economic struggles of modern society. There seems to be an unspoken assumption that the readers are or will be largely passive consumers of this technology rather than being protagonists who are actively shaping it.

It is to be hoped that the scientific and professional expertise of educational technologists can be mobilized to shape these technologies into forms which will best serve a

¹ C.C.I.T.T Regulation S70, November, 1980.