

Reviews

Ager, Richard (2004). *Information and communications technology in primary schools*. London: David Fulton. ISBN 1-84312-042-9. 166 pp. £16.

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This monograph concerning the introduction of information technologies (IT) in primary schools addresses the basic questions that teachers usually ask to give meaning and direction to their use of computers in their professional work.

Ager considers several different issues. In particular, these are:

- why there is currently so much interest in IT in education;
- why and how IT can enhance learning and teaching;
- how teachers can carry out assessment and reporting of IT, and with IT in their other teaching subjects;
- what kind of IT-based activities teachers can carry out to meet the requirements (in the different subject areas) of the (British) National Curriculum; and
- what the main issues are that relate to the inclusion of children with physical or cognitive impairments in IT-based activities.

The book also addresses the (to some) boring but necessary questions concerning the management of IT—such as the role of the IT coordinator and writing an IT policy. For this reason, this book could also be of interest to senior and technical managers.

Ager considers two possible approaches underlying children's activity with IT—letting the child be in control of the computer and letting the computer be in control of the child. He points out that both approaches can give rise to useful activities, but it is important that teachers understand the implications of each of them for children's learning. In the context of IT-based activities, Ager deliberately

excludes reference to any specific software title, but rather discusses the generic characteristics and uses of different software types.

The book is very well organised, with all sections and subsections dealing with well defined, limited questions. This makes it possible to use it as a reference book, as topics of interest are easy to find in this book. I appreciated in particular the sections on IT and specific subjects—for they are rich with interesting suggestions, easy to read, and include schematic summaries with the main points to keep in mind.

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Barton, Roy ed (2004). *Teaching secondary science with ICT*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. ISBN 0-335-20862-2. 160 pp. £17.99. openup.co.uk enquiries@openup.co.uk

Secondary science is pretty well served when it comes to both opportunities and resources for using computers and digital communications (IT). This book aims to provide practical advice as well as cover pedagogical issues. In achieving its aims, the book succeeds well. Its only failing is its own fault—being a book. Teachers need to play with the “toys” in question in order to work out how to use them—and however well such resources are described, the hurdle from reading to doing is not a low one.

A large section of the book covers the use of practical work and data logging. This is still the mainstay of IT use in many science departments, and the chapters provide good solid coverage. It is a shame that the section on new opportunities for data logging does not have more space and examples. Later on John Wardle closes this loop (and reaches out further) by explaining what to do with the numbers we

obtain from experiments and elsewhere to arrive at something meaningful. He is right to be critical when the effort and the time spent on collecting data are not followed up by proper analysis. I am sure that many students around the world are drawing graphs after doing experiments just because "that's what we do in science."

The Internet provides a dizzying assortment of resources for the science teacher and Patrick Fullick wisely avoids just giving the map. He provides a key and a pep talk before sending us off into cyberspace. That said, if you explore all the places he sends you, you will have a pretty impressive set of bookmarks. The shame is that teachers are far more likely to click on a live link on a web page rather than copy from book to browser. His Sci-Journal project displays a less widely exploited but excellent opportunity for students to publish their own work on the web. One should not underestimate the motivational effect of students' work being available anywhere in the world together with the possibility of interaction with their peers.

The use of virtual laboratory style simulations and Java applets has much to offer against the published dominance of data logging. Jerry Wellington's chapter on multimedia in science tries—in limited space—to cover too much ground on perhaps the most rapidly growing area of IT and science. The use of multimedia is also significant for a department with limited resources, as many simulations are freely available on the Internet. The strength of these, as discussed, is how they can aid conceptual understanding by providing a "play" area at school or at home where science works but nothing gets broken or needs clearing up.

Now there is an idea to keep the lab technicians happy...

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Brophy, Jere (2004). *Motivating students to learn*. Mahwah, NJ & London: Erlbaum. ISBN 0-8058-4772-3. 418 pp. \$ 45.
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eurospan.co.uk orders@eurospan.co.uk

This book is specifically for teachers to develop their students' motivation to learn in the realities of a classroom learning community (thus achieving intended curricular outcomes in a context of student differences and group dynamics). Based on a comprehensive review and rigorous synthesis of motivational literature, Brophy draws upon motivational principles that are most relevant to teachers, and discusses strategies for them to engage their students in classroom activities designed to improve motivation.

The concept of motivation as the product of expectancy and value (within a social context) is a general model for thinking about both students' existing motivation and the potential intervention strategies. The author adopts it in order to organise most of the chapters in the book that cover social context and the expectancy and value aspects of motivation. The distinction between the intrapersonal (expectancy and value) and interpersonal (social context) aspects is much better articulated in this edition than in the previous one. Also, the coverage of social context features principles associated with the concept of learning community. Then follow discussions on the individual and group differences that may provide a basis for adapting motivating strategies to students' personal characteristics, and suggestions about ways to address motivational issues in instructional planning.

Although the primary target audience of the book is the teacher and the context of the strategies discussed is the school, there is little mention of technology-mediated learning environments; even so, this book has a lot to offer to *BJET* readers. The author integrates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation principles by addressing two controversial claims:

- that performance-approach goals are compatible with and even complementary to learning/mastery goals; and
- that extrinsic rewards can be used in ways that are compatible with or even complementary to strategies for nurturing intrinsic motivation.

He then shows how to use strategies based on these principles effectively in schools. These principles and strategies are especially useful

for educational technologists who are designing IT-mediated learning environments (online and face-to-face). You can build the principles systematically into instructional design and/or planning as checklists against which effectiveness. Brophy also covers several emerging aspects of motivation that may be of interest to *BJET* readers, including self-identity concepts, situational interest, and the rediscovery of John Dewey's ideas on motivation.

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Cohen, Sophia (2004). *Teachers' professional development and the elementary mathematics classroom*. Mahwah, NJ & Eurospan London: Erlbaum. ISBN 0-8058-4287-X. 187 pp. \$19.95. (boards \$49.95).

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eurospan.co.uk orders@eurospan.co.uk

Teachers' Professional Development and the Elementary Mathematics Classroom, subtitled "Bringing understandings to light," is Cohen's record of a 1-year professional development programme. The book tracks the experiences and learning of a group of elementary (primary) school maths teachers and their pupils as they followed "Developing mathematical ideas" (DMI). This is a commercial US teacher development course in which teachers:

1. study elementary school maths to deepen their own understanding of it;
2. study the development of mathematical ideas in young children; and
3. experience a teaching and learning environment focused on the joint exploration of ideas.

Cohen had helped originate the DMI curriculum and so had a vested interest in understanding its effectiveness and impact. Her book narrates and analyses the stories of both teachers and pupils as the teachers followed the DMI training programme. Cohen provides plentiful evidence for each of her analyses and compellingly outlines positive benefits to teaching and learning for teachers who underwent the DMI training.

However, the evidence-based justifications, in contrast to the simple truths she manages to extract, do not make it easy for the teacher reader to take away as much as the participants did in their training. The book seems most suited to readers involved in providing professional training to teachers of young children, rather than teachers wanting to develop their own expertise in the classroom. Having said that, there are some gems contained in the book—like the way the programme encourages teachers to view "children as havers [sic] of mathematical ideas" and investigates how this view impacts on teachers, students, and pedagogy. It left me hoping that another book would follow: for those who are keen to explore these themes without having to go through the DMI training.

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de Corte, Erik et al ed (2003). *Powerful learning environments*. Oxford: Pergamon. ISBN 0-08-044275-7. 239 pp. €85.
elsevier.com

This book is essentially a set of conference proceedings—of the first meeting of a European research network of 14 research teams with the aim of providing research-based principles for the design of "powerful learning environments." "What are these?" we ask. Different answers appear here, starting with the editors in the preface who suggest: those environments that encourage students to achieve conceptual understanding, higher order cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, and self-regulated learning. [What we used to call higher education?]

So, what are these environments? Well, there is no very clear description given here either. While the volume aims at identifying their "basic components and dimensions," the chapters range widely in their focus, as well as in the age of the learners concerned. So hopes of reports of a more specific breakthrough are disappointed. Nonetheless, if we do indeed regard this book as a set of conference proceedings, there are some very interesting contributions for anyone with an interest in learning—or in e-learning—and teaching.

The contributions range over instructional psychology, instructional design, and instructional technology. A few concern novel software support for learning. The common background is the current paradigm of social constructivism. There are several instances of computer-supported group work, and three chapters on software tools for learners. One of the latter concerns a “construction kit” (modelling environment) for science. Another investigates different types of graphical representations and their impact on learning. The third concerns a collaborative writing environment.

The one British contribution, by Noel Entwistle and his colleagues, is untypical. It reports the interim findings of the “Enhancing teaching-learning environments” project (www.ed.ac.uk/etl), which concerns fundamental research into aspects of learning environments (also called courses) that encourage deep approaches to study. It relates the outcomes of two surveys of students, on their approaches to studying and on their perceptions of their learning environment. It does not concern computer support, it has a phenomenographic approach, and its action research is driven by collaboration between subject teaching departments rather than being theory-driven and experimental. Even so, for all the academic interest of the other contributions, one suspects that this particular project may generate the most powerful conclusions for improving the learning experiences of many university students.

A few learning technologists may want to buy this book as a collection of recent research articles. Most will want to browse its contents page and select those of most interest, and so will want it in the library.

Meanwhile, we await further conference proceedings of the network in the hope of increasingly coherent recommendations on the design of learning environments.

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Diaz, Karen R & O'Hanlon, Nancy (2004). *IssueWeb*. Westport, CT & Harcourt, Oxford: Libraries Unlimited. ISBN 1-59158-078-1. 287 pp. £16.99.

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Background: Students use the web all the time to find information for their essays and their projects. Unfortunately, there is a lot of biased information on the web, so we need to ensure that students know how to evaluate the content they find. This book is helpful in this respect.

Audience: High school and university students.

Purpose: To provide students with a guide and a sourcebook for using web sites to gain information when researching controversial issues.

Structure and content: The book starts with the guide. This consists of a brief introduction that explains the rationale and structure of the book, and three short chapters—Finding, Evaluating, and Incorporating Your Resources. Students should learn to discriminate between sites ending in .org, .com, and .edu. The sourcebook then follows. This is a compendium of 40 “briefs” on controversial issues that students might like to research (such as abortion, adoption, animal rights, assisted suicide, censorship, church and state, and civil liberties, to give the first few). Finally, three appendices list further web resources for extending research.

The guide is good. In a sense, it is the most important part of the book but it is so short that students might overlook it when diving into the “issues.” The bulk of the volume—the “sourcebook”—deals with these. Each brief includes (i) a two-page account providing background information on the topic, (ii) an outline of key controversies, (iii) suggested key words for use with search engines and in similar contexts, and (iv) a list of relevant web sites grouped into five categories: for reference, news, legal matters, data, and advocacy. The last of these provides web addresses for people/groups/institutions, and so on, that oppose or support various positions on the issue in question.

Strengths and weaknesses: The highlight of this book is the sourcebook. The briefs are cogently

written, balanced, and informative. Doubtless, they will be duly plagiarised. But they do lead the reader to contrasting information that demands evaluation. One way to test the success of the book is to try it. Taking “abortion” as the issue, I looked up the 19 web sites listed; I was able to locate all of them. Mind you, I then had the problem of knowing how to navigate the sites, what to select from the massive amounts of information presented, and how to use that information. So students will need to return to the guidelines when examining web sites. And they will need extra guidance on how to write up their researches—for this latter issue is not significantly addressed in this text. *IssueWeb* starts the process for students but a lot more needs to be done to ensure that good reports are written.

Conclusions: This is a thought-provoking text that students worldwide will enjoy, even though it is unashamedly North American, and some topics that different readers might like to see are not included. Reading through all of the briefs is instructive. Students will see that there are many different viewpoints on each issue raised, and they will be encouraged to evaluate them. The authors are to be congratulated on writing lucidly about 40 issues that concern us all. More work will have to be done, however, to ensure that students write as informatively as the authors do.

Related reading: **Fabos, B** (2004). *Wrong turn on the information superhighway: Education and the commercialisation of the internet teachers*. New York: College Press. The second half of this more detailed text looks at how teachers and students work with the Internet.

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Furlonger, Clare & Haywood, Susan (2004). *Teaching the national ICT strategy*. London: David Fulton. ISBN 1-84312-029-1. 180 pp. £16.
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Concern about widespread unsatisfactory standards in the secondary schools of England

and Wales has led to the development of a “national strategy” in the main subjects of the National Curriculum. That list includes the use of computers and communications, widely (but... allow me a moment riding a hobby horse... incorrectly and unnecessarily) called information and communications technology, IT (neigh!).

In the domain of IT, more schools fail to meet statutory requirements than in almost all the rest put together. That is mainly because the National Curriculum rightly expects all learners to have the opportunity to develop, throughout the 11 years of formal schooling, the knowledge, understanding, and skills required for them to be able to produce efficient and effective solutions to a wide range of information-related problems—and the majority of young people in this country do not have that opportunity. That is despite our spending huge sums of money on hardware, software, advice and guidance, and quite well focussed pre- and in-service teacher training.

The national strategy for this subject area, therefore, should be very good. However, although this collection of pedagogic exhortation, graded units of work, and loads of support resources has been available for a couple of years, its impact has been patchy, to say the least, and teachers in few schools seem to understand it or how to use it.

OK, so those teachers need practical guidance.

This appealing book claims to provide practical guidance on the nationally strategic approach to the subject’s work in years 7 to 9; it does so quite readably and very clearly, and it is easy to use. You want help with lesson 2 of unit 5 for year 8?—there’s a three-part lesson plan on page 108. And so on.

But there are some quite significant problems with the national strategy that have caused the patchy impact and lack of understanding mentioned above—and this book does not address them. While these problems tend to apply to the strategy in all subjects, IT needs greater care. This is because only a minority of the subject’s teachers trained as specialists, and also because there is an extra statutory requirement in this case—that schools support every

child's growing knowledge, understanding, and skill with information handling in specific ways throughout the curriculum.

The national strategy's main areas of weakness in this domain follow these implicit or explicit assumptions; I know no school that meets them.

- Every IT teacher has a post-16 qualification in the subject so can grasp all the implications of teaching the 11–14 age range.
- Computer-based teaching in every school is sufficiently well coordinated that all the learners receive the appropriate opportunities in all subjects, at the appropriate levels, in the appropriate ways, and at the appropriate times.
- IT teachers in those schools who do not offer weekly discrete 1-hour IT lessons know how to modify the published schemes to suit.
- Schools indeed know how to use those published schemes, modified or not.
- Schools have homework timetables including IT each week, and systems in place to ensure all pupils do the homework tasks suggested and all teachers handle homework effectively.
- IT teachers all know enough about differentiated smart unit and lesson objectives to be able to properly devise, share, and teach and assess them.
- Schools have sufficient hardware, suitably deployed, that IT classes offer a machine to each learner for individual activities.
- (Oh, yes) Children are always attentive (“on task”) and never late or absent.

(I could go on, but the reviews editor would shout at me.)

Anyway, this book does not help with any of those practical difficulties. About the only ways it goes on a limb are to make it gently clear that teachers do not have to follow the strategy in detail (they do not have to follow it at all, in fact), and to consider difficulties with time and hardware allocation.

As well as claiming to provide that practical guidance, Furlonger and Haywood (or their publishers) claim to provide analysis of the national strategy. There is, indeed, a six-page introduction, and this includes a few paragraphs of comments on the strategy. However,

they hint at only a few of the weaknesses, and much less openly than have I, in the above list, and have no help to offer to address them. (A prime example is the strategy's lack of differentiation.) Also, at the end of the book is a two-page “mapping” of the strategy's units to the National Curriculum—but this “map” is no more useful than a one-page Mercator projection of the whole world.

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Hall, Kathy & Burke, Winifred M (2003). *Making formative assessment work*. Maidenhead: Open University. ISBN 0-335-21379-0. 172 pp. £16.99.

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This book begins by clearly defining the rationale and perspective that make up the fundamental study of the writers. They neatly divide it into bite-sized chapters, with each building neatly on the one before—and it is easily accessible to the reader.

Hall and Burke consider the practice of formative assessment in the context of busy and demanding learning environments, relating this to research and to theory without divorcing it from reality. A major focus for them is the importance of involving children in their own assessment from an early age and the benefits for individual learning and development that result from this. They also examine how teachers can support children's understanding of this process and how teachers' own practice may develop as a result.

Also of importance to the writers is the individual situation of each child—for culture, belief systems, and background all have an influence on how the child perceives and responds to the learning situation. A formative assessment approach is seen as having an important part to play in recognising the different approaches and pathways that children use to demonstrate understanding.

The book covers in most depth formative assessment for the core subjects of the National

Curriculum of England and Wales as well as art/design and history; it is illustrated throughout with helpful and relevant case studies and scenarios. It describes different methods of assessment, considers current national expectations and demands in the light of individual interpretation, and suggests that common agreed practice and understanding within the school have benefits for all.

Hall and Burke acknowledge that formative assessment is hard work. But they make clear that the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages (for instance as regards work load and record keeping); effective formative assessment provides greater insight into the nature of children's learning and development and supporting each individual more appropriately—a product of which must surely be the raising of standards.

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Kaye, Roland & Hawkrigde, David (2003). *Learning and teaching for business*. London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer. ISBN 0-7494-4025-2. 226 pp. £22.50.
tandf.co.uk enquiry@tandf.co.uk

This is a book of “best stories” (ie, case studies) of “successful” innovations in UK business schools. There are two sets of inverted commas there: I shall explain in a moment.

BEST—the Business Education Support Team—is the UK Learning and Teaching Support Network's node for the disciplines of business, management, and accounting in higher and further education. Late in the year 2000, the team carried out a survey that identified 126 innovations in teaching and learning in this area: this book brings together the 12 chosen as the best of these.

The criteria for inclusion seem sensible—so we have here a set of case studies that are well worth reading by anyone concerned with business education and/or innovation in higher and further education. Each case study tells a story rather than setting out a piece of

research, and this makes the individual chapters very readable. We should note at this point (and give a cheer) that the use of new and emerging technologies was not one of the selection criteria: the editors have not been seduced by the idea that IT of itself makes a successful innovation.

As I read the first chapter, which sets the scene and lays out the editors' criteria, I started to feel uneasy and a little cheated. The original plan was that the stories would first be published on the BEST web site (<http://www.business.ltsn.ac.uk/>), then printed as a set of booklets and, finally, appear in this book. This, I thought, was a reversal of the model we have come to recognise whereby written material appears first in print and is then translated into web pages to become a (usually impoverished) form of e-learning. Visiting the site confirmed my suspicions: all of the case studies can be found there (<http://www.business.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/reflect/stories>) albeit with minor editing changes.

So why, I asked myself, should anyone buy the book if the material was already available for free on the web? (I have a personal answer that is to do with ease of access: I still find books more convenient than electronic media for analytical material. But enough of my Luddite tendencies.) What I cannot find on the web site are the excellent chapters that top and tail the case studies in this book. These set out the criteria which Roland Kaye and David Hawkrigde used to select their top 12 from the 126 innovations that were on offer, and, equally importantly, the reasons why they rejected the others. They draw helpful conclusions as to why some innovations are successful while others fail and fade. So the purchase price buys you convenience, permanence (the web site may not be there for ever) and the original chapters. Is it worth it? Probably—if you are involved in business education and want the read about the best.

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Llamas-Nistal, Martín *et al* ed (2003). *Computers and education*. Dordrecht, NE & Norwell, MA: Kluwer. ISBN 1-4020-1599-2. 287 pp. €115.

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This is essentially a post-conference volume. The 23 chapters are revised English language versions of the best refereed papers presented at IE2002, a joint conference of the international Spanish-speaking informatics and education research and development community held in Vigo, Spain in 2002. It covers the topics nominated for discussion at this conference—namely, computer-based and online courseware systems, tools and networks, and e-learning and methodological approaches to information and communication technologies in education.

The chapters report on tests, evaluations, and work in progress. They provide a series of interesting (albeit at least 2 years old) case studies and research findings into the use of information and communications technologies to:

- help rehabilitate children with Down's Syndrome;
- develop writing skills in elementary students;
- enable school children to create web sites;
- encourage collaborative learning;
- support home-based study;
- deliver distance learning with a high practical content; and
- provide a range of higher education programmes.

The papers are formal, academic, and technical in style, and occasionally adversely affected by the translation. They will primarily be of interest to academics and researchers who are familiar with the technicalities of e-learning and interested in the kinds of technological and methodological work undertaken in Latin countries on both sides of the Atlantic.

The book may offer less to lay readers or those interested in what is happening in these countries in regard to changing the teaching/learning paradigm, monitoring learners' expectations and experiences in e-learning, supporting lifelong learning in the wider community, and bridging the digital divide in

remote and disadvantaged communities. This observation prompts the thought that there is outstanding need for an up-to-date English language volume on the curricular, methodological, logistical, and operational aspects of e-learning—and on how this modality is in use to benefit those excluded from conventional educational systems in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America.

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Morrison, D (2003). *E-learning strategies: how to get implementation and delivery right first time*. Chichester, England: John Wiley. ISBN 0-470-84922-3. 426 pp. £30.99.

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For those thinking about including e-learning in their company training programme, or for those who have tried but received mixed results, this is a “must read” book. Indeed I would go as far as to say for anyone thinking about training (or learning) using any delivery method this is an essential read. It covers all those questions you need to ask before you embark on a project involving learning. This book firmly places the emphasis on getting the ground prepared properly before you start—which in my experience is the only way to go.

The book starts with an excellent introduction followed by an “E-learning primer.” This forms Part 1 of the six major divisions within the book. Good definitions are essential to make it clear what is being referred to—and e-learning is notorious for words like those in *Alice in Wonderland* where a word means what the speaker—rather than recipient—means by it. This “E-learning primer” is very helpful. It includes a comprehensive analysis of return on investment and how to work it out, and how to link it with evaluation, two activities that are frequently considered only at the end of a project rather than throughout.

Learning strategy is the core of Part 2 of the book, with many important issues clearly laid

out when developing the business case for e-learning. (It is only at this point that it becomes apparent that the book is written for large corporate institutions and the larger e-learning industry vendors.) There is a section on culture that could be very useful for those introducing e-learning to any organisation, however.

Part 3 considers Implementation. Positioning this topic before, and separating it from, Part 4 (on Delivery), shows the writer has something to say that is different. Often the implementation and delivery of a new course are considered part of the same process—but not here, which is why this book is important. Testing is given a proper place—it is “mission critical not just nice to have”—and a whole chapter is given to this topic. In the chapter on project teams, the descriptions of roles and responsibilities for those concerned with any e-learning implementation, with accompanying diagrams, seem daunting. However, all these functions need to be considered and included. Again this demonstrates that the book is aimed at the larger corporate; however, educational establishments and smaller companies considering e-learning simply have members of the team carrying multiple roles—the danger is not to consider the area at all.

One aspect of the book that did give me concern was the marketing approach. This is written very firmly from the viewpoint of big companies to big companies—smaller operators are squeezed out by some techniques described in the chapter on e-learning vendors, such as the “RFI process.”

Part 4 also includes a section on instructional design, and I did feel the emphasis was on reducing costs and development time rather than on developing quality learning. However, the discussions on learning objects and on reusable information objects are interesting, and the very useful section on “banana skins” often met during development is good and clearly based on reality.

Part 5 offers a variety of good case studies—all based in large companies—while Part 6 is an interesting closing chapter on possible future directions.

This book can provide much food for thought for anyone considering introducing e-learning, and if they follow Don Morrison’s guidelines they will not go far wrong.

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Muijs, Daniel (2004). *Doing quantitative research in education with SPSS*. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-4383-8. 228 pp. £18.99 (£60 boards).
sagepub.co.uk info@sagepub.co.uk

The author must surely have asked himself why he should write yet another book on data analysis using SPSS—but does not come up with a satisfactory answer. His first 84 pages deal with conceptual and methodological issues, presumably so that arithmophobes are not scared away immediately. The coverage of issues such as quantitative versus qualitative approaches is very schematic, however—but who would buy this title expecting a balanced debate?

And I noticed some howlers. For instance, an example in a box on page 17 explains the rationale for an experimental hypothesis, then derives a different prediction, follows that by misdescribing the experiment in a manner that makes it nonsensical, and finally claims that the experimental hypothesis is supported—even though the findings contradict the original prediction. Then the discussion of null hypotheses (pp. 16–17) is either wrong or so condensed that a naïve reader has no hope of making sense of it—one example contains a double negative, making H_1 logically equivalent to H_0 ; another claims that if H_1 predicts a score between 20 and 30, then the null hypothesis says that the score will lie between 10 and 20.

Statistical sophisticates might not be seriously misled by errors such as these, but they will be irritated. Novices deserve to be treated with far more care: becoming confused and seeking help from other sources, they will encounter contradiction and conclude that the fault lies

in themselves rather than the “expert” text writer. Thus, acute arithmophobia does become chronic. Encouraging the right *attitudes* is also important. Muijs defines the “alternative hypothesis” as “the one we want to be true” (p. 16). First, an experimental design seeks to falsify, not to confirm, but second (and more important), what a researcher should *want* to find out is the truth, whatever it is.

There are certainly some good things about the book. Although occasionally casual with accuracy and detail, conceptual and theoretical issues are generally discussed with tolerance and good sense. Muijs is obviously more comfortable when he is describing the nuts and bolts of SPSS use. The topics covered are sensibly chosen and the book is to be commended for its emphasis on the use of effect size measures, and its inclusion of latent variables and structural equation modelling.

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Panda, Santosh ed (2003). *Planning and management in distance education*. London & New York: Routledge/Falmer. ISBN 0-7494-4068-6. 288 pp. £22.50.
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This volume brings together articles written by a cadre of recognised experts and senior managers in the distance education field from the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, India, Hong Kong, South Africa, and Nigeria. The sheer effort in bringing together such a consortium is a feat in itself.

The 22 articles in the volume are sensibly organised under six areas of major importance in planning and management of distance programmes. These lead the reader from:

1. the preliminary considerations involved in offering programmes by distance (open and distance education models, policy, and planning); through
2. the various operational management issues involved in the execution of distance pro-

- grammes (institutional management and management of processes); and through
3. considerations of programme quality (quality assurance and accreditation); and, finally, to
4. a reflection on competition on the world stage (internationalisation).

More than half of the articles address operational considerations. Therefore, the table of contents is promising indeed.

Disappointingly, however, the content of the volume falls short of the initial promise. First, both the quality and usefulness of the individual articles are quite uneven. Indeed, in some cases, the author’s holding an important leadership position seems to encourage sweeping generalisations and statements of the obvious about managing distance education—or any kind of education. The bibliographic references of some authors are dated: for example, in an article on the management of instructional design and development that relies heavily on scholarly citation, only three of 22 references cited were published after 1998, and two of those were by the author himself.

It is also unclear to whom the publication is aimed: if it is to newcomers, then “how to” detail is sadly lacking; if it is to the research community, then much of the content is boringly derivative and out of date; and if it is to the already established managers of distance education, it is all “old hat.” Sadly, the initial promise of the volume does not stand up to scrutiny.

As a final observation, I must note my disappointment in the editing of the articles. Peppered sporadically throughout are niggling grammatical inaccuracies like “firstly” and “presently,” lack of subject-verb agreement, and the use of “this” without a noun to which the pronoun refers. Such grammatical errors undermine the general impression of a high quality, meticulously presented volume that addresses issues of current importance in distance education.

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Talbot, Christine (2003). *Studying at a distance*. Maidenhead: Open University. ISBN 0-335-21336-7. 174 pp. £12.99.
openup.co.uk enquiries@openup.co.uk

Christine Talbot's *Studying at a Distance* is a well thought out and useful book that will assist many beginning distance learners to:

- become confident learners at higher education level;
- develop sound study habits;
- become familiar with the tertiary education environment and its implicit expectations for learning and learner behaviour;
- utilise assistance and resources provided by institutions for their benefit;
- become acquainted with essential terminology;
- correct misconceptions and poor habits;
- increase their potential to succeed in their chosen courses.

The book is based on significant experience and research over a sustained period and this is most obvious in the clear layout, facilitation of reader engagement, and practical approach to communicating advice.

Discussions of technology occur naturally in the text and the coverage of email and web-based tools emphasises their usefulness for both supporting learning and completing study tasks. The author's approach to the issues concerned shows great sensitivity to the needs of learners who are not familiar with such tools. Also, the organisation of chapters and the giving of explicit permission for readers to skip the detailed theoretical discussion about the learning process indicate that the author writes from a sensitive learner-centred perspective.

As you would expect, the book models accepted practices for distance education. It is:

- written in a conversational style;
- well sequenced and structured into chapters centred around useful themes;
- designed to take the learner from the known to the unknown through reflection;
- intended to provide scaffolding for learning through active engagement;
- practical; and
- designed for ease of accessibility when particular advice is required.

I expected greater breadth of recent international literature in the reference list, particularly, on learning in higher education and on e-learning, but this is a minor criticism.

This book would be a useful addition to any beginning distance student's bookshelf.

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Breck, Judy (2004). *Connectivity*. Lanham, MD & Oxford: Scarecrow. ISBN 1-57886-040-7. 167 pp. £22.95.
rowmanlittlefield.com

One could almost see this book printed in green ink—it certainly has the shouting capital letters (eg, its subtitle: **THE ANSWER TO ENDING IGNORANCE AND SEPARATION**) and the plaintive rhetorical questions (eg, its subtitle: *Can You Hear Me Yet?*). The blurb tells us that the book shows us how the Internet (the connectivity of the main title) is “fundamentally diminishing terrorism... and providing a new and different locus for human knowledge.” As the book is supposedly about education, it may deserve a closer look from *BJET* readers. This is especially so, as it is (we were told) one of the first to predict that the Internet may replace schools... but your reviewer stuck at the bit describing the first shot of the US revolution as the catalyst for changing a world of tyranny into one of liberty. Was that the result of the Internet?

Cantu, D Antonio & Warren, Wilson J (2003). *Teaching history in the digital classroom*. Armonk, NY & Eurospan, London: M E Sharpe. ISBN 0-7656-0993-2. 361 pp. £22.50.
eurospan.co.uk orders@eurospan.co.uk

Although a US book, this is of much interest to humanities (social studies) teachers in Britain at least as well—it is an attempt to integrate computers, communications, and other such new-fangled aspects of digital world into school history. And it is generally very successful in showing that we can use these new tools to improve the quality of learning in almost every aspect of the history curriculum... and

doing this in a highly nonthreatening way. OK, it is a bit academic—but any reader can skip those parts without damage—and it is much more than a bit US-centric (both as regards the subject and its content and as regards the use of IT). But there is still a lot here to provoke the thoughts of history teachers in many countries.

Edwards, Anne *et al* (2002). *Rethinking teacher education*. London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer. ISBN 0-415-23063-2. 164 pp. £19.99.
tandf.co.uk enquiry@tandf.co.uk

This collection of “Collaborative responses to uncertainty” is indeed a remarkable collaboration—between three professors of different facets of education in different UK universities... often intensely personal, sometimes almost antagonistic, but generally readable and thought provoking. The uncertain aspects of the field hinted at in that subtitle and considered here are fairly far ranging, but the broad list would not differ too much from yours or mine:

- ever more insistent, even intrusive, but varying influences of political expediency;
- evolutionary philosophies of teaching and learning (and of educational technology)—but sometimes revolutionary attempts to link practice to philosophy;
- the role of psychology and its applications...;
- indeed, the very methods of dealing with threats and uncertainties (and, although barely mentioned, opportunities).

This lovely little book—OK, does not reveal any answers, but—provides good leads to more focused thinking about what troubles the world of initial teacher training and its stakeholder inhabitants.

Kafai, Yasmin *et al* ed (2004). *Embracing diversity in the learning sciences*. Mahwah, NJ & Eurospan, London: Erlbaum. ISBN 0-8058-5301-4. 661 pp. \$125 (\$75 in advance).
erlbaum.com orders@erlbaum.com
eurospan.co.uk orders@eurospan.co.uk

This is the *Proceedings* of the sixth International Conference of the Learning Sciences, a huge, hefty tome on a huge, hefty subject. The (increasing) diversities of the title addressed at the meeting are: of the disciplines drawn into the development of learning science (and its application as educational technology); of the learning environments which learning scientists study; and of the learners and learning groups themselves.

It is impossible to review such a volume effectively, at *any* length. In this case, we have reports of seven symposia, over 70 papers and nearly as many poster sessions, and 10 more papers in the so-called “doctoral consortium.” Two strengths of the meeting are the great diversity (sic) of (fairly well focused) authors and experiences described, and the general success the organisers had in encouraging those hundreds of authors to use meaningful titles. Scanning the titles is a rewarding experience, as a result, and most of the papers the attractive ones lead to are readable and thought provoking. The whole indeed allows us to embrace the diverse diversities, even come to terms with them, and appreciate and celebrate them.

Here is another word of huge, hefty praise to end. What do *you* reckon is the worst attribute of conference proceedings? To me, it is the usually great delay in publication—so that purchase is rarely worth while. This conference was near the end of last June, and the review copy reached *BJET* less than two months later. How long will the *BJET* review take to reach you?