

President's Column

"It's about the learning, not the toys"

By Ana Donaldson, AECT President



Ana Donaldson

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Often, when folks hear the term "technology" in our title or the AECT name, they filter out all the modifiers and go right to the "techie geek" component. If our field is perceived as primarily focused on the "toys", then our adding richness to learning through instructional design is lost or devalued. The learning needs to always come first with the technology as a valued enhancement.

There is no argument that the Internet has had a powerful influence on how we teach and more importantly, how we learn. My favorite story supporting the effect technology has had on our teaching took place a dozen years ago in a Chicago classroom. The tale begins when a bashful second grade girl was given back a book report from her instructor. The grade was unexpected and she gathered all her strength to approach the teacher and ask why her efforts received a scarlet D. The stern teacher looked down on her woeful face and informed her: "that is not what the author meant. You received the grade you deserved." The next morning's class began with the same shy but determined young child marching up to the instructor, with the crumpled book report in

hand, and demanding an A. She explained in a firm voice that she had emailed the book's author the previous evening and that the author's response supported her interpretation of the book. The girl got her A.

This scenario resulted in a young girl being empowered through her own efforts to take responsibility for her learning and to question second-hand opinions and judgments. The Internet has shifted the power focus from the instructor to the "consumers," our students. Educators are realizing that immediate access to the world of resources has enabled student accountability for their own learning. I've found this especially true among students who in the past might be considered at-risk. Many previously labeled "remedial learners" discover they can direct their own inquiry without depending on the authoritative figure in the classroom. This shift is especially evident in the online learning environments available today.

My concern as an educator has always been focused more on creating an effective learner than a student capable of regurgitating information. A student's intrinsic motivation, to con-

stantly be questioning and exploring, should be encouraged through the effective application of technology. As instructional designers and educators, we need to be aware of the vast resources available to our learners, while keeping in mind that information, available by smart phone or an Internet search, is not the same things as valid data and certainly is not the same thing as knowledge. We now exist as one more resource available for our students' own self-directed learning adventures. The diversity and richness of the resources remind me of the all-you-can-eat 347 item breakfast buffets in Las Vegas. Even though many of us were limited to "tapioca pudding" as the content delivery mode, we need to make sure the other 346 items are also on the menu. It is difficult for me sometimes to consider myself the Ambrosia Salad and not the whole dessert table.

One of the side effects of technology as a catalyst for empowerment

is the instructional transformation I have seen in educators and trainers. No longer are we limited to delivery from PPT slides that are repeating content that is available through more current and interactive media. The inclusion of simulation activities into concept discussions also allows students and faculty to experience situations that add depth to the discussion beyond a pre-recorded lecture. Communities of Practice have also allowed instructors to share ideas, explore new opportunities, and question their own teaching approaches. A prime example of this collaboration is the AECT-supported ITForum listserv (listserv.lt.unt.edu). This is an active and rigorous global discussion environment that is focused on member concerns and posted discussion papers. The benefits of realizing we are not alone in our efforts are powerful. Participation at professional conferences, such as AECT's International convention in Louisville, KY from Oct. 30-Nov. 3, 2012, allows provides us with a voice

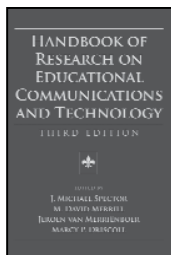
to share research and best practices as we push the boundaries of using technology to take learning to the next level.

For our profession, I view technology as an enhancement to instruction and learning. The possibilities for advances in our instructional strategies are limited only by our own hesitations to take risks. Many times it is my students who are setting the bar higher as they repurpose existing software or introduce me to new tools to advance my own content delivery. But again, it isn't only the toys...it is the learning that needs to come first.

As always, your voice is encouraged to be heard. I'm continuing to travel the world and spread the word on the benefits of being an active participant in our organization. Hope to see you soon in your part of the world or in Louisville this coming Fall. Do not hesitate to contact me with your concerns and questions. Ana.donaldson@cfu.net I look forward to hearing from you.

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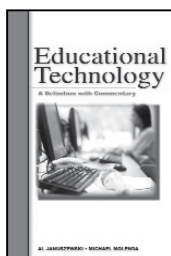


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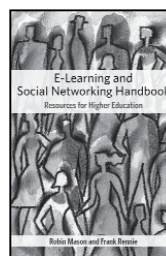


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