

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Educational Technology for the Global Village: Worldwide Innovation and Best Practices. Edited by D. Lloyd and G. I. Barreneche. Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.; 2014. Softcover: 204 p. Price: USD\$39.50. ISBN# 978-1-57387-481-6. Available from: <http://books.infotoday.com/books/Educational-Technology.shtml>.

I have to admit, I was really looking forward to reviewing this book. Like most librarians, I have a keen interest in education and find educational technology inspiring. I also have a bit of a “travel bug”, so this book seemed a natural choice for me to review. I was expecting to hear about innovative new technology employed in creative ways in interesting places, but I was disappointed.

This book is a collection of essays loosely tied together under the theme of “educational technology” in settings other than the United States. The projects are based on the principle of “service learning”, which is defined as “a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (p. 2). Most of the service learning projects outlined in the collection involve students from the United States donating obsolete computers to schools in countries like Mexico and the Philippines and spending a week or two in that country teaching students to use them.

The book is co-edited by Les Lloyd and Gabriel I. Batteneche. In the Preface of the book, Lloyd explains that he was seeking a way to “meld my IT background and my interest in travel” (p. ix). A number of the projects share the same components: an IT element and an interest in travel. What seems to be missing in many cases, however, is the project leader’s assessment of the context of the project, including factors such as the community’s access to internet and its physical facilities. Barreneche’s chapter “Learning Global Citizenship through Teaching Technology” involved a group of students travelling to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico with used laptop computers to teach students web design. Unfortunately, no one had asked the school about internet access, so they had to move to plan B. Lloyd’s chapter “A Service-Learning Novice Finds his Way” describes a second project taking place in San Miguel that resulted in the community scrambling to build a makeshift shed (with community donated material and labour) to house the computers being donated to them, because there wasn’t enough room in their current building to set them up. One faculty member seemed surprised at the cold weather in Mexico. Another project outlined in the chapter by Hewitt and New attempted to procure “One

Laptop per Child” in Rwanda, only to find out that access to electricity came and went unpredictably. Another red flag appeared for me in the Schulz essay when a project leader proclaimed: “Needs of the school or organization is the final issue to consider in identifying the specific project focus and plan” (p. 119). The needs of the school or organization were listed, notably, after “room and board” (p. 119). It would seem as if the most basic research and communication with the host school before embarking would have avoided these pitfalls in the proposed projects.

There were other chapters that didn’t seem to belong in the book at all, but were interesting nonetheless. The chapter by Merideth and Steinbronn discusses the use of e-portfolios for teaching candidates. During the course of their education degree, students would store materials they created, and they would provide links to audio and visual presentations or even examples of their teaching to provide evidence of their skill mastery. The only tie this chapter made to the theme of the book is that a few students procured teaching English as a second language positions abroad using their e-portfolios. It did strike me, however, that e-portfolios might be an innovative and creative way to compile one’s case file for tenure and promotion cases in academic libraries. “The Safe Agua Case Study” by Amatullo, Gottlieb, and Herscovitch outlined interesting, innovative, and very practical projects that directly benefited communities in Chile and Peru. While I enjoyed reading about these projects, I noted that the only educational technology employed in them were Skype and Facebook to connect the students in the host communities with students back in California.

The book consists of 12 chapters that have been contributed by different writers. It is natural that each author’s style would be unique, but I would have expected to see more evidence of the editors’ influence. For example, some chapters are meticulously referenced, whereas others seem to be crying for citations. One example of such a statement is “It is well-recognized in the higher education literature that sustainability education is a long-term effort” (p. 24). References to the related literature on this issue would have been helpful. Some writing is academic and formal in tone, whereas a chapter contributed by one of the editors, is casual: “Students raised funds by having a car wash and selling Mexican craft items and photography by yours truly” (p. 174). For some reason, the inconsistency in writing style irks.

Unfortunately, I cannot recommend this book to colleagues in the field of librarianship; nor do I think that this collection of essays would hold much interest to those in the field of education. I saw very little that was truly innovative or that was anything more than common sense in terms of best practices. I was also left struggling with the underlying premise of the book which seems to be

that the quality of education can always be enhanced using technology. Perhaps a more practical approach to providing assistance to global partners would be to focus more sharply on meeting “the needs of the school or organization”, (p. 119) which in many schools might just mean providing a qualified teacher.

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