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■ Resource Review

The Connected School: Technology and Learning in High School

By Barbara Means, William R. Penuel, and Christine Padilla

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. 235 pages, \$27.00.

In *The Connected School: Technology and Learning in High School*, the authors have put together an excellent book that imparts the findings resulting from their intensive study of selected urban high schools' use of technology. These findings are delivered in a clear and organized story, broken into readable and useful segments, which allow readers to take them as a whole or refer to them individually. Although background information about suburban school districts is included to provide some perspective, the study focuses on six schools selected from the Chicago and Detroit Public School systems to examine the challenges that urban schools face in implementing technology in the classroom. In addition to reviewing the general technology implementation challenges shared by the schools as a whole, *The Connected School* fleshes out its story by selecting two to three interesting uses of technology from each school and looking at them in more detail. The authors also offer recommended actions for school districts, high school leaders, and teachers.

Beyond describing interesting case studies of successful technology implementation in urban schools, this book serves as a guide for those trying to unlock the secrets or best practices for technology integration in schools. The examples in this book provide clear answers to several important questions about the use of technology in schools, such as: What does teaching and learning supported by technology look like in urban schools? How is it different from these schools' suburban counterparts? Is technology inevitably a magnifier of educational inequality? What barriers do urban schools have to overcome? Are there urban schools using technology in ways that empower students? If so, how do they do it? What would it take for other urban schools to emulate their strategies?

Part of what makes *The Connected School* work so well is that the authors draw from a wealth of professional experience to answer these questions but do not overwhelm the reader with the technical minutia of the subject matter. Besides being an educational psychologist, Barbara Means is the codirector of the Center for Technology and Learning at SRI International

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in Menlo Park, Calif., and William Penuel and Christine Padilla are a research scientist and policy analyst, respectively, at the Center. Together, they manage to address the major issues of incorporating technology in schools without leaving the reader lost in the realm of abstract concepts or the jargon of unfamiliar terminology. Indeed, one of their strengths as authors is their ability to boil down complex material into simple, easy-to-understand components that school leaders can recognize as factors in their own environments. Another strength is the skill with which they combine the nuts-and-bolts descriptions of various technology programs with actual quotes from principals, teachers, and even students about how those programs affected them personally.

The book opens with a look at technology access issues, but it moves quickly to the application and use of technology in schools to enhance curriculum and advance student achievement. Specifically, the text emphasizes how teachers can empower students by stimulating them to think of creative ways they can adapt the technology for their own purposes; for example, to communicate with distant scientists and get insight into the fieldwork of an actual investigation. In addition, the case studies cite examples that demonstrate the need to look not just at technology resources and constraints but also at curriculum integration, staff development, and school–community culture to gain acceptance of new programs and provide adequate budgeting. This also includes gaining and maintaining local political support for the necessary investments in time and money, which further elucidates the different challenges that urban schools face as compared to suburban districts.

Four major themes of success seem to appear throughout the six case studies. The first key to success is having a visionary school leader who is committed to the program and who will work to make the resources available, whether those resources are monetary or human. The next critical factor is professional development of faculty and other staff members. It is not sufficient to place the resources in the classroom for student use; teachers and staff need to be trained in the uses of technology and be able to enthusiastically integrate it into both classroom curriculum and their teaching or administrative styles. The third common theme is how the students are allowed to use the technology. Project-based approaches as opposed to remediation and drill are the hallmarks of successful student-empowering uses of technology. This may involve having students collect and collate data from the Internet to produce online reports or learn about software applications to create a multimedia presentation or computer model.

Perhaps the most important theme throughout the book concerns achieving a cultural change at the school in which the approach to technology is seen not as a separate issue, but rather is positively embraced as part of the path to overall school improvement. The authors note that it is

vital that school leaders demonstrate a willingness to try new methods to effect changes in their schools and avoid the common traps of complacency and reliance on the status quo. A progressive attitude helps to ensure that a school's new computers become powerful tools for learning instead of merely wires in a box that gathers dust in a corner.

The authors have clearly done their homework in providing an outline of the obstacles and opportunities that face educators who want to harness technology as a resource to help students achieve their full potential. This may be even more important for inner-city schools than for their counterparts in the suburbs; however, Means and her coauthors persuasively argue that, given a chance, teenagers are certainly up to the challenge. As one student at the Von Steuben Metropolitan Science Center in Chicago put it, in referring to the school's aging building and diverse student body, "We're a ghetto, but we're intellectual" (74). Indeed, they proved as much when Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair visited the school in April 1999. With just several weeks' notice, the students used available technology to produce a CD-ROM containing a biography of Blair's life, a large, artistic, computer-generated digital photograph of the prime minister, and even a book about famous Chicago women to be presented to Blair's wife. In less prosaic terms, the Von Steuben center also seemed to be succeeding by measures of attendance and academic performance. At the time it was studied, the Von Steuben center had a 94% daily attendance record, and 92% of its graduates went on to postsecondary education.

This book provides readers with a valuable account of successful technology integration; I suspect it will become well worn as both a reference resource for educators wanting real examples of best practices and as a professional development resource for site teams planning their own programs.



Breaking Down the Digital Walls: Learning to Teach in a Post-Modem World

By R. W. Burniske and Lowell Monke

Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001. 284 pages, \$19.95.

As an exploration of the benefits and problems of using the Internet in education, *Breaking Down the Digital Walls* underscores the idea that technol-

Reviewed by George Shadrui, a Memphis-based writer whose work has been published in more than a dozen magazines and newspapers. Correspondence concerning this review may be sent to george.shadrui@stjude.org.