

Technologies for Learning Outside the Classroom

John A. Niemi and Dennis D. Gooler (Eds.)

*New Directions for Continuing Education, 34: Jossey-Bass, 1987,
115 pages, Index, paperback*

In 1980, Professors John A. Niemi and Dennis D. Gooler published *Providing Continuing Education by Media and Technology*, one in a series of paperback source books called *New Directions for Continuing Education*. Their new, updated volume, *Technologies for Learning Outside the Classroom* places a new emphasis on nontraditional learning and the learner, as opposed to institution-bound education. A collection of essays by authors from all over North America, this book includes informative chapters on television, audio, interactive video, print, computers, integrated information on technology, technology and instructional functions, and instructional design and new technologies. The book opens with a sensible if predictable chapter by Niemi on "Contexts of Using Technologies for Learning Outside the Classroom," which examines the implications for lifelong learning of the "greying of America" and the various transitions which are now so common as Western society ages.

The book provides not only a background but also an overview. In the final chapter, Niemi and Gooler discuss a number of the issues raised throughout the book and summarize the benefits of various technologies. They group these benefits in six broad categories, viewing the increased access to learning opportunities as especially important. Other benefits listed include access to more and better information resources, the increased variety of learning strategies, increased motivation to learn, and the new capacity both to individualize learning and to make it more cooperative. However, although the benefits of various technologies are examined in detail, the inevitable limitations are virtually ignored, somewhat restricting the usefulness of the book. All the same, this final chapter is certainly the most useful and interesting in the book.

The other chapters vary considerably. Some provide little more than a rather low-level discussion of a particular technology. Moreover, some chapters are ill-written: the editors or the publishers might well have corrected the too frequent misuse of words and the painfully clumsy sentences.

In some chapters the focus on American examples severely limits the usefulness of discussion, since distance education, after all, is a field in which much of the most interesting work has been done outside of the United States. Fortunately, other chapters are broader, more sharply written and more informative. Gooler's chapter on "Integrated Information Technologies," for instance, includes an interesting discussion of the Education Utility, a subject on which he is clearly expert. Daniel D. Pratt writes especially well on the question of feedback in his well-researched and documented chapter, "Technology and Instructional Functions," which stresses the potential value of learning about the effects of technology from the learners themselves.

A considerable amount of discussion and information is crammed into this short book. The volume is well-produced, the documentation, though appropriately enough not exhaustive, is full and the index is useful. Altogether this would be a worthwhile, though not essential, part of the library of any distance education institution or any distance educator.

June Sturrock
Centre for Distance Education
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, British Columbia
V5A 1S6