

INTERVIEW

Technology in JTPA Programs

The NCEP (National Commission for Employment Policy) issued a contract to Education TURNKEY Systems, Inc. for the assessment of use of computer-assisted instruction and related technology in JTPA and Job Corps programs. The project had two principle components: 1. to determine current and future instructional uses of computers, and 2. suggestion of policy options that would increase effective use of technology. Part of the research involved identifying barriers to effective use of this technology. Following is an interview with Charles Blaschke (CB), the President of TURNKEY, by the ALT Newsletter Editor (AM) on the subject of barriers.

AM: You had discussed barriers, such as short-term funding, staff development, general awareness, to the implementation of technology in JTPA programs. One of the aspects I found very interesting was the lack of vendor awareness of the needs of service providers.

CB: This report was developed from November through January of last year. Since then, some significant developments have occurred. A number of software publishers are more aware of the growing need for software in this market. Because it is a growing market and also because of this study, software publishers are increasingly more sensitive to the needs for basic skills job-related software.

AM: Will software development be more toward what we have been considering academic or specific domain content?

CB: Two things are happening. Some publishers are modifying existing programs for adults and the content is relatively similar to grades 3 through 8. However, a number of very promising developments have occurred with some publishers. These publishers are developing language experience programs that are suitable for workplace programs. If you look at the successful programs, they have strong sales. In some states, for example, Michigan, most of the efforts are behind workplace literacy.

AM: How much of a barrier to implementing technology is really technology and how much of it is a larger programmatic issue?

The folks at Job Corp are always under very tight budgets because of the competitive nature of their contracts. Having said that, some of the most effective applications in using computers most efficiently are found in Job Corp—instructional management, reporting, diagnostic/prescription capabilities. It was required that the computers in the big CAI Job Corp Evaluation Project program would be used no more than one half of the time. In Title II, it is uncertain from year to year who will get the contract. It

is very difficult for a service provider to tool up when funding is so uncertain. That is why the more successful service providers have a multiplicity of funding sources.

AM: Do you see any change in that government funding will become more long-term?

CB: The President and Vice President are supporting some type of job training and adult literacy. Something like JTPA will continue, without question, but the level of funding is certainly an issue. Even if the level of funding remains the same, I think the increased emphasis on basic skills, remediation, and literacy will increase. You are talking about an increase of 30 to 40 million dollars a few years ago to a projected 300 million dollar increase next year just for remediation in Title II.

AM: One of the barriers discussed in your study is the attitudes of teachers towards using technology. What kind of staff development will be effective in making these people more comfortable with technology?

CB: It depends on the system. If you are talking about integrated learning systems like Prescription Learning, Wasatch, or CCP, some training is required. But the system performs a lot of the functions that a teacher is normally trained to do. You don't have to have a diagnostic/prescription expert for instance—

the system assists in this function. If you purchase a system of stand-alone computers and try to pull it together with different publishers and try to develop coordination, sequencing, and instructional management systems, it is time consuming and requires intensive training. But with the AIL (American Institute of Learning) in Austin system, for example, teachers really don't function as teachers. The students were trained to measure their own instructional progress because it is mostly self-directed. The teacher functions as a counselor and confidant.

AM: Do you see that it is a problem for teachers to function on that basis?

CB: In the model sites we visited, we unquestionably saw exemplary teachers. They were very solid, bright, and energetic. When you are dealing with children, a good teacher is one who does a lot of personal contact. When you are dealing with adults, a good teacher manages the instructional process. The typical adult learner is basically a self-paced learner, and needs the teacher to function as a guide through the instructional process.

AM: We had talked about systems and stand alone. Do you see the movement being toward big systems or toward a hybrid of stand-alone programs?

CB: I think it will be more integrated learning systems in conjunction with interactive video systems. That isn't tomorrow but in the next two to four years. I mention interactive video because it makes so much sense in literacy training plus I

would estimate that 2/3 of the functionally illiterate population over age 20 have some limited English proficiency.

AM: Let's talk about the limited English proficient population for a minute. You had talked a little bit about alternative technologies, such as television. What role do you see for other delivery systems, such as broadcast media?

CB: Broadcast media will be used more for teacher training since the programs themselves have to be open entry/open exit. Currently, I see broadcasting for off-air taping and I see video use with a follow-up of computer-assisted instruction. The interactive technologies on an individual basis will probably be the most important.

AM: What other issues do you consider to be important when we talk about barriers?

CB: The performance contract notion is very controversial in education. It is commonplace in the JTPA systems. Performance contracting often influences the decision about what service providers will be used, what technology will be used. You need to have some reasonable expectation of positive performance results. These integrated learning systems do that pretty well. On the other hand, because of the nature of some of the instruments used to assess reading, there is a tendency to select those into the program who are most likely to succeed.

What kind of policy do you see needs to be in place to help infuse technology into basic skills, job-related programs?

We first need to have a large-scale demonstration of technology to PIC or SDA programs. Most of them have had cuts in travel funds, therefore they rely heavily on their incumbent service providers. If that service provider is part of a national franchise and only knows products, X, Y & Z, that is all they are going to hear about. When we visited exemplary sites, we were asked a lot of questions about what is available. It is obvious that they had a lot of interest, but the information is not being made available to them.

What else would you like to see happen?

We proposed the creation of a national technology resource system. With this system, a number of services could be provided, ranging from providing a software selection checklist to actual systems integration services. Job Corps has a long tradition since the 1960s of using technology in effective ways. We recommend that Job Corps become a national laboratory. Ironically a book that just came out, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, discusses Job Corp as a national demonstration site. I'm not sure that the Commission was interested in hearing about the creation of new agency or if they would rather be part of an existing agency within the Department of Labor, for example. In the Department of Education, Bennett basically abolished any organizational responsibility for technology and we have to go back and resurrect some office to deal with it.

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