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Defining Educational Technology

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DEFINING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

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> Educational technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological process and resources. (Januszewski & Molenda, 2008, p. 1)

After years of work, the Definitions and Terminology Committee of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), has published its long-awaited redefinition of the field. Alan Januszewski, who spearheaded this committee effort, was joined by Michael Molenda in the publication of *Educational Technology: A Definition with Commentary* (2008) which replaces *Instructional Technology: Definition and Glossary of Terms* (1994). This book, with its definition and explanation contained in 12 chapters, is must-reading for anyone in educational technology, and should be on the reading list of those in distance education, also.

As might be expected, the new book and definition has generated considerable controversy. A number of leaders in the educational/instructional technology field have weighed in on the new definition. As a matter of fact, a portion of the November-December, 2008 issue of *Educational Technology* magazine is dedicated to a critique of the new definition and the book. This issue of *Educational Technology* is also a must-read.

Arguments about, and criticism of, the new definition focus on several issues—most notably the new emphasis on ethics and the diminished emphasis on the concept of systems and the systematic process. Denis Hlynka, in his column "Looking Ahead Looking Back," identifies several problems worthy of debate and discussion. First, he asks who this definition is for, and cites the book's assertion that the definition is for "students entering the graduate programs in the field." He considers this to be "wrong" (p. 49). Hlynka also is concerned with the words *ethical* and *appropriate* and the phrase *improving performance* in the definition. His last criticism is that there are not clear "exemplars" of the definition, something he considers to be essential.

The same issue of *Educational Technology* also has a column dealing with the new AECT definition written by the wandering philosopher of the field, Alex Romiszowski. His interesting comments about the definition address the concepts of process or product; of science, technology, and ethics; and of the use of the word educational instead of instructional. As always, Romiszowski's comments generate many questions worthy of thoughtful discussion.

Finally, it is obvious that change is a critical, if undefined, aspect of the definition of the field. There are those who think that, as the field changes, a change of definitions is warranted. One wonders if other fields approach redefinitions easily. AECT's contribution to the definition and terminology of our own field, *Distance Education: Definition and Glossary of Terms*, will be revised in a third edition in early 2009. The two AECT books and one magazine issue should be studied carefully, and not only by "students entering graduate programs in the field," but also by leaders, managers, and practitioners. The *Quarterly Review* welcomes articles, position pieces, and letters to the editors dealing with the definition and terminology of the fields of instructional technology and distance education.

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