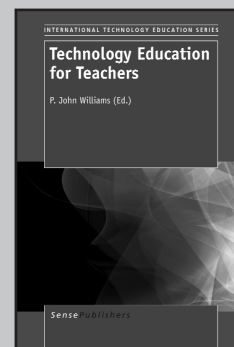


Review

Technology Education for Teachers

Title:	Technology Education for Teachers
Editor:	P. John Williams
Publisher:	Sense
Price:	Paperback (\$ 54.00) Hardcover (\$ 99.00)
ISBN:	Paperback 978-94-6209-159-7
ISBN:	Hardcover 978-94-6209-160-3
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Every so often a book is published that makes a significant contribution to bringing up to date the literature supporting teachers developing their professionalism. This is such a book. It will have a place internationally on the reading lists of both initial teacher education courses and those concerned with continued professional development but should also be read by those occupying positions of influence and responsibility for curriculum development in their respective institutions. As stated by Marc J. De Vries, technology educators are constantly required to justify the place of their subject in the curriculum both in terms of content and practice. No other subject has to do this.

The Editor John Williams has a long established and substantial reputation for his writing on technology education. This book presents a current perspective developed through bringing together ten of the most well respected academics in the field, representing an international platform. The scope of this review does not allow for consideration of each of their contributions but suffice it to say, each is significant and unique. Although the book is made up of a series of chapters, each representing a key aspect of technology education, and typically those around which centres much debate, links between them are easily drawn by the reader even where reference is not specific. Collectively and individually, the contributions help the reader to make sense of the worth, meaning and benefits drawn from engaging with technology education and in a world where there remains no consensus about what technology education should be, what students should learn and what are effective teaching strategies. As the editor says in his introduction: 'in many countries, technology education is challenging a number of traditional characteristics of schooling the

deconstructionalization of knowledge, the primacy of the theoretical over the practical, and the organisation of the curriculum along disciplinary lines.'

A central tenet of the book is that a more explicit philosophy of technology education would enable rigorous discussion and debate and provide a 'logical and defensible rationale for educational activity. Chapter 2 addresses this, making the claim that as international revisions of curricula come about, there is a need to base these on a thorough understanding of what is essential and what is worth preserving, otherwise they are unlikely to represent improvements. In chapter 2, David Spendlove considers the nature of technological activity and points out that increasingly, teachers have become disenfranchised from making decisions, as national systems using standardised approaches are adopted: 'Such approaches de-skill teachers and present a centralised view of technology based upon common norms'.

Spendlove also points out that through reading this book, there is a danger that the teacher may become overwhelmed but that this feeling, although not unusual, is also a positive indication that the reader is grasping both the significance of teaching and the enormity of the task. This is true, and he continues to briefly unpack a number of pertinent aspects including the role of knowledge in teaching, the nature of technological activity and the tension between teaching subject content (the what) and the process (the how). This chapter also explores the comparison between those working professionally as designers and technologists and how this might give an insight into pedagogical strategies. In so doing, the 'ritualisation of the portfolio' is considered. This provides

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yet further stimulus for all those engaged in teaching and assessing technology to rethink the value of this often absurd collection of related 'design' evidence for assessment purposes.

In terms of sheer entertainment, the chapter: Understanding Assessment Its Importance; Its dangers; Its Potential, stands out. For those practitioners who on a daily basis are forced into completing assessment activity, often inflicting it onto their students, as they are required to believe it is beneficial to learning, this may provide an accessible and stimulating way into the book. Certainly those who work in England or other countries that are currently reworking approaches to terminal assessments and related public examinations will find this a fascinating exposition on how we have arrived at where we are. It goes on to tantalisingly present an alternative model using comparative judgement and the *pairs engine*, that capitalises on the skills teachers have and provides a far less cumbersome yet far more statistically accurate way of arriving at terminal judgements. Those already familiar with the work of Richard Kimbell and the Technology Education Research Unit (TERU) will find this an interesting reminder of just what could be. Those new to the subject will find it an essential tool to help them make sense of and arrive at their own conclusions as to the use of assessment and critique the processes they may be forced to apply.

The challenge of responding to national agendas is returned to later in chapter 9, with David Barlex's contribution addressing curriculum development. In this highly accessible chapter, he explores and gives practical advice on matters including curriculum innovation, developing interdisciplinary approaches, achieving breadth and balance, differentiation and achieving progression. Empowering teachers by enabling them as reflective practitioners and giving them the skills to become curriculum developers is a complex business, but one he claims is vital, and one which is enhanced by collaborative activity through the engagement of teacher professional associations. Indeed this is true. In countries where the demise of centralised subject specific support and government appointed local or national bodies with the responsibility for curriculum development, this is arguably the most desirable way forward. In the absence of such organisations, in a continually developing technological world, teachers have to constantly address ways in which the subject and its teaching respond to the challenges and opportunities presented. We must ensure that students develop the skills and knowledge to participate effectively in a democracy.

This book will provide for many what is a timely reminder of the value and purpose of technology education. As a relatively young subject in the curriculum there remains much to be done if it is to be expected that, as De Vries suggests, 'the internationalisation of technology education will continue and gradually make technology education curricula look more similar than in the past when countries usually had a rather outspoken preference for a particular aspect of technology. This will certainly be a benefit of technology education in general.' Whether one agrees with this or not, the philosophical discussion this work contains will certainly inform debate and opinion.