Editorial:
Plus ça change; c'est la même chose!

Nick Rushby

Education & Self Development, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia

ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2379-1402

I received a shock last month. Forty years ago I wrote a book called *An Introduction to Educational Computing*, and now the publishers have written saying that they want to republish it in its original form as part of a programme to revive some of their key titles. Their reason is that they believe these titles "very much reflect the context of the times in which they were published. For newer libraries, it represents a chance to build up where, for various political or economic reasons, library holdings have been neglected in the past 50 years but budgets are still strong."

Well, this was all very flattering but it was a surprise none the less! I have a copy on my bookshelf but I had not opened it for many years. It was time to re-read it and see whether it was as dated as I suspected it was.

The book was written at the end of three years when I was working in the directorate of the UK National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning (Rushby, 1979). That programme, which ran from 1973 to 1977, dominated research and development in learning technologies in the UK and brought about significant change in the use of computers in education in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. Of course, learning technology was not new: there was research into computer assisted instruction in the 1940s, and then the programmed learning movement that built on the work of B.F. Skinner (1953) and others. This is one of the areas where the gap of understanding between work in Russia and in the West is very visible: researchers in Europe and North America know about the research of Skinner and his contemporaries but not about comparable research in Russia – and vice versa.

The use of information and communications technologies has moved on significantly since this book was published in 1979 – forty years ago – at a time when none of our current generation of learners and many of their teachers were yet born. The technology now is smaller, cheaper and more pervasive, and one of the consequences is that we see and use it in a very different context. Learners used to smart phones, social media and being continually connected to each other would find references to specific equipment (for example, mainframe computers, mini-computers and graphic terminals) very antiquated and barely comprehensible. Perhaps it is fortunate that I chose not to include images of the equipment used in the 1970s because this would astound the reader of the 21st century!

Yet, re-reading the book, I was reminded that many of the issues that faced the technology-based learning community then still face us now. Human evolution progresses slowly and the psychology of how we learn has not changed in the last forty years, although we may have a better understanding of the underpinning theory. Similarly, we seem little better at bringing about change in education and training systems: despite well publicised successes the long-awaited revolution that would automate our classrooms is still tantalizingly beyond our grasp. Indeed, there is still an unacceptable number of people worldwide who have little or no access to education – with or without technology.

There is no doubt that the development of educational computing – under whatever name we chose to give it – will stretch far into the future. Perhaps this book, as a snapshot of the state of the art in 1979, will cause us to ponder on the changes that have happened since and the developments that may happen in the future.

Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr wrote (in French, 1849) that "Plus ça change; c'est la même chose." This translates as "the more things change, the more they stay the same." With the hindsight of forty years, this seems very true for education.

References

Karr, J-B, A (1849) *Les Guêpes* (The Wasps), January 1849

Rushby, N J (1979) *An introduction to educational computing*. Croom Helm, London. (published in North America as *Computers in the Training Process*)

Skinner, B.F. (1953) *Science and human behavior*. Accessed February 19th, 2019 at http://www.bfskinner.org/product/science-and-human-behavior-pdf/