Meeting Highlights

The Annual Meeting comes to Boston

With the NCTM meeting returning to Boston, I anticipated an increased technology focus since Boston is one the main hubs on the information "superskyway". But after perusing the huge meeting agenda (1062 sessions), I was somewhat disappointed. My technology barometer (based on the number of sessions in the program that mention some form of technology) indicated only a moderate hi-tech presence. There are only 103 sessions that specifically refer to some form of technology in their blurbs. The most popular technology reference is graphing calculators (TI 81, 82 and 85s). The new TI CBL unit (useful for science & math integration) was mentioned 3 times and the new Sharp EL E300 was mentioned once. The TI Math Explorer (the fraction calculator) was the focus of 2 sessions. 11 sessions referred to specific pieces of software like the Geometer's Sketchpad (2), Hypercard, Logo (2), and Lego/Logo. The use of video (including the TV show Square One and the fascinating Cammotion project - session 1033) made it in three sessions.

But it is encouraging to see that the calculator has made its way into the mainstream of technology presentations at conferences (if not in classrooms). It is interesting that the calculator presentations greatly outnumber the computer presentations. To be fair not all sessions that may use some form of technology mention technology in their titles which means that they may or may not be referring to it. In one sense, that's the ideal. The technology should be just part of the fabric of the classroom and not the focus. Of course, this assumes that most people have experience and a working knowledge of technology. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Technology has barely made a dent in math classrooms and most teachers still need to learn the A,B,Cs of using computers and calculators. (Interestingly, the sessions are color coded. The categories are: level, general interest, teacher education, research, Chapter 1, and assessment. A glaring omission is Technology.) And then there is Bert Waits. Just when you think you got the latest, greatest hand-held technology in your classroom, Bert makes you feel outdated by what he is planning to talk about. In his blurb (p. 134, session 951) Waits describes the next revolution in mathematics learning: pocket sized, inexpensive computer algebra systems (CAS). Graphing calculators are just the beginning, he says. So what does that say about the people learning to use TI-81s in Boston? Probably not a lot. The important thing is that they get turned on by what they learn. (I still have some great activities that I could show if someone forced me to use a Commodore PET. No requests for that, please!)

SEYMOUR PAPERT TELLS US WHAT MATH LEARNING MAY LOOK LIKE IN THE YEAR 2020.

Where's the on ramp?

How hi-tech is Boston? Well if an Espresso bar that lets you connect to the Internet at the booths is any indication, then the answer is "very". But, unfortunately, you can't tell this is so from the NCTM program guide. You have to look hard to find the Internet connections here. Sure, this is not a computer conference, but there are only 7 sessions (out of 1062) discussing the Internet. Surely, that's not enough. Since we believe that technology will play a huge role in how learning and teaching happens in the 21st century, it seems that this topic warrants more discussion.

At the Clime Meeting

Speaking of the 21st century, at our annual Clime meeting (see enclosed flyer), Seymour Papert will deliver a "mini keynote" on what learning mathematics may look like in the year 2020. Here's a rundown of what's on tap.

•**Seymour Papert (MIT Media Lab & developer of Logo)** will lead off the session by talking about "Learning Mathematics in the Year 2020: Is Megachange Conceivable?"