Model Test 1—Integrated Task (Page 207)

(male speaker)

School systems across the country are devoting resources to equipping their classrooms with computers and training teachers to use them. In reality, how well prepared are teachers to use computers with their students? The government recently conducted a survey to find out, gathering information from over one hundred schools across the country. Ninety-six percent of the teachers surveyed reported that their training consisted mainly of developing basic computer skills, which they already had prior to training. Skills and knowledge that would help them incorporate the use of computers more fully into their lessons were not addressed in most training programs. Seventy-eight percent reported that the training they received was too brief, averaging less than five hours in total. Sixty-five percent said they were not comfortable using technology and rarely or never made use of computers in their classrooms. Of those who did use computers, the majority used them for skill and drill exercises and did not feel that the use of computers had changed their approach to teaching in any significant way. School administrators are wondering whether money invested in educational technology might yield better results if used to support other educational needs.

This is a bleak picture indeed. However, there is hope. Let's look at a success story that shows how technology can support education. Five years ago, the Riverdale School District implemented a program to train teachers to integrate technology into their lessons. Teachers who participated in the program received two hundred hours of training on using technology with their students to develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. The training occurred over a two-year period. In addition, teachers were assigned mentors who could assist them in implementing computer-based activities in the classroom. As a result of this, computers were fully integrated into the lesson plans of these teachers. Rather than the skill and drill software so commonly used, these teachers had their students working with simulation software to solve problems. When their students took the statewide achievement tests at the end of the first year of the program, they scored significantly higher than students who were not participating in the program.

Clearly, a commitment to filling schools with computers is not enough. An equal, if not greater, commitment must be made to training teachers to use this technology in ways that enrich the learning experience of their students.