



INSTRUCTION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION • 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, D C 20036 • (202) 822-7350

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March 8, 1982

The Honorable Donald J. Senese
Assistant Secretary
Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Don:

Your technology and education meeting on January 31 was a well-planned, useful, open, and much appreciated exchange of views. Good show.

I was doubly pleased. First, that you invited my employer. And second, that I had the good fortune to represent at your meeting the world's largest, independent, professional union. Also, of course, it was good to meet you and to learn something about your plans in the area of technology and education.

Sorry this has taken me so long, but during our visit last January, I did promise to send you the enclosed documents: an NEA policy paper developed last year by our Special Committee on Instructional Technology, and a re-print of Sharon Robinson's "Teachers and Computers."

Finally, Don, as you and your associates make plans for your national conference here this summer on technology and education, I hope you will include some of the concerns of classroom teachers, many of which were put on the record during your January 21 meeting. As a matter of fact, I would like to suggest that you consider NEA's Sharon Robinson as a speaker or panel member at your conference this summer. She is very good, and I'll be happy to send you some of her more recent statements on technology if you'd like to have them.

With thanks and all good wishes.

Your very truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bob Snider", written over a horizontal line.

Robert C. Snider
Professional Development Specialist

RCS:lr

enc.

**NEA Special Committee
on
Instructional Technology**

REPORT

**Presented to the 60th Representative Assembly
of the National Education Association**

July 4-7, 1981 Minneapolis, Minnesota

(Copies of this document are available from Instruction and Professional Development, National Education Association, 1201 16th Street, N.W. Washington, DC 20036.)

No matter how it may eventually be described, instructional technology now seems to involve three rather separate but interdependent kinds of activity:

1. The adaptation and use of new technology as an integral part of the process of instruction
2. Changing the curriculum to include the role of technology in today's world, i.e., technology as a subject of study
3. Anticipating, planning for, and changing the role of teachers in the instructional process as a result of such technology transfer.

The quality of definition depends on an understanding of what is to be defined. It is a conclusion of the committee that the idea of a technology of instruction has yet to become operational in a full and practical sense.

At the same time, however, the committee is convinced that the current impact of new technology on instruction gives increased impetus to the prospect of a full-blown, universal system of instructional technology. *The role and influence of teachers in shaping the future of education in a technological society will depend on the ability of the teaching profession to anticipate, plan for, and give direction to such change.* The recommendations of the Committee on Instructional Technology are based on this assumption.

Teachers and Technology

If the problems of new technology were limited to understanding and learning the operation of machines, there would be no need for this committee and its recommendations. Were this the case, the potential of technology in education would be barren, indeed, and teachers would increasingly leave the profession or abandon hope and resign themselves to becoming subhuman cogs in a mechanistic system of instruction. Nothing, of course, could be further from the humanistic traditions of the teaching profession.

In its coming involvement with a technology of instruction, the profession will be faced once again with the challenge of leadership—by example and by effective communication—the challenge of convincing the public that education is much more than treating students like so many Pavlovian dogs, to be conditioned and programmed into docile acceptance of a do-it-yourself blueprint of the Good Life.

The problems associated with technology, in the final analysis, are problems of freedom and control. Whose freedom? Whose control? As a result of its study, the committee urges the Association to view the problems and promises of instructional technology

not as a single issue but rather as a broad continuum of issues affecting all aspects of education and teaching—from purposes to products, from political pragmatism to professional practice. Most problems produced by technology have to do with the human use of human beings. In his book, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Doubleday, 1978), William Barrett observes that—

Human creativity exceeds the mechanisms it invents, and is required even for their intelligent direction. . . . If we try to flee from our human condition into the computer we only meet ourselves there.

The Committee on Instructional Technology has tentatively identified many areas of interest and concern for classroom teachers. Here are some examples from the committee records:

1. Many school administrators still use the old palaver about the classroom being a "labor-intensive, cottage industry" and still talk without end about "cost-effectiveness" in education. Some consultants, however, have sounded a more logical note by pointing out that there is really no rational way of assigning cost-effectiveness to learning gains. What, for example, is a two-month gain in fifth-grade reading worth? Until such questions can be answered, there may be little point in imposing a "factory-production" model on the school via new technology.
2. The image of classroom teachers in relation to technology seems now to be much more positive than in past years, and even superintendents are now talking in public about the need for major continuing education activities for teachers in relation to computers and other aspects of new technology.
 - a. All faculty contracts at Oral Roberts University require that teachers be willing to "learn about" and "use educational technology."
 - b. One national authority has reported that teachers who know how to use computers in the classroom are in great demand. "Do everything you can to keep them on your staff," he observed. "Treat them very nicely."
3. In terms of equalizing educational opportunity, the gains of the past 15 years may be wiped out in 2 or 3 years by the present uneven use of microcomputers for instruction, largely in selected and privileged schools. The committee has also noted that a growing number of more affluent students (in secondary and elementary schools) have their own microcomputers at home.
4. Another point of view about the use of computers in the classroom has to do with the management of