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March 1986

Volume 43

Number 6

Educational Leadership is intended primarily for leaders in elementary, middle, and secondary education but is also for anyone interested in curriculum, instruction, supervision, and leadership in schools. ASCD publications present a variety of viewpoints. The views expressed or implied in this publication are not necessarily official positions of the Association. Copyright © 1986 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.

ISSN 0013-1784
Mar. 86 Stock No. 611-86006

Using the Sticks We Have

It is the stick in your hand
That kills the snake—
Not the stick you wish you had
—*Old African Proverb*

How far we've come from this primitive approach to tool use. Imagine ... immediate problems as criteria for tool use! And I'll bet they picked up the first available stick, too.

From our advanced perspective we can wonder whether these early people ever specialized enough to have their own "stick-ware" developers and purveyors—people who had intimate knowledge of the strength and beauty of wood and therefore could see its potentials for a wide range of uses—housing, furniture, artistic carvings, and even fuel? If these specialists did exist, they must have been frustrated when they contrasted their sense of the medium's potential with the rather unsophisticated job of snake killing. Did they ever figure out how to convince those who are up to their waist in snakes that they should be more interested in furniture and art?

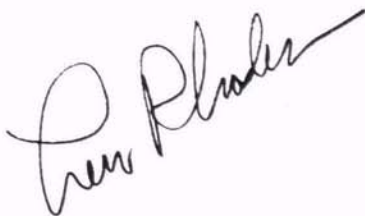
If we can judge by the articles in this issue, education's technology "revolution" is approaching a new stage, one the early Africans understood, but that earlier technologies such as TV never quite reached. Quality of technology use is beginning to be defined by the importance of the problem to which the tool is applied. That it has taken us as long to get around to fundamental concepts of tool use is understandable considering how often the public perceives and supports new technologies as tools for students—our clients, rather than for educators—the workers.

Appropriately, some articles in this issue deal with theory and potential future developments, but the majority report on, or examine, the "snakes" of

today: the conditions in the context of schooling that educators encounter as they try to fulfill their daily purposes. Sherry Turkle discusses the problem of providing teachers sufficient experience in using the tools they are expected to teach with. Madian extends these ideas as he explains the use of word processing in the curriculum. Mojkowski suggests that principals focus on their own persistent problems so as to find ways that technology can serve as a tool for both school effectiveness and expanded instructional leadership. Articles by West, Wall, and Volker describe how technology can be applied to broader curriculum delivery and training problems in urban and rural areas. Lesgold addresses the issues of preparing students to make better use of modern tools.

If we may judge these writings as indicative of a new wave in the evolution of technology, then we in education face an immediate future of excitement and challenge. Our task:

discover how to use
the sticks we have
to rid ourselves of
the snakes keeping us from using
the sticks we wish we had. □



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