Heinich and Instructional Technology

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Heinich's 1984 article “The Proper Study of Instructional Technology” begins with an interesting warning to instructional technologists. In his warning, he advises that the article should not be read by anyone other than an instructional technologist, and that if persons outside of the field were to read the article, it would “[strip] you of your behavioral objectives” (p. 4). This comment is interesting to note because: 1) Heinich admits that persons other than instructional technologists would never agree to his standpoint, 2) he is dividing and disconnecting the instructional technologist from the facilitators, consumers, and customers he requires, and 3) he is indicating that the instructional technologist’s behavior and objectives would be ultimately modified and altered if his superiors were to read the article. This, in my opinion, is not only an arrogant view of the specialist and the field, it demonstrates a lack of interest in collaboration and cooperation with the educational institution, and acknowledges a lack of self-confidence and security as a profession.

Thus, by only reading the first paragraph of the article, my skepticism developed, and grew as I read on. The disconnection and egotistical position towards any profession will only hinder its progress and reliability. This said, the housing of instructional technology programs apart from the colleges of education will hinder instructional technology’s growth and advancement. As a separate entity independent from its catalyst or end user, it will become more detached and reach its ultimate demise. Instructional programs housed separate from the institution they are serving will remove them from the reality they need to survive.

Instructional Technology is indispensable. It is indispensable because it facilitates and enhances the quality of education. The progress of technology in our daily lives demands that education follow the pattern and progress of our lifestyles. Education cannot afford to ignore the importance and usefulness of technology in effective instruction, nor will it do so. Leadership in the field must come from the institution and the educators, the ones who employ the technology. Who better knows what works and what does not? Not all instructional technologies employed
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triumph, and all instructional technologies have the potential for improvement. Nothing is stagnant and works forever; with time, change must occur.

It is the educator who should provide the leadership and knowledge in instructional technology. The educator must advance alongside the environment around him. The task of an educator necessitates adaptation to environmental reality. If not, education will stultify.

There is no way that technology can replace teachers. The teacher will never be replaced by instructional technology. It is not even accurate to believe so. The teacher is and will always be the provider and the principal at the helm of education. Technology is an invaluable tool that will facilitate learning and add to its efficiency, but never will it dominate over the teacher.

This is not to say that Heinich's article is totally without substance and worth. Much of Heinich's comments are worthwhile and worth mentioning. Heinich's comment that "comprehensive use of technology can result in better instruction in schools more quickly than can be achieved solely by training teachers" is true (Heinich, 1984, p. 11). Teachers that complement instruction with technology will achieve better results and more efficient learning than those who do not. Heinich also states that the "survival" of instructional technology depends on "establishing our own intellectual identity" (p. 11). An instructional technologist who collaborates directly with the teacher has his own identity, and that identity depends on the feedback from the teacher in order to be reinforced and maintained. Here, the key is collaboration with, and not separation from the educational institution!

As Heinich states, instructional technology has its significant advantages. Due to its constancy, it is replicable, reliable, more permanent and organized than traditional instruction. This is one of the reasons that Instructional Technology will prevail. It is efficient and effective. But a teacher cannot be compared to a crafts person as Heinich attempts to illustrate. A teacher interacts with his subjects and adjusts his instruction based on the feedback from the students. This adjustment occurs during interaction, and influences future association with the students. Heinich comments, "Today's teaching profession has certain characteristics of the craft guilds" (p. 16). This reference compares teachers to crafts makers which, in my opinion, is flawed.
Teachers produce their lessons based on the needs of the students. The craftsman needs no such interaction with his customers in order to continue producing his crafts, although he may not be able to sell them if he fails to consider the marketer. Essentially, there is no need for any interaction between the craftsman and the consumer. However, there is a fundamental need for interaction between the teacher and the student. Heinich's analogy of teachers as crafts persons is inaccurate; the teacher can more correctly be compared to both the crafts person and the crafts marketer because not only does he create, but he also has direct contact with the customers (the students). The instructional technologist does not have that contact with the students, and creates based on the needs and stipulations of the educator.

Heinich admits that “it is almost impossible for someone to analyze critically an activity in which he or she is presently engaged” (p. 18). However, this is exactly what Heinich is attempting to do in his article. Heinich is critically analyzing the position of the Instructional Technologist (himself) within the educational system. If he follows his own advice, he obviously is not the most apt to objectively scrutinize this field.

The teaching profession cannot be compared to the medical profession, crafts persons, manufacturers, pharmacists, chemical engineers, or lawyers. Simplifying and generalizing the task of an educator loses touch with the essence and uniqueness of education. Instructional Technology and education depend on each other for livelihood and growth. The teacher must assume the responsibility of either collaborating closely with the Instructional Technologist in developing effective lessons, or assuming the skill herself. Instructional technology and pedagogy must work hand-in-hand with consistence, realism, and innovation.
References