HUMANIZING THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION:
A RE-EXAMINATION

JOHN W. MURPHY

Abstract — Educators are currently attempting to integrate computers into the classroom, in order to humanize their use. The strategies that have been adopted, however, are primarily logistical and ignore the philosophy that underpins this technology. It is argued in this paper that educational technology will not be humanized until it is understood to be sustained by a philosophy other than technological rationality, and thus is provided with a human base. The 'life-world' (Lebenswelt) is identified as a proper foundation for technology, because technological rationality is illustrated to be a modality of human expression. When this is the case, technology is placed in the service of humankind, for it cannot be conceived as the genesis of personal freedom.

Zusammenfassung — Gegenwärtig sind Pädagogen um die Integration von Computern ins Klassenzimmer bemüht, um deren Gebrauch zu humanisieren. Die dabei angewandten Strategien sind jedoch primär logistisch und ignorieren die theoretischen Voraussetzungen, auf die sich diese Technologie stützt. In diesem Bericht wird argumentiert, daß die Bildungstechnologie so lange nicht humanisiert wird, bis sie nicht in einem anderen Sinn als dem der technologischen Rationalität verbunden wird und auf eine humane Grundlage gestellt ist. Die Lebenswelt wird als ein wahres Fundament der Technologie identifiziert, da technologische Rationalität als eine Modalität menschlichen Ausdrucks dargestellt wird. Wenn dies der Fall ist, wird die Technologie in den Dienst der Menschheit gestellt, da sie nicht als Nemesis persönlicher Freiheit angesehen werden kann.

Résument — Les pédagogues, aujourd'hui, tentent de faire entrer l'ordinateur dans la salle de classe, afin de ramener son utilisation à l'échelle humaine. Cependant, les stratégies adoptées demeurent de l'ordre de la logistique et ignore tout de la philosophie qui étaye cette technologie. Dans cet article, il est argué que l'on ne saurait humaniser la technologie au sein de l'enseignement, tant qu'il n'est pas entendu qu'une philosophie autre que la rationalité technologique la sous-tend, la dotant ainsi d'un fondement humain; l'environnement naturel (Lebenswelt) constitue la véritable base de la technologie car la rationalité ne représente qu'une modalité de l'expression humaine. Dans ce cas, la technologie est placée au service de l'humanité et ne saurait être conçue comme sanction de la liberté individuelle.
Introduction

The idea that introducing computers into the classroom may have a dehumanizing effect is clearly not a new one. Over the past years many writers have suggested that this technology may destroy the humanistic character of the typical classroom (Gordon, 1966; Fox and DeVault, 1974). Technology, it is thought, is to do with machines, and education with human beings. But although technology is viewed with suspicion by many educators, there have been numerous strategies proposed for its integration into the classroom, thereby inaugurating a kind of rapprochement between the individual and the learning machine. In other words, the attempt is under way to humanize the use of technology in education.

The issue that is addressed in this article pertains to the image of technology held by educators. Specifically, the question is asked whether their view of technology includes an understanding of its philosophical principles, which is essential if it is to be humanized. If it does not, then the prospects are indeed not at all favourable for the humanistic employment of technology. Technical competence alone is not sufficient in this regard, because the problem is of an essentially philosophical nature.

Technology and Instruction

The dehumanizing effects of technology are described typically in sociological terms (Bjorn-Anderson and Rasmussen, 1980). The introduction of technology into a classroom is thought to violate the sanctity of the student-teacher relationship, altering the teacher's role in order to accommodate what are believed to be shifting aims of education (Ehramann, 1984). As technology begins to mediate the educational process, the mastery of techniques becomes centrally important to the acquisition of knowledge. Teachers therefore, must be first and foremost technical experts, while only secondarily carrying out their usual role as guide, instructor, companion, and confidant. It is thought that teaching machines will alter the classroom to the extent that its human character will be effaced as a result of fracturing both a school's internal environment and its curriculum. For, as the mastery of techniques becomes paramount, a holistic approach to education is presumed to be difficult to sustain.

On the other hand, technology is thought to diminish the human content of knowledge, because the creative or interpretive side of education may be obscured as a result of the emphasis placed on the logistics of learning. Additionally, many educators are concerned that technology subtly conveys a scientific image of the social world which discounts the importance of the