Letter to Teacher Educators


Dear Teacher Educator:

I classify myself as a teacher educator—as a teacher of teachers. I specialize in all aspects of computer-related technology in education. Often I am embarrassed to admit this, because I feel that our teacher education system is doing such a poor job in preparing teachers to deal with computer-related technology.

I routinely work with graduate students who know far more about the use of computer-related technology in schools than do their College of Education faculty. I teach in a College of Education where most of the teachers who graduate are not adequately prepared to deal with the current level of use of computers in schools. I imagine that many of you face this same situation.

It surprises and saddens me that our teacher training institutions are doing so poorly in dealing with the onrush of computer-related technology. College faculty are bright, well educated, and strongly encouraged to keep up in their fields. However, on average they have failed in providing leadership for the major restructuring of our schools that is so sorely needed. There are many aspects to restructuring, and technology is only one component. For example, cooperative learning, multidisciplinary and team-based instruction, portfolio-based assessment, and site-based management are all quite independent of technology. However, all are facilitated by and facilitate use of computer-related technology.

Here are a few requirements that I believe the faculty of every College of Education should immediately lay upon themselves and their students.

1. Every preservice educator in a teacher training program should do at least one major multimedia project each term, where the multimedia include a range of computer-based technologies. We are rapidly moving toward a school environment in which all students will routinely do multimedia projects using computers, CD-ROM, videodisc, camcorders, VCRs, scanners, and other computer-related facilities. These students need teachers who are comfortable with and experienced in such a learning environment.

2. At least one term each year, and preferably each term, each teacher education faculty member should directly supervise a number of students who are doing multimedia term projects. Every faculty member must learn to help their students teach in a multimedia learning environment. It is not appropriate that faculty members should remain inept in the use of the tools that precollege students and their teachers routinely use.

3. Every College of Education faculty member and every preservice teacher should learn to make routine and effective use of computerized information retrieval and communication systems. Students and faculty should routinely communicate with each other via electronic mail. Computers are a powerful
aid to problem solving and to information storage, processing, and retrieval. Many problems can be solved by retrieving information about how someone else has already solved similar problems. Many problems can be solved by appropriate use of information that is now stored in computerized databases. In these and other ways, computers bring a new dimension to problem solving and are a unique new aid to higher-order cognitive processes.

4. At least once each year, and preferably once each term, each teacher education faculty member should present a unit of study in which the primary mode of instruction is computer-based multimedia. We know that teachers teach in the way that they were taught. Without appropriate role models, preservice teachers will continue the pattern of instruction that currently exists in our schools. College of Education faculty must provide leadership in breaking this pattern.

5. Every College of Education should provide its students with substantial experience in learning from and teaching with Integrated Learning Systems and distance education. Computer-assisted learning and distance education are powerful additions to our instructional delivery system. We must prepare teachers to make appropriate use of this technology.

Almost every College of Education already has enough computer-related facilities to implement the above ideas. Many have adequate faculty to quickly bootstrap themselves into implementation of these ideas. Others will need to make extensive use of computer-knowledgeable teachers from local schools.

The International Society for Technology in Education has a mission of working to improve our educational system. This professional society stands ready to help you as you work on dealing with the types of issues addressed in this letter.

Sincerely yours,