

The Future of Computer Technology in K-12 Education

American business was not able to take advantage of the power of computer technology until many of its basic practices changed, Mr. Bennett points out, and this is equally true in education. Until schools can permit a major alteration in the way teaching is carried on, they must necessarily continue to miss out on the improvement that computer technology can bring.

BY FREDERICK BENNETT

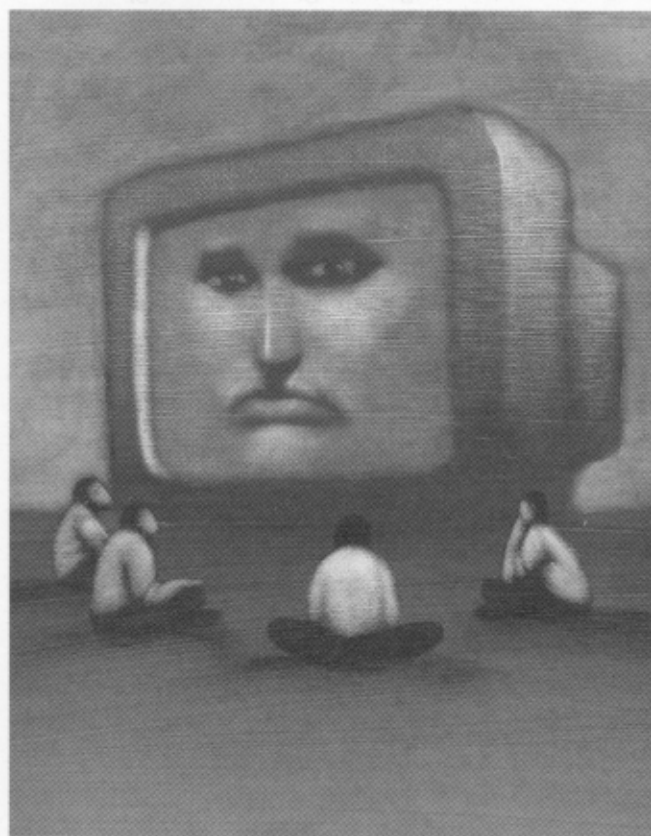
IN A PIECE published in February 2001, syndicated columnist George Will used Hippocrates and Socrates to illustrate the difficulties in contemporary American schooling. "If you were ill and could miraculously be treated by Hippocrates or by a young graduate of Johns Hopkins medical school, with his modern technologies and techniques, you would choose the latter. But if you could choose to have your child taught either by Socrates or by a freshly minted holder of a degree in education, full of the latest pedagogical theories and techniques? Socrates, please."

Teaching has always been more art than science and depends heavily on the talents of the practitioner. Some teachers are outstanding; some are not. In medicine, Hippocrates probably had more innate abilities than many of the new physicians, but his successors have the advantage of modern technology. Teachers, however, rely on basically the same approach that instructors have used throughout history, and, consequently, they must count on their own native skills. This situation presents a difficulty for education because exceptional instructors are in the minority. We see this easily if we think back over the teachers that we ourselves had in our school career. The number we remember as superb is not large.

THE PRESENT

Education today, as always, depends on the luck of the

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draw — who gets the good teachers and who gets the others? Meanwhile, technology has become a powerful force in the world. Theoretically, it might change education, just as it has made the new physician better equipped than Hippocrates and has brought dazzling benefits to innumerable other areas of society. Education authorities apparently hoped for comparable results because they have

