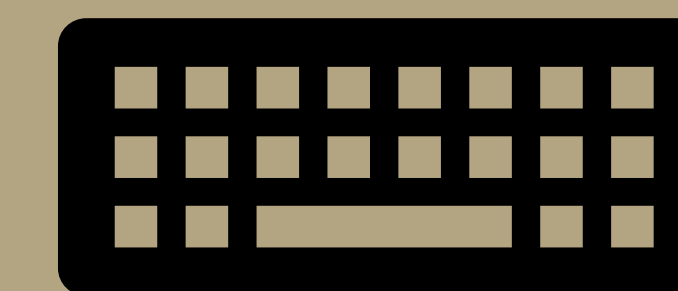




Electric Learning: The Edison Responsive Environment



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Abstract

Beginning in October 1969, Millersville University (then Millersville State College) operated a "talking typewriter" program at the now-defunct Eastern State School. The goals of my research were to understand how the talking typewriter worked, and if the program was successful in teaching neurodivergent students how to read and write.

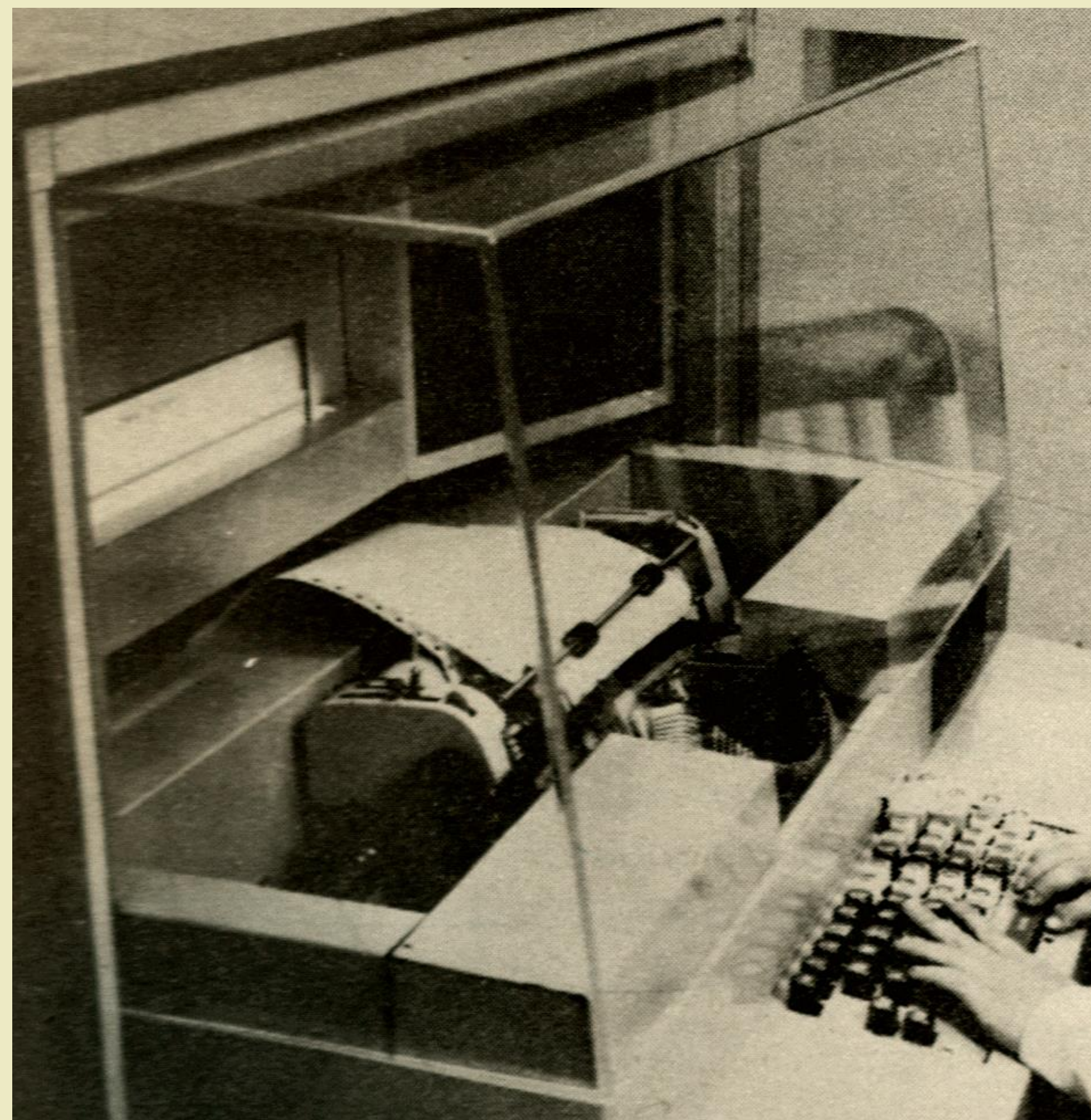
Methodology

Since this program was administered by Millersville University, I searched the University's digital archives for mentions of "talking typewriter", as well as its official name, the "Edison Responsive Environment".

As of March 2025, I was unable to find any documents from Eastern State School that were accessible to the public.

Connections to Millersville

- Various faculty helped when preparing to install typewriters (Drs. Osman, Laynor, Zerby, Champa)
- Project overseen by Dr. W. Richard Kettering, former Chair of Special Education
- Typewriter program director was Dr. Arlene Bucher, Assistant Professor of Special Education
- One component of a greater educational partnership between Millersville State College and Eastern State School, which lasted from 1967 to 1975



A photograph of the Edison Responsive Environment. Image taken from Millersville State College Faculty Exchange, 15 Oct. 1969, p. 1.

Typewriters

- Edison Responsive Environment; commonly called "talking typewriters"
- Invented by Dr. Omar Khayyan Moore
- Cost \$40,000, plus extra for program materials, in 1969
- Piano-sized booths with electric typewriter, voice recorder, speaker, viewing screen, and projector
- Typewriter keys were color-coded to aid in identifying specific letters
- One-way glass around booths; children couldn't see outside, but attendants could monitor users

Outcomes

- Within 8 months of the program's start, students reportedly improved at an average of almost an entire grade level
- Eastern State School's typewriters were filmed by Time-Life in 1970 for an educational film
- Collection of poetry authored by children in the program was published by Millersville State college in 1971

Further Questions

- How did the Edison Responsive Environment influence future teaching methods and equipment?
- What were the long-term effects of the program? Did students continue to improve after they stopped using the talking typewriters?

Resources

The Snapper, issues from 29 Nov. 1967, 15 Oct. 1969, and 13 Aug. 1975.
Millersville State College Faculty Exchange, issues from 15 Oct. 1969, 18 Mar. 1970, and 17 Mar. 1971.

Acknowledgements

This project is part of the Millersville Institutional Legacy Initiative:
<https://library.millersville.edu/archives/MILI>.
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