

**Shepperd, Josh, University of Wisconsin-Madison. “Understanding (Educational) Media: Marshall McLuhan at the NAEB, 1958-1960”**

After receiving a grant from the National Defense Education Act in 1958, the National Association for Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) invited Marshall McLuhan to produce a syllabus for eleventh graders in ‘media awareness’ (Fishman, 2006), to be edited by University of Illinois professor and NAEB Executive Director Harry Skornia, with a consulting staff that included NAEB president William Harley, Gilbert Seldes, and the management training staff at General Electric. While the NAEB were ultimately unsatisfied with what they viewed as his impractical results, McLuhan’s conceptual discoveries during this time culminated in the writing of his opus *Understanding Media* (1964). The Wisconsin Historical Society holds the entirety of the NAEB archives, including three folders of primary documents detailing the intellectual development of McLuhan’s research, ultimately released in 1960 in a very limited edition under the title: *Report on Project in Understanding New Media*. Early drafts of McLuhan’s project proposal, hand written notes, internal memos, and most revealingly, correspondence between McLuhan and Harry Skornia remain extant. Utilizing these primary sources, this presentation examines: 1) how Marshall McLuhan’s research in educational technology between 1958 and 1960 served as a constitutive influence in the development of his ‘medium theory’, and 2) how McLuhan’s involvement with the NAEB may be understood in context with a long-running attempt to define the conceptual parameters of educational media going back to the early 1920s.

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