The Internet is being pushed at educators as the “must have” educational tool of the 90’s. All states except Queensland are pledging to connect all schools by 2000 (Wilson, 1996). While most of us, myself included, welcome any new initiatives in our impoverished education systems, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Internet, for educational purposes, is just a teaching resource and not a panacea for all that is wrong with education nor an end in itself!

Like all innovations and new teaching resources this new technology needs support if teachers are to implement it successfully. NSW announced recently that it would be in-servicing 15000 teachers on the use of computer technology from February 97 (McIntosh, 1996), and while I cannot comment on the effectiveness or scope of the training planned, at least it indicates that they are acknowledging the biggest stumbling block to the use of the technology in education, teachers.

The majority of our teachers were educated and trained in a pre-computer world, one in which the education system had changed little for generations, with the most dramatic technology improvements in education being the OHP, VCR and photocopier. None of these technologies required whole new strategies for teaching, learning curves or finding that your students know more about the technology than you. Having the students more technologically literate is a situation that many technologically illiterate teachers find hard to deal with and it is a situation which will occur more and more. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that there are now 2.5 million computers in Australian homes compared with 600,000, two years ago (Wilson, 1996). Most of these computers go into homes that have children, 51% of Australian households that have children have a personal computer and 7% have access to the Internet (McIntosh, 1995). Given the explosive growth of the Internet during the last twelve months, 7% Internet access would have to be very conservative. At this rate of growth Australian homes are leading our schools in the move to technology.

The late 1990’s are proving to be a time of change for our schools, and we need to realise that to have any lasting educational value, putting new boxes on desks is not enough, it is our teachers’ “skill base” that needs the biggest upgrade.

The theme of our next issue will be, The Computer from Cradle to Year 8. We welcome your contributions relating to the use of computers in primary and pre-primary education.

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