EDITORIAL

The Computer from the Cradle to Year 8 - Use of Computers in Pre-primary & Primary Education

As a parent I have watched my children grow up with the various brands of computers and I still see them "play" but now with a purpose because of the school work they have to complete. They have an assignment to do and they know they can type out their project using the computer as a support tool. If they have research to do they use the Internet or the Encarta CD-ROM encyclopedia using the computer as a resource. They try out the new software I bring home from school and they will play and discover what they can or cannot do by using the computer in exploration and control mode. They communicate through email with their friends and overseas penpals using the computer as a link tool. They use the keyboarding package, the Japanese language tutor and the spelling practice program using the computer as a tutor.

I see the strategies for learning and the modes of computer use have not changed from the first computer I bought for home which was an Apple IIe. At that time there was a lot of debate about the harmful effects of computers being used with young children. However, as computers have evolved (we then had an XT, upgraded to an AT, then moved onto an MAC LC and now have a MAC LC 630 with a video card and multimedia capabilities, CD ROM and Internet connection), the hardware is faster, flashier and can do some wonderful things. Today CD-ROM software has great graphics and sound appropriate for the "multimedia" world of children. The debate about the computer has evolved from fear to accolades for how wonderful this technology can be as another media which our children can explore, play with, analyse, sort and download information with. Very few businesses today are without some sort of electronic data processing or storing. But are we as teachers preparing our children for an electronic world in our classroom? Are teachers using the computer in the five modes of computer use in learning? (see URL: http://owl.qut.edu.au/acce/frame/frame.html). Does there need to be a change in the culture of teaching and what we as educators expect to gain from the use of technology in our classroom?

I have seen, in ten years, that things have come and gone in a cycle. As Cuban (1986) suggests schools usually go through a consistent cyclical pattern in their response to new technologies, a pattern of exhilaration, scientific credibility, disappointment, and blame. Much money has been spent on hardware in schools and putting "boxes" on desks. Some schools are doing great things with technology but many teachers are still wondering what they should do and whether they should do anything at all.

Now in Western Australia another twenty million is to be spent in the next three years to support five projects, one being the Internet in Schools project where every state school is to have an Internet connection by the end of 1997. As I talk to schools and teachers I try to relate to my philosophy. People must see how they can use the technology to help them accomplish goals that they themselves define as crucial to their success. The most 'successful' teachers are 'orchestraters', who integrate and coordinate activities with other means of instruction. In this issue a number of classroom teachers talk about how they have achieved this. How they use technology in pre-primary and primary classrooms from low-end technology, to high-end technology, from antiquated computers, to adventure games, multimedia, robots and the Internet. This is a "grass roots" approach, a ground swell as we, the teacher, the educator, the facilitator, use the technology for a purpose, a reason to achieve our teaching and learning aims. This change in culture to use the technology comes from careful planning for a purpose just as our children are already doing from home, given the opportunities.

Contributions are due by August 30th.

This issue's editorial has been written by Sue Trinidad who is the early childhood and primary expert on our editorial team. The theme of the next issue will be: "From Gutenberg to the Classroom Press - School publishing, Both Paper and Electronic."

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