EDITORIAL
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IN 1988 WE REFLECTED on the past 200 years of European settlement in Australia and began to increase our knowledge of our country’s history. The past is interesting, and it is important to see an overview of our achievements and our failures. Now, it is time to look to the future. The future has many exciting possibilities especially with technological advances being made. But to achieve our nation’s full potential, we need to make learners of all ages one of our major considerations.

We have experienced two decades of computers in schools. Computers have been used for simulations, drill and practice, to entertain and for wordprocessing. Students appear to enjoy their learning using the computer, and some of the research that has been undertaken shows that computers have an important role to play, especially in helping students with learning difficulties.

We are now ready to take the next step: to use the computer as a tool to give students the opportunity to learn by discovery and enquiry. When we asked Australian teachers who use computers to write about recent innovations in Computer Education, the themes that emerged show us the direction in which computer education is moving.

Students need a chance to experiment and computers provide the ideal medium. Computers give students a chance to make mistakes, and students gain valuable educational insight because of it. Computers give students immediate feedback, and no one else in the room needs to know that a mistake has been made.

Computers are a rewarding way of empowering children. This issue describes ways in which caring teachers have discovered new ways to help physically and mentally disabled children to gain a richer life and raise self esteem using new technologies. Several writers have suggested that it is time to rewrite curricula which will make better use of computers, rather than attempt to fit computers into existing courses. There is also need to re-examine our teaching methodology and classroom management skills. Discovery learning does not mean that we toss out all our existing software. It is refreshing to see the number of people who have taken another look at Logo.

There is a continuing need to recognise that the essential ingredient of education is a facility with language. Wordprocessors have helped a number of students express themselves more fluently. Use of wordprocessors and communications packages are making it possible for all students to practice language skills in new and exciting ways. Communication technologies are increasingly important, and new methodologies will be implemented to take full advantage of this exciting new medium. Distance and physical disability are no longer such handicaps to learning. Considerable progress was made when it was recognised that computers were more than a mathematical toy — so much so that computing innovation in the mathematics classroom and science laboratory has been slow in recent years. This edition of the Australian Educational Computing Journal indicates new directions emerging in the use of computers in classrooms.

Many educators have watched the interaction between thinking students and the artificial intelligence of machines. These observations have given us new insights into the way students learn and respond to different modes of instruction. It is now time to measure these observations using much tighter research based techniques. The computer will continue to grow as a powerful educational research tool.

The future is with students in our educational institutions. It is the responsibility of us all that we give our young people every opportunity to learn. Although some facts need to be learned, the essential ingredient of education must be to learn how to learn. By teaching students how to learn we are equipping them for the future — one in which everyone will need to be open to change.