For the past ten years many of us have been exploring the use of computers in our classrooms. When using computers, our lessons are perceived to be more relevant to an information age, our students have renewed enthusiasm in our subjects and many concepts which were once difficult to teach can now be explored much more efficiently. Our continuing mission has been to show fellow teachers how easy it is to follow this example.

There have been many subtle rewards to those who have shared our enthusiasm. Some of the most valued benefits have arisen from our need to re-examine our teaching methodologies and our classroom management techniques. Once placed in a non-traditional teaching environment, it is easy to justify further changes which may have little to do with using computers! These experiences have given us confidence to experiment with different approaches to all of our teaching.

Those of us who have supported our Computer Education Groups, have also enjoyed the rare experience of working with teachers from a wide variety of subject disciplines and age groups. High school mathematics teachers have learned to value the benefits of computers to grade-four language arts. University lecturers have discovered that Logo can be more than just another computing language.

Sadly, there are some particularly vocal individuals who have not had the benefit of these experiences. A few very influential people have shaped narrow visions of the ways computers can be used to enhance learning in their subject area at a particular level. Any use of computers for a different purpose, particularly in earlier years, is perceived as unhelpful, even distracting, from the “real purpose of computers in education”. Moreover, if other institutions or faculty groups are competing for funds, their efforts are seen to be “wasteful of limited resources” and their “ill conceived views” must be publicly opposed. Unfortunately, such critics are the very people who seem least willing to avail themselves of the opportunities for challenging and critical debate inherent in our organisations.

There is one aspect of curriculum which makes us most vulnerable to such criticisms. Except for the more obvious subjects such as Computing Science, the use of computers is rarely written into course requirements. How could it be? So long as one school was able to afford many more machines than another, questions of social justice ensured that computers had to be non-essential. But now it would be difficult to find a disadvantaged school that does not have access to computers. Most complaints now come from schools in relatively affluent suburbs, whose parent groups once purchased machines which are now thought to be obsolete.

Members who read Cathie Sherwood’s article in Volume 3 Number 1 of this Journal will recall that she recognised that it was time for “new curricula to keep pace with technology”. In Volume 3 Number 2, David Woodhouse explained some of the implications of the Blackburn report. Fall-out from that report is having revolutionary effects on post compulsory curricula in the southern states and the influence is spreading across the continent. Most states are engaged in major re-writes of senior curricula.

And so the stage is set. Schools do have adequate equipment. Curriculum reform is taking place. New curriculum statements must recognise the value of using computers and require their use where value is recognised. If we are not prepared to make an effort to achieve curriculum recognition then we are vulnerable to those who would scoff at us “using our toys to amuse children” and we are vulnerable to those who see a more urgent need for limited finances in a most expensive enterprise. We have spent ten years learning how to use computers in education and enthusing our peers. It is now time to enthuse our leaders and incorporate that experience into the official documents of our educative systems.

See you at WCCE’90