

Technology versus teachers?

Maelor Himbury reports a traffic jam on the information superhighway—send help

One of the quaint aspects of science fiction in the fifties and sixties was its blind faith in the virtues of technology. It was taken for granted that people in the future would blithely hand over responsibility for most aspects of their life to robots and other machines without consideration of possible social consequences. There are similar attitudes behind the Victo-

rian government's *Schools of the Future* program.

We have seen a considerable downsizing of staffing in education while at the same time extra funds have been allocated to technology—including computers, faxes and CD-ROMs for administration and satellite dishes for the delivery of in-service information. However, the dictum stands—garbage in, garbage

out. I saw one of the VCE programs that came through on the satellite and it involved someone sitting in front of a camera reading a script in a dull monotone. It was fifties television using nineties technology. In fact, it would have been more useful, and cheaper, to have photocopied the text and circulated it. The point I'm making is that it is people and the quality of their ideas that make good education, and good business, and not just the media that they use.

Education has not really changed much since the days of Socrates—the really important thing is the relationship between two human beings, the teacher and the student. Few people who look back on their education pay much attention to the technology that was used to present information. What they remember most vividly is the ability of teachers to communicate their ideas.

This point has particular relevance to libraries. Few areas in the school have been so affected by technology. We get our cataloguing downloaded from SCIS. Circulation

Schools and Internet

Michele Huston is justifiably excited by this new educational opportunity

An exciting new information opportunity for the education sector is opening up for Kindergarten to year 12 (K-12) students, with their introduction to Internet.

The use of computing and telecommunications as a classroom tool is rapidly capturing the imagination of both students and teachers alike. A situation where many individuals (both adults and other students) and resources can be invited into the classroom environment quickly and easily will inevitably change the educational process.

The primary means of communication on the Internet is electronic mail (e-mail). Using e-mail, students can publish their writing, question a specialist or communicate with other students worldwide. A more recent development in the telecommunications environment has been the development of software to transmit video over the internet. Cornell University's Information Technology organisation (CIT) has developed a Macintosh video-conferencing program called CU-SeeMe which is freely available on the Internet. Using the software, students in Australia can communicate in real time with other students overseas. The students are able to see their own image on their Macintosh screen along with the images of the students overseas. The CU-SeeMe software can display up to 8 image windows at one time.

The United States National Science Foundation recognises the potential for this application in the K-12 environment and has funded an initiative to make video conferencing a reality in the classroom. This initiative has been appropriately named the Global

Schoolhouse Project.

At the 1994 Australian Science Festival students from Wanniasa Hills Primary School participated in the first Global Schoolhouse conference for Oceanside, California, using the CU-SeeMe software. The Wanniasa Hills students have been studying aspects of living in space with a view to sharing their experiences and exchanging ideas across the Internet. The students were also able to question a scientist from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, USA.

Opportunities such as this, where students in one country can exchange information with students in other countries, and with specialists in every field of study, are an exciting new application of the world-wide Internet. ■

Students from Wanniasa Hills Primary School accessing the Internet via a computer at the school

