

# Editorial

This issue of *delta-k* focuses on microcomputers. Certainly the number of these machines in Alberta classrooms has dramatically increased during the past 12 months and will continue to increase.

In this issue, a detailed report of the October meeting of the Alberta Society for Computers in Education is provided. Stephen Kemp describes Apple Pilot, and Gloria Cathcart talks about her attempts to involve parents in her computer literacy program. My daughter, Cori Lyn Cathcart, wrote a report on computers as a Grade 5 assignment. I have taken the liberty of reproducing her report here.

## Shop Carefully for that Computer

Many of us eagerly awaited the release of the School Book Branch's price list for computer hardware and software. These prices were finally released in early December. However, our anticipation quickly turned to disappointment. Not only had prices not been significantly reduced as we had anticipated, but they were considerably higher through the School Book Branch than through local computer stores. For example, figures obtained from one large school system indicated that the complete dual disk system could be bought through local stores on an open tender basis for \$715.28 less than the price quoted by the School Book Branch. Presumably, on a closed tender basis the difference would be even greater.

It could be argued that the Bell and Howell Edumod Model has some features regular Apple does not have. However, these are not many. For example, being able to plug the game paddles into a socket on the outside may be convenient, but the advantage of having the additional electrical outlets can be achieved by buying a \$10 extension cord from your local department store. Furthermore, the lockable cover will probably prove more of a nuisance than an advantage. And as for the extended warranty, only time will tell how much *that* is worth. I found with my own Apple that local computer stores tend to bend over backwards to service their machines for little or no cost well after the warranty is past. Bell and Howell has yet to prove itself in this regard. For example, last May one Edmonton school, interested in purchasing a computer, investigated Bell and Howell. The personnel in the Edmonton office could not answer the simplest of questions and gave the school various Calgary and Toronto numbers to call. Needless to say, I am highly skeptical of Bell and Howell's ability to provide warranty service on a satisfactory basis.

If you do not have a computer store near you, it will probably be well worth your time and effort to drive to a larger centre and shop around. Evidence to date indicates that the School Book Branch is offering no bargains. As a final piece of evidence that this is indeed the case, I decided to call a computer store last December to get an over-the-phone quote on one of their software pieces. I randomly chose Visicalc. Without identifying myself, I asked what they charged for a 16-sector Visicalc. The price of \$225 that they quoted me should be compared to the considerably higher School Book Branch price of \$257.50. Obviously, Mr. King's prices need to be questioned. Clearly, you and I must shop carefully.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that what is perhaps most amusing about this "great deal" is that the government spent nearly two years negotiating it. Bell and Howell is snickering all the way to the bank.

- George Cathcart