
Computing in Calgary Public Schools

by
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Have you heard the one about the car salesman who sold a car to a caveman? He sold him a sports car. He was able to persuade the caveman that a sports car was a real necessity. He supplied, along with the car, a litre of gas and half a kilometre of good highway. The caveman really liked his car, he showed it to his friends, and he raced up and down the road. The salesman took a movie of the action and used the film to try to sell cars to other cavemen.

In the preceding story: for "caveman" read "educator"; for "car" read "microcomputer"; for "highway" read "courseware for the microcomputer"; and for "gas" read "software."

As far as Calgary Public Schools are concerned, in October 1981, we have some lovely little cars, one or two stretches of reasonable highway, but a real shortage of gas. We hear that efforts are being made to increase the roads, but the development is slow. As for the gas supply, it looks as if there is only a cup or two for each of us.

The cars we have are being guided by some very dedicated teachers in the city here. Several schools have access to mainframe computers for various programs. These schools make the link by public telephone, either

to the Calgary Board of Education, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, or the University of Calgary. Projects at present include an extensive reading program at the elementary level, several programs to teach computer programming, some computer-assisted instruction programs, and one computer-managed learning program.

As well as these mainframe applications, there are microcomputer projects which, like Topsy, have "just grown." Some very hard-working people are leading in microcomputer applications. There are projects proceeding in elementary schools to familiarize students and staffs with the use of the computer. The same thing is happening in junior high schools with programs in the areas of options, mathematics, and industrial arts. Micros are also being used as problem-solving tools. Several high schools are currently being equipped with micros to be used in the computing science, data and word-processing programs, and some business education programs. There is a project under way to catalog and evaluate courseware. Some teachers are writing their own courseware. When you consider that it requires between 70 and 100 hours to produce one hour

of good courseware, and that some of the authors are full-time classroom teachers, you can see how this task could become horrendous.

What we need for these nice little cars is a whole system of roads. We also need a lot more gas of a high quality, easily obtainable, and adapted to the Alberta (curriculum) climate. The infrastructure to support these projects needs to be in place to ensure the continued growth and expansion of the technological advances.

We cannot avoid the advance of computer technology into classrooms and the impact, unlike that of the calculator, will be felt in all areas of school curricula. To be able to judge the possible impact and the applicability of new technologies we, as teachers, need to familiarize our-

selves with products such as micro-computers.

As educators:

1) we need to learn how to drive, and as we learn we should make certain we have lots of roads and lots of gas. We should know where we want to go, and we should then go out and buy the right car to get there.

2) we must make sure that we are in a position to evaluate these technological advances and to implement those parts we feel will benefit our students.

3) we cannot ignore what is happening!

4) we should get ready to drive cautiously!