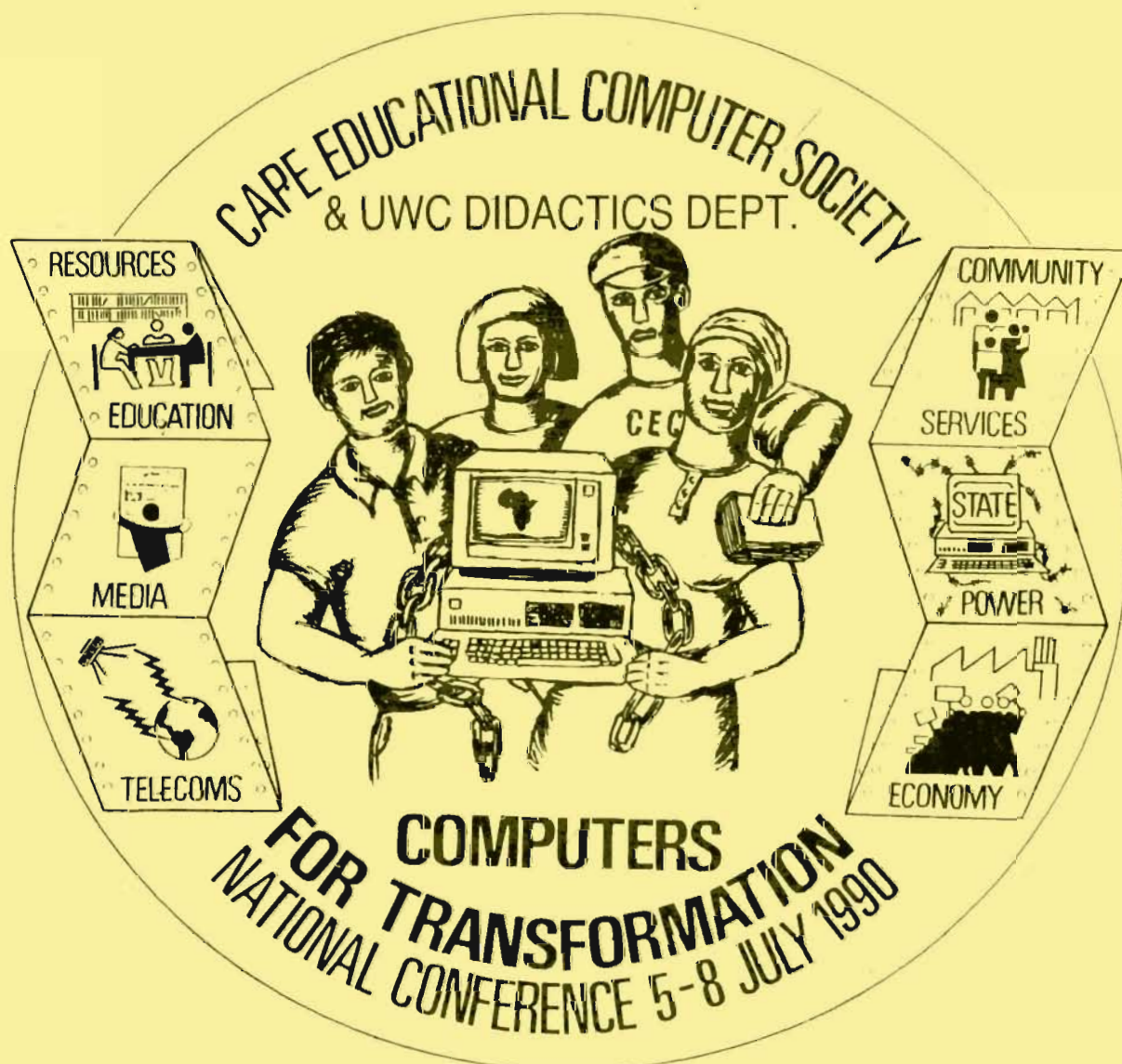


Conference News



Newsletter No.1, February 1990

Why are we having a conference?

- ☞ To stimulate research in COMPUTERS IN EDUCATION for transformation in South Africa. Such research would occur both in preparation for the conference and as a result of the conference.
- ☞ To expose educationists, community workers, students and other interested people to the possibilities and problems around computers in our society.
- ☞ To develop progressive approaches to the development and uses of computers in schools, universities, community structures and workplaces.
- ☞ To establish national contact between educationists and community workers who use computers.
- ☞ To lay the groundwork for extending progressive organisation in Computers for Transformation nationally.

We are hoping that the conference will forge a multitude of working relationships between all who attend. There will be many serious times and many social times but most of all it will be a conference for all to learn together and assert that people are what count, not technology...

*What kind of
Conference
will it be?*

This is what you can expect :-

- > International and national keynote speakers will be addressing the conference on the problems and possibilities of computers as a tool for liberation.
- > Papers by educationists and community workers who have researched key issues around the themes of the conference.
- > Practical workshops and demonstrations on all aspects of the use of computers.
- > Panel Discussions where issues will be debated and developed.
- > A public exhibition over one evening for parents, workers and members of the community to expose them to issues, possibilities and to demystify computer technology...
- > Social and cultural events.

Few of us have ever had a chance to use the computers. But all of us are affected by them in one way or another.

All of us have our names and personal details somewhere in some data-bank of the cool, clinical computer rooms of the banks, the police, the taxman, the big companies...

The equation is simple. Computers can control vast amounts of information at high speed. Control over information is power. Therefore whoever controls computers has power.

But the implications are confusing. For those of us who want power to be shared, for whom democracy and equality are the basis of social life, computers seem to negate all that. Big Brother monitoring our lives. Faceless politicians with monster computer mainframes turning us into coded numbers to be crunched under the footless boot of the State should our little number come up. Our gut feeling is to ignore computers, to keep them out of our little world, to hope they will go away...

They won't.

We have to deal with them or they will deal with us. We must domesticate and decolonise computers and subject their use to the democratic will of the people.

Computers are creeping into every corner of society. This article examines some possibilities and some problems

Computer Power People's Power?

On the positive side we must encourage the use and development of computers as a tool to enhance our lives.

Some of us have started to look into what computers are all about. We have discovered that some computers, micro-computers, are quite easy to learn and are actually quite useful. Word-processing for people who must write reports, for teachers typing-up their lessons, lay-out programs for doing our community newsletters, pamphlets and posters, programs for doing admin for our organisations like labelling hundreds of envelopes, doing accounts, keeping track of resources, telecommunications for sending typed messages anywhere immediately at the touch of a button etc. etc.

Some of us also worry that we may become too dependent

on computers, that a few "experts" often hold subtle power in our organisations because only they know how to use these frustrating machines. What about the cost of computers while millions live in abject poverty? Are computers really the marvel education machines the adverts say they are? Do we lose our creativity to dazzling computer graphics? Do some of us succumb to the seductive technolust of computers as a solution to our organisational and social problems?

These and many other questions must be asked.

Not by Joe in New York or Jill in London but by Nobom in Gugs, Sipho in Soweto and you in South Africa.

The Conference on Computers for Transformation has been called to bring together all who are concerned about the progressive use of computers in South Africa today, computer users and non-users alike. This will be a forum to address the issues raised above, to share and collectivise our scattered experiences. We hope that the Conference will lay the basis for future co-operation on a national level.

Computers for T

Does the computer have a role to play in our present struggle for social change?

The computer is not our natural ally, but needs to be liberated from its historical links with the dominant class interests, and be domesticated for use by the democratic forces.

The computer can be used to challenge the present monopoly over resources, skills and ideas, by the dominant classes. It can be used as a powerful weapon in our battle to build and establish the political hegemony of the Mass Democratic Movement.

This is both a task and a challenge for all our organisations. We need to breakdown the exclusive domains of the "experts" and aim at overall empowerment and enskilling of the people's organisations. This not a TECHNICAL Task, but a POLITICAL one.

Let us briefly look at the areas in which the computer can be most usefully deployed for transformative purposes.

A. Education and Resources



Computers are being successfully used for the development of alternative learning/teaching materials and resources, for curriculum development, as a tool for teacher subject groups.

Computers are also widely used for resource and library administration, enabling users to identify and access resources quickly and easily.

B. Community Services



The computer becomes a powerful and strategic tool in the broader empowerment of the community, if harnessed by mass-based community organisations. It can help to increase efficiency in democratic administration, through information storage

(mailing and membership lists), accounts, budgetting, wordprocessing and media production.

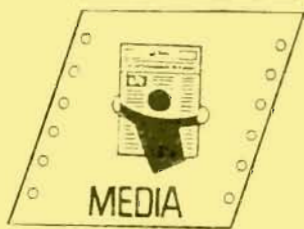
The role of the Conference

There are many other areas of strategic importance in which the usefulness of computer technology needs to be researched. Hopefully the Conference will help to identify these and accord them appropriate and relevant social roles.

Is this a task for the technologists, or can it grow out of the continuous use of technology in our community-based structures, educational institutions and workplaces? We need to challenge the monopoly of technology by the technicians and the rich and powerful, and reappropriate it for the people. Above all we have to assert the place of humans and not technology at the centre of existence.

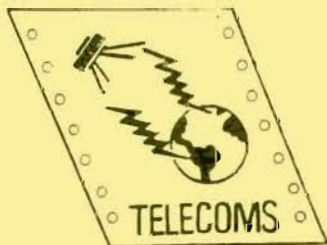
Transformation

C. Media



With the rapid increase of computer-aided publishing, the role of computer technology becomes more central. It is particularly important for desktop publications used by the alternative media structures and decentralised people's presses.

D. Telecommunications



Through telecommunications community-based organisations are able to maintain constant links, share information and resources in an electronic form, in ways that the telephone and fax do not. This can be done locally, nationally and internationally.

PROBLEMS

The use of computers is not unproblematic. It must never be regarded as the panacea for our socio-political ills. We must ensure that we remain human-centred and not be processed into becoming techno-centric.

The danger exists that we can develop our own elitist groups of "techno-vists" (technical activists) creating an imbalance in our mass-based structures. Empowerment means the diffusion of technical, organisational and political skills to all activists and the oppressed community as a whole. A dependency on modern technology can be dangerous and in many instances socially inappropriate. We cannot put social transformation in computer-mode.

A Political Priority

South Africa has entered the phase in which the democratic forces are preparing to govern. The political gains won by activists must be consolidated by technical skills and efficient democratic administration and structures. The political battle is also a war of information and the ability to handle information. South Africa has a technologically advanced capitalist economy which places computer technology at the centre of human resource development for post Apartheid South Africa. Ignoring the strategic importance of the computer for transformation is a luxury we cannot afford.

It is in this context that the need for a NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMPUTERS IN EDUCATION becomes more urgent. In particular it is only the participation of a broad range of people, computers users and non-users that can make it a success.

A Call for Contributions

There is still time to offer contributions

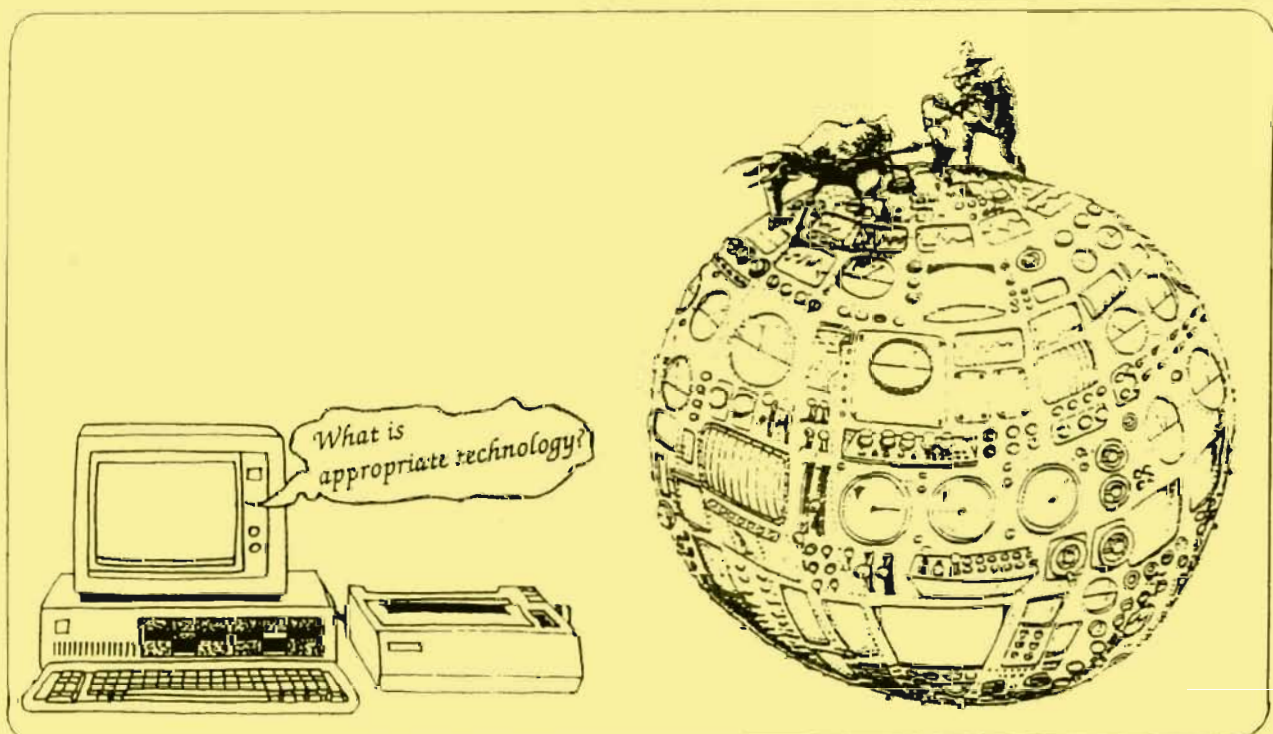
We welcome any contributions to the conference in any form:

- papers
- demonstrations (from 15 minute demos to 2 hr presentations)
- practical workshops
- debates
- anything that stimulates a critical appreciation of computers in South Africa

Any proposed contributions should reach us by 20 March at the latest. We would require a 1 to 2 page description or summary of your intended contribution.

Send any correspondence to:

*The Joint Conference Committee
P.O. Box 24427
Lansdowne
Cape, 7780*



Who is the Conference for?

- ✓ Those who are interested in People's education
- ✓ Those who are fascinated by the power of computers but feel intimidated by them
- ✓ Those who argue that computers must not be monopolised by the rich and "clever"
- ✓ Those who are concerned about the role of computers in the development of democratic education
- ✓ Those who are concerned about the role of computers in the struggle for social change
- ✓ Those who fear that social control and repression may be increased through the use of computer technology
- ✓ Those who are concerned about the needs of a Post-apartheid South Africa and the role of computers therein.



...about this newsletter

This newsletter will reach you once a month until the Conference. In it you will find:

- general information about the Conference
- background articles to stimulate interest and inform the debates and discussions at the Conference
- profiles of the key-note speakers and some of the presenters
- a Conference letters page to give you an opportunity to give ideas for the conference

We will be publishing summaries of all the contributions well before the Conference to prepare delegates for their own participation

Conference Registration Form

The Conference begins on the evening of Thurs 5 July and ends on Sunday 8 July 1990. There will be full-day programs and evening activities including a public exhibition in the evening of Saturday 7 July. The venue will be the University of the Western Cape

Fees and accomodation:

Conference fees for all four days are:

R20 for employed people

R10 for students and the unemployed

Make all cheques out to CECS.
Send all correspondence to:

The Joint Conference Committee
PO Box 24427
Lansdowne
Cape, 7780

Accomodation is provided in the UWC hostels for R20 per day which includes 3 daily meals.

Meals for those not requiring accomodation will be R5 each.
(Subsidised accomodation and fees will be considered if motivated)

Name:

Address:

.....

Tel:(h)(w)(Fax)

Occupation:.....Organisation

- I will be attending the conference. I include R... for conference fees
- I will require accomodation. I include R... for accomodation

My interest/involvement with computers:

I would like to see the following features/issues addressed at the Conference:

For queries, write or contact Newton Adams 021-6968413 (phone), 6968537 (fax)