

November 3rd 2003 - The Courier Mail
Computer taking over teacher role

Courier-Mail

Computer taking over teacher role

Joel Dullroy

EDUCATION REPORTER

A COMPUTER program that can teach Year 1 to Year 8 children maths could one day replace teachers in the classroom.

Nearly 600 schools nationwide have turned to "virtual teachers" to help deliver maths lessons.

Both state and private schools have been quick to buy the software, called "Eduss Trek", and are recommending parents use it on the family computer for homework.

Students no longer need to raise their hand for help - they click a button on a keyboard.

The program - created by two Queensland schoolteachers - assesses a child's skill level then gives the child virtual lessons to bring them up to speed or to extend their learning.

It contains enough information to give daily lessons across eight school years and eliminates cheating by generating random exams for each student in a classroom.

At present about 600 schools



Julie-Ann McCullough

have bought the software, nearly half of them in Queensland.

Both teachers and students are embracing the virtual teaching program.

At the Southport School on the Gold Coast, Year 6 teacher Andrew Philip said the program had helped most of his students improve their grades. At present four classes at TSS use the program on laptops for about a third of their teaching time, but Mr Philip said he expected the entire school to be using it soon.

"When you've got 24 kids of 24 differing abilities, they all want to know something different," Mr Philip said.

"If they've got a problem, they click a button and straight away a teacher will talk through the computer, instead of raising their hand and waiting for me."

Year 6 student Alexander Uruchutu said the virtual

teacher had helped explain long division and fractions.

"Lots of times you can't understand what the teachers are saying, but it explains it all," he said.

Eduss Trek marketing director Phillip Laird said the program would help tackle the problems of growing class sizes, as it was like having five teachers in a class of 30 students.

The software company would soon release a maths program for Years 9 and 10, and was working on an English program, Mr Laird said.

Queensland Teachers' Union president Julie-Ann McCullough said teachers would appreciate any additional resources, but doubted computers would replace humans.

"I can't imagine a computer doing everything a teacher can do," Ms McCullough. "Even if it's a very good quality program, there's still a very significant role for teachers to play."

Education Queensland said any computer program would be a "curriculum support mechanism", not a replacement for "core learning activities".