

Value of computer technology in classroom directly linked to quality of teaching

Computers. We all know that some day we'll be using them. That's why it makes sense to put them in every classroom.

Well, maybe. Dr. Ron Ragsdale, who has studied what happened when computers were put in classrooms, isn't sold on the idea that every classroom needs a computer.

Now, retired from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, located in Toronto, his research showed the value of computers was directly linked to the quality of input from teachers.

If the teacher knew the computer and the programs and worked with students who were using the computer then good

learning took place. If the teacher wasn't trained on the computer — or if the teacher let students "discover" unguided — the quality of learning dropped.

Ragsdale first started his research in 1987 at a school in Brampton where educators had decided to put at least three computers and a printer in every classroom. His study expanded to include other schools which bought computers for the classroom.

Some of what he saw didn't impress him.

"One teacher put it this way: 'I don't monitor what my students do at the

computer. I believe that anything they do there is important."

Ragsdale's study team didn't share that belief. He and his fellow researchers found students who used computers as toys, rather than learning machines. One girl in a Grade 2 class, who had been left to her own devices, was spinning a track

ball and "mashing" her hand on the keyboard. The result was an artful display of letters scattered across the screen. Although that could be deemed acceptable for a while, or if she was trying to create a piece of art, not so if the computer was supposed to be helping her learn word skills.

Computers can work well in

the classroom, but to believe that they "must" help is wrong, said Ragsdale.

"It has to be done with thought, with goal orientation and with teacher involvement."

The boards which seem to get the best use out of their computers, he said, are the ones in which planning and commitment had been implemented.

WEEKENDER AUGUST 26, 1995, P. 13

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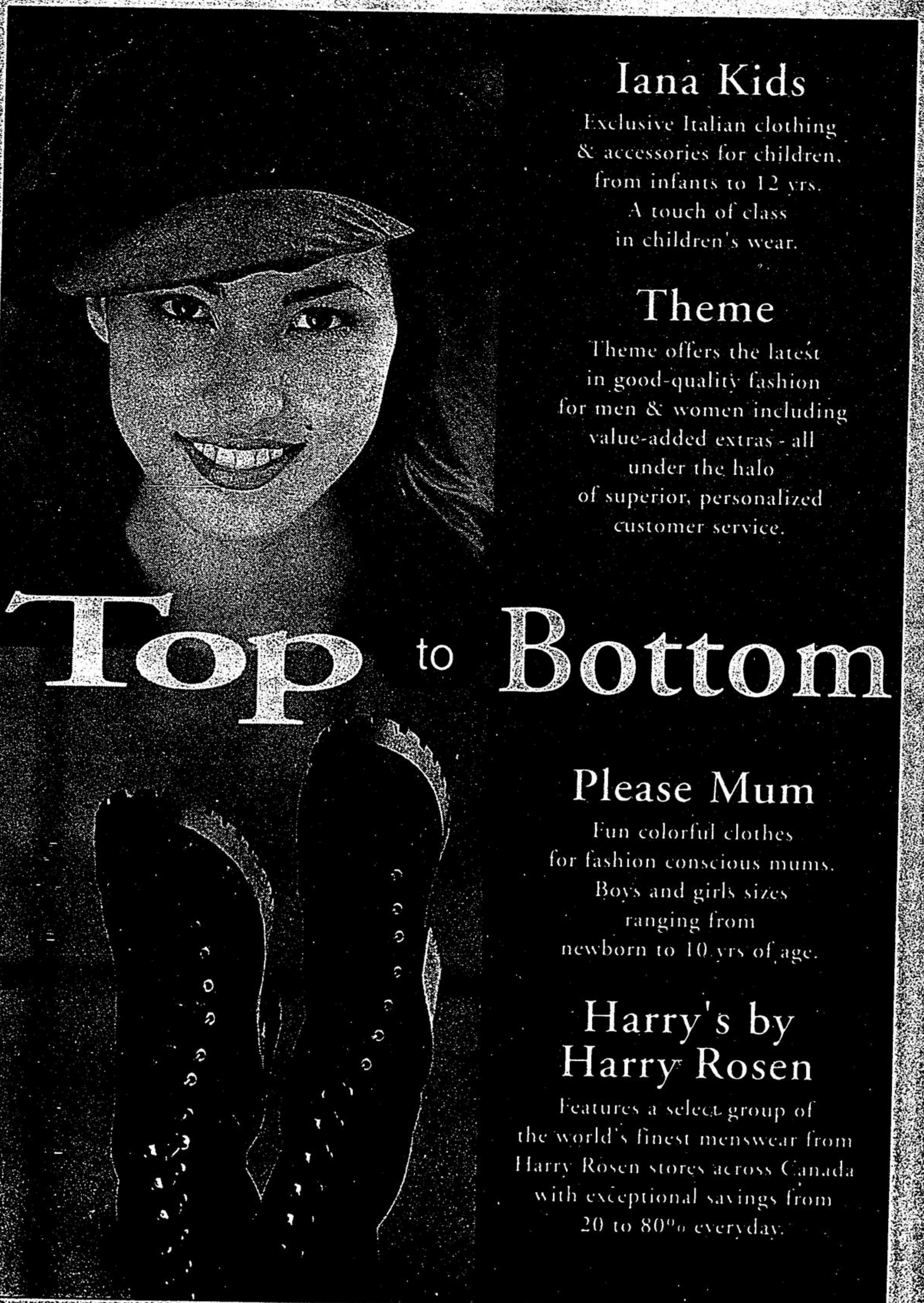
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