INTERNET FOR STUDENTS

There are a number of organisations world wide that are dedicated to the use of telecommunications as a means of improving the learning environment and experiences of our pupils, and to making the job of teaching more satisfactory for us as professionals. One such organisation began here in Australia in 1983, Computer Pals Across the World (CPAW). CPAW is an international educational telecommunications project using telecommunications to improve communications skills and promote international understanding. It involves primary and secondary schools, universities, handicapped groups such as deaf and blind, hospitals and senior citizens. Computer Pals Bulletin Boards are maintained on Keylink and Nexus. There is a server in Trondheim, Norway, which hold information on people involved in CPAW and projects being run or sponsored by CPAW. The address is - info@tt93.tih.no - Mail this address and write HELP in the subject field for information on how to receive the databases from the server. This organisation sponsors school to school links as well as a number of international projects. A monthly newsletter keeps everyone up to date. For more information email the Australian Director, Don Nethercott using the address given above.

I have found that an organisation based in the USA runs some very useful projects. Academy One is an online international educational resource for primary through secondary students, parents, educators and administrators. Run by National Public Telecomputing Network, a special area exists on the National Capital Free-Net for Academy One participants. Its most recent activity was to receive daily reports, in French and English, from a French expedition exploring Mt Erebus in the Antarctica. These reports made fascinating reading, and made very useful material for a classroom studying explorers, Antarctica, the atmosphere or the oceans. For more information on Academy One contact Linda Delzeit, NPTN Director of Education, on a0022@nptn.org

If your geography class is studying Earthquakes, try this one. Telnet to geophys.washington.edu with login/password quake. Make sure screen capture is on before logging on. This gives a printout of recent earthquake activity around the world, including location, depth and strength.

One service that I use a lot is the Kidsphere Listserv. This is a forum for discussion and help on educational matters, consisting mainly of teachers. Excellent for finding out what goes on around the world in telecommunications as just about any activity in the world concerning Telecomputing is posted to this listserv. If you have a query on anything to do with education, send it to the listserv and you could end up with hundreds of useful suggestions. A warning — there will be a lot of mail, up to 50 or more messages a day, as the number of teachers accessing this listserv is unknown, but thought to be 4000 or more. To join, send an email message to kidsphere-request@vms.cis.pitt.edu

INTERNET FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A number of Educational Journals are becoming available online free of charge. Here are some that I subscribe to and have found useful:

- **Learning:** This is a newsletter of the National Research Centre on Student Learning for teachers, principals, administrators, policy professionals published bi-annually. To subscribe, send your name, position, affiliation and (non-electronic) address to skubitz@vms.cis.pitt.edu

- **IPCT-J:** The Interpersonal Computing and Technology journal, published at Georgetown University in association with Pennsylvania State University. Articles on use of electronic networks in the classroom; electronic publishing; use of electronic networks and information exchange; library applications of electronic communications, etc. To subscribe, e-mail to listserv@voguv leave subject line blank add the following one-line message to the body subscribe IPCT-J YourFirstName YourLastName. The journal is also available via Gopher from goguv.ccf.georgetown.edu, edpol-d to school.

- **Education Policy Digest from Scholastic Inc.:** To subscribe send an email message to edpol-d-request@scholastic.com. On the first line of text type subscribe edpol-d YourFirstName YourLastName

- **AskERIC:** This is part of ERIC. You can send requests for ERIC searches and they will reply within a day or two. They will also give you details on how to do ERIC searches yourself online. Email to askeric@ericir.sty.edu

The difference that makes a difference

BY CHRIS BIGUM

Deakin University, Internet address: cj@deakin.edu.au

When Jackie Stokes reminded me of Michael Ryan’s request to write a paragraph or so for the new Internet page I thought, sure why not? After all in the privileged position I enjoy of having good access to the Internet and having “surf ed” it for many years it made sense to talk about some of the good spots, where the good waves are so to speak. In surfing, most people who surf are in agreement on what is or is not a good wave. Unlike surfing, information tends not to be as obvious as a perfectly formed one and a half metre wave breaking left to right on a gently sloping ocean floor. Passing on information is more like the situation in which a friend tells you about a book or film or TV show you must read, see or watch. Your friend makes a judgement that you would enjoy reading, seeing or watching what they recommend. But how often do you find that after watching, reading or seeing that you spend more time wondering what it was that your friend thought was so important or interesting. Often you seem to learn more about your friend than you do from the book, film or television program. So as I write this...
short piece for Australian Educational Computing I am mindful of what Gregory Bateson wrote about information. He said information was difference that makes a difference. What I am about to describe made a difference to me. It turned out to be a good place for a wave if you like.

Earlier this year I logged on to a MOO, not the noise that cows make, but a multi-user, object-oriented, text-based virtual reality. In brief you can think of it as a multi-player environment in which you can talk to other players, gesture or emote at other players and build new locations (rooms) and objects. A MOO is a computer program running on a Unix computer system. The program compiles and runs programs (called ‘verbs’) written in a language called MOO. The MOO language is a cross between C++ and LISP. All objects reside in RAM in what is called the ‘core.’

There are a number of MOOs accessible on the Internet. One at MIT called MediaMOO is modelled on the Media Lab at MIT and encourages people with broad media research interests to sign on and add their own ‘offices’ to this virtual space. These offices range from ships, to dungeons, to bars, to ballrooms, to car parks to elevators and many more imaginary spaces. The MOO is populated with characters, objects, robots and emissaries. A character is what a user of a MOO invents as a kind of persona. It is given a description and assigned a gender. Objects are things you make and they can be anything from a car, to a doughnut, to a camcorder, to a feeling. They can be given to other characters or left in rooms for others to use. Robots are objects which have a limited repertoire of actions and responses. Most MOOs have bar tender robots and waitresses. There is a band in the Ballroom of MediaMOO for parties and you can request particular tunes. An emissary is an object you can send into another room to speak or look on your behalf.

A part from being an elaborate virtual text space, this MOO like other MOOs is used as a meeting place and there are regular gatherings of people with common interests in such things as computers and writing or studies of science, technology and society. A few months back I ‘attended’ a conference in MediaMOO concerned with cyborgs and chaired the education strand. To give you a sense of what it is like to use a MOO, here is a short ‘transcript’ of an interaction. The explanations are in [brackets] and user input is bolded.

telnet purple-crayon.media.mit.edu 8988
(This is the connect command for a Unix host: 8888 is the port number you connect to. An easier way to access a MOO is to use software that acts as a client to the MOO’s server.)

******************************
** Welcome to MediaMOO! **
******************************

Type:
‘connect <character-name> <password>’ to connect to your character,
‘connect Guest’ to connect to a guest character,
‘help @request’ for information on how to get your own character, ‘#who’ just to see who’s logged in right now,
‘@quit’ to disconnect, either now or later.

connect guest
[[logged in as a guest. This is the way you connect first time to any MOO. You have to apply for a character]]

Okay... guest is in use. Logging you in as ‘Purple_Guest’
[Guests are assigned colours to distinguish them from one another]

*** Connected ***
The LEGO Closet
It’s dark in here, and there are little crunchy plastic things under your feet! Scoping around, you discover what feels like a doorknob on one wall.

Obvious exits: out to The LEGO/logo Lab
[The place in MediaMOO where you are placed before you build a room of your own.]

exit
[a command I typed to leave this space]

The LEGO/logo Lab
The LEGO/logo Lab is a happy jumble of little and big computers, papers, coffee cups, and stray pieces of LEGO.

Obvious exits: close to The LEGO Closet, center to Center of Centers, Library to Library Foyer, and atrium to Third Floor Atrium Landing You see a newspaper, a Warhol print, Sun SPARCstation IPC, Projects chalkboard, Sign about stuff in the garden, MediaMOO Map, Research Directory, STS Sign, Constructionist Flag, Train Transfer, and Bulletin Board of MOO Papers here.

(A typical room description with lots of objects to use. You can look up research interests using the Research Directory for instance.)

Don’t forget to take a look at the newspaper. Type ‘news’ to see it. Don’t forget to choose your newreader. You can do ‘#newreaders’ to see the list of available newreaders, and ‘#newreaders #chooses’ to select one.

MediaMOO is a professional community for media researchers. Please type ‘help purpose’

WARNING: guests’ site information is included in their descriptions
[Information for guests]

@who
[A command I gave to check who was connected]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player name</th>
<th>Connected</th>
<th>Idle time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phylax (#9886)</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>a second</td>
<td>Hooka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axolotl (#6958)</td>
<td>19 minutes</td>
<td>2 seconds</td>
<td>Axolotl’s Study [mailing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest (#113)</td>
<td>a minute</td>
<td>8 seconds</td>
<td>Bisquik’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flame (#2486)</td>
<td>an hour</td>
<td>10 seconds</td>
<td>Hooka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple_Guest (#345)</td>
<td>a minute</td>
<td>20 seconds</td>
<td>The LEGO/logo Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blackbird (#10118)</td>
<td>33 minutes</td>
<td>49 seconds</td>
<td>13th Beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trellis (#9536)</td>
<td>a minute</td>
<td>55 seconds</td>
<td>deposition for funology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bisquik (#8842)</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Bisquik’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mickey (#5899)</td>
<td>19 minutes</td>
<td>9 minutes</td>
<td>Deep Freeze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton (#7687)</td>
<td>a day</td>
<td>41 minutes</td>
<td>The Root Lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margeaux (#9527)</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>an hour</td>
<td>Margeaux and Mickey’s place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jade_Guest (#701)</td>
<td>an hour</td>
<td>an hour</td>
<td>The LEGO Closet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean (#576)</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>Sean’s Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy (#9886)</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>9 hours</td>
<td>The Architect’s Chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks (#9528)</td>
<td>a day</td>
<td>13 hours</td>
<td>Marks place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay (#10023)</td>
<td>18 hours</td>
<td>10 hours</td>
<td>The LEGO Closet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink_Guest (#359)</td>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>The LEGO Closet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 18 players, 9 of whom have been active recently.
The are 3 players not listed.

@whois blackbird
[I use a verb to identify a character called blackbird] blackbird’s real name is “Lenny Bremer”.
blackbird (#10118) can be reached via email as: bb@msx.uac.ac.edu
[This information has been altered]

research blackbird
[A command in this MOO to look at how a character has described his/her research interests]
Research interests:
I do research at UCLA concerning human-computer communication and am currently studying MOOs as part of an information seeking behaviour class. I am interested in studying new types of computer interactive media and how people use this media to find information. My question is: are MOOs a useful tool for scholarly communication? Tell me your thoughts!

@join blackbird
[Join a character called Blackbird at 13th Beach]
13th Beach
You are standing on a stretch of sand that runs east and west as far as the eye can see. There is a light northerly wind blowing which has made the 1.5-2m swell glassy. The sky is clear and there appears to be no one surfing at the moment. There is a sign nearby and you can see sea birds. The temperature is a warm 33°C (90°F), a perfect day for a wave or three. Obvious exits: south to Surf.
You see a sign and vidiot box here.
blackbird is here.
You join blackbird.

look sign
[give a command to read the sign on the beach.]
The sign reads: Please do not feed the Noobs. Tourists excepted.

look blackbird
[A command to "look" at a character in the same room as you.]
You see a small black-feathered bird carrying a spy glass and wearing an eye-patch. It seems hungry. Perhaps you should feed it.
[The description provided by the character]
blackbird says, "Hi purple"
"Hi blackbird
[You "speak" by using a "before text]
You say, "Hi blackbird"
blackbird says, "is this a hello purple?"
:smiles
[You emote by using a "before text]
Purple_Guest smiles
blackbird basks in the sun
blackbird is laughing
handstand
Purple_Guest does a handstand
blackbird does a cartwheel
blackbird says, "have you seen the Ballroom?"
"Let's go
You say, "Let's go"
blackbird says, "OK"
blackbird disappears suddenly for parts unknown.

@go the ballroom
[Room name]
The Ballroom
Hanging from the peaked ceiling thirty feet above, an art deco chandelier shines. You can see its reflections in the marble floor, which is a deep green with swirls of gold. Behind the black slate bar built into the west wall, Lucy is making drinks. Sunken down two steps is a large, octagonal dance area.
Obvious exits: north to Ballroom Foyer, northeast to Men's Dressing Room, northwest to Women's Dressing Room, and south to Dance Floor.
You see Lucy, The Great Big Giant Birthday Card, plate of cheese, MediaMOO Award Plaque, Robo Ninja_Librarian, and plate of cookies here.
You wonder if you should dress for the occasion.
You step quietly into the ballroom, feeling underdressed.
Lucy clears the empty glasses from a table.
[One of the things Lucy does intermittently.]
order a beer from lucy
[A command to the robot Lucy who is a robot waitress who can make almost any virtual drink known to humankind]
Lucy says "One draft, comin' up!"
Lucy says, "I'll have that for you in just a minute."
Looking underdressed, blackbird timidly steps into the ballroom.
[The description of entrance into the ballroom by any character]
blackbird materializes out of thin air.
[The description of the entrance of this character into any room.]
Lucy hands you your a beer. "Here ya go."
Robo Ninja_Librarian warbles a pathetic off-key version of 'Till There Was MOO.'
[Robots can be programmed to do things periodically when there are characters in the room.]
Lucy begins wiping down the bartop.
[If ever did finish my virtual beer!]