Theme: Global Networking

There are many similarities between the current enthusiasm for communications technology with previous episodes in the history of educational computing. Once again we can see carpet-baggers, often from outside education specialties, predicting great and revolutionary changes to schools. They claim that once schools become linked to global networks, many traditional constraints to learning will disappear, and students will progress into an age of 'informational' enlightenment (some even suggest 'entertaining'). The hype, the shallow arguments and the trite metaphors are all there. One such metaphor of course, is the 'information super-highway' which not only has a range of conflicting meanings, but has entered the lexicon with undue haste.

Metaphors can be useful devices when we attempt to explain new phenomena in terms of old. But they can also trap us into adopting misleading ways of thinking. Some people believe that the Internet is an unsurpassed source of 'information', conveniently disregarding that much of what passes as information is really a form of textual pollution (if you will excise the metaphor). Others believe that the Internet is a resource to be exploited, conveniently sidestepping the issue that what appears as a resource was contributed by others at some stage.

I believe that computer-based global communications networks do represent a significant opportunity for those involved in educational computing, but the responsibility for building effective learning environments (darn, another metaphor) lies with us. We should look to what such technology offers us as educators: shared resources, wider audiences, interesting purposes and new ways of representing knowledge to name just a few.

IN THIS ISSUE
Michelle Williams and Chris Bigum in their paper 'Connecting schools to global networks' explore the historical, social and practical issues involved with global networking. They identify similarities with past innovations in educational computing and suggest that we should learn from such experience. If we don't, the consequence, especially if we allow other interests to set the agenda, may be painful.

While the Internet generally provides for asynchronous communication (where the parties are not necessarily connected simultaneously), audio/graphics represents a set of technologies where simultaneous connections are used. Zane Berge and Mauri Collins present an introduction to audio/graphics in their paper 'Audio/graphics used in distance learning'. They suggest that a careful, educational analysis of the various media is preferable than an unplanned adoption of a particular technology. Such analysis will probably result in a mix of technologies rather than a single approach.

Michele Huston provides us some timely advice, based on practical experience, of the roles that Internet connection can play within a school curriculum. In her paper 'The Australian Capital Territory Education Information Network' she outlines the pilot project being undertaken in ACT and some of the uses being made of the Internet.

In 'Lessons learnt in connecting schools to the Internet', Rex Boggs and David Jones reveal issues gained from a year long study. While connection to the Internet is not easy, the rewards are there for those that persevere.

Our regular Internet sites and activities section and a review of Global networks: computers and international communication edited by Linda Harasim rounds off the contributions to our theme this issue. I extend special thanks to Michelle Williams for her contributions and organisation of this issue.

CONTRIBUTED PAPER
John King, John Feltham and Donna Nucifora revisit the issue of programming within school IT subjects in their paper 'Novice programming in high schools: teacher perceptions and new directions'. In research based on teacher perceptions, they reveal a dependence on notions held by tertiary educators about programming. They suggest that it is time for teachers to recognise that they may have more flexibility of approach than their tertiary cousins.

CHANGES TO THE JOURNAL
The journal continues to evolve, particularly into electronic publishing.

While the text of the last two volumes are available at our ftp site (ftp.ger.edu.au in the directory papers/aeec) we hope to include a more complete representation of the journal at a World Wide Web site in the near future. Such a change might offer a number of other possibilities, for example incremental publishing (where papers are electronically published immediately after review). A time may come when this journal is primarily electronic, with a periodic paper-based version available for those that wish one.

THEMES FOR 1995
The editorial panel and board have decided on themes for next year. The first issue will address the changing roles that computers may play to encourage and enhance thinking. These roles may include new forms of representation and expression, new problem-based environments and greater opportunities for students to communicate their thinking. We would like to maintain a practical focus and be keen to hear from teachers who have implemented thinking programs with a technological flavour.

The second issue will address professional development of teachers, lecturers and technological support personnel. What are the models that are available, and more importantly which are the ones that work? How have the current trends towards workplace and open education worked for in- and preservice training in information technology education? Again, we would like to maintain a balance between theory and practice and would encourage practitioners to contribute.

Of course readers are invited to contribute papers or short communications at any time on any applicable topic (see inside cover for submission details).

RESOURCE REVIEWERS
An important role for the journal is to share the fruits of experience around the educational computing community. If you have tried a resource (a book, software or a course etc), you may wish to publish an evaluation. In addition, the journal often receives material from publishers for review. If you would like to evaluate such resources, you can express an interest to me (see contact details, contents page).