
Editorial

Whither ALT-J?

Issue 7.1 represented the annual special issue of selected papers presented at ALT-C 98. This issue is the first time the new editorial team have edited an 'open' issue comprised of papers selected from those submitted as part of the normal refereeing process. The broad scope of the papers in this open issue – courseware design, collaborative learning, evaluation, student use of electronic bibliographic databases, staff development – bears witness to one of the most fascinating aspects of learning technology: its broad-based interdisciplinary nature.

We feel strongly that ALT-J should provide a forum for scholarly debate, which reflects the eclectic nature of learning technology. However, there is a danger that, with a diverse profile, the journal could lose a sense of direction. With this in mind we have identified four areas that we would like to encourage:

- The application of learning technology is in its infancy. HE institutions are trying out different approaches in an attempt to match the use of technology to local needs and demands. We can all learn from each other in this context, and we see ALT-J as providing opportunities for strategic initiatives to be reported, leading to a discussion of issues such as staff training, resourcing and management.
- Our view is that ALT-J is a scholarly journal. As such a prime rationale for the journal is the publication of the results of empirical research, and we wish to encourage research papers.
- The youth of learning technology makes it very important that we think creatively about the future. 'Brain-storming' has a role in thinking creatively about the educational use of technology, and we wish to encourage papers that reflect on future developments.

- The journal must guard against being parochial. The boundaries in education are being eroded – notably in the blurring of notions of higher and further education. Likewise the interface between the commercial and industrial sectors and education is becoming more diffuse. Education is becoming more international, in some part due to the possibilities afforded by information and communications technology. We intend to encourage papers that look to cross-phase developments, explore relationships with industry and commerce, and have international dimensions.

In line with these aims we have decided that in addition to the annual conference edition, we will publish a special issue on a key topical theme or research area or work which reflects current developments in a particular sector. This will give an annual profile for the journal consisting of a special conference issue published in April, an 'open' issue published in July, and a special thematic issue published in November. In this way we hope that we will provide an opportunity for a wide range of papers to be published in a focused way, to reflect the four key themes of the journal.

To launch this new format, Issue 7.3 will develop the fourth aspect outlined above by focusing on work from the commercial sector and in particular will describe the educational work associated with the BT Laboratories at Martlesham Heath. The work in the BT Laboratories picks up on all four of the themes we have identified: interdisciplinary research and development, links between further and higher education, relationships with industry and commerce, and state-of-the-art research and development in learning technology. We would welcome suggestions for the next special edition to be published in November 2000.

David Squires and Gráinne Conole