

ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING TECHNOLOGY NEWSLETTER

ALT-C 1-5

NEWS 6

FEATURE 7-8

REVIEWS 9

COMMENT 10-11

EVENTS 12

ALT-C 2003: ten years on September 2003 - University of Sheffield

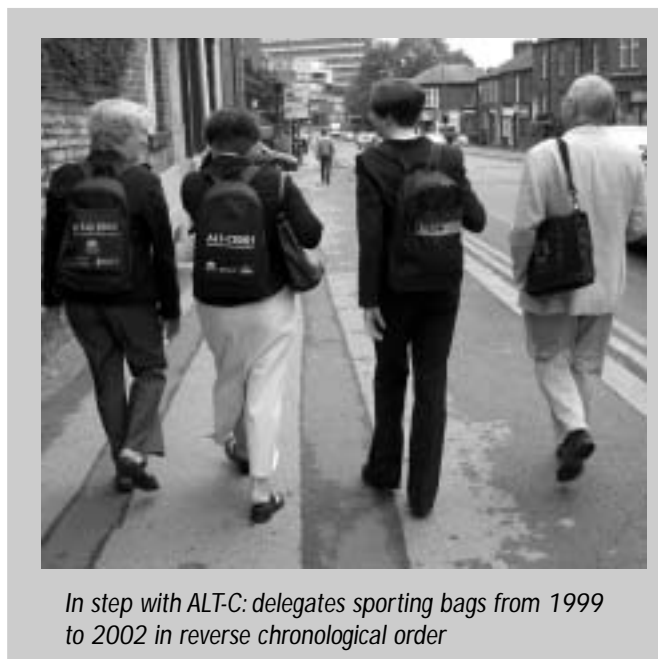
JACQUIE KELLY AND
MARGARET WALLIS

Despite some delays due to Network Rail, we arrived safely for registration which was slick but somewhat daunting for “an ALT-C virgin” like Margaret. Over 500 delegates, twelve sessions running simultaneously and venues dispersed around the Sheffield campus contributed to a sense of bewilderment. However a change of venue for the pre-conference session on “The UK eUniversities experience: aims, issues, solutions and outcomes” was speedily and efficiently dealt with by numerous friendly conference assistants in canary yellow T-shirts. Jonathan Darby and a team of contributors outlined progress on the design and launch of Volume 1.0 of the UKeU’s student-centred learning environment.

The Conference began in an extremely full lecture hall. As a newcomer the scale of the Conference and the enthusiasm of participants was a revelation. There was no cynicism apparent amongst the “old lags”, rather the excitement of being part of this dynamic, fast moving subject area. Chris Yapp’s opening keynote address was challenging and optimistic. He identified ten issues that need to be addressed if networked learning is to materialise globally (*see page 4 for Chris Yapp’s article*). Brian Sutton, Executive Director of Ufi/Learn Direct outlined the progress being made in developing “a “mass access laboratory” nation-wide. It was staggering to learn that their marketing budget is \$25m. This apparently is essential to ensure “people know you are there.” We wondered how much the combined HE sector spend is on marketing.

Our first plenary session was with Ranald McDonald, Sal Cooke and Paul Bacsich who presented their vision of communities of practice. Ranald had prepared a brief background paper on Communities of Practice, which we were invited to read and ponder. In a highly interactive session delegates worked on the distinction between “core participation” and “legitimate peripheral participation” and in the light of this reviewed our personal experience of communities of practice. Sal Cooke followed this with an interesting introduction to Learning Design and then Paul Bacsich presented on Diversity of Learning through technology.

Our own JISC Workshop, “How to build your institutional MLE: learning by sharing practice”, stimulated valuable feedback. The session also highlighted one of the major frustrations of the conference - the lack of time to pursue issues more deeply. In every session we attended presenters were battling against the clock to cover their material. Indeed the organisers



In step with ALT-C: delegates sporting bags from 1999 to 2002 in reverse chronological order

might consider presenting an award next year for the presenter who speaks most quickly. There would be many contenders!

Next, Margaret opted for a useful presentation by Nile and Thorpe “Too much information: providing new pathways to student support”. Blackboard is being used to deliver background information and materials for students on HND/C courses. Adam Warren from Southampton University delivered a presentation on using PowerPoint to create animated guides for students. Both these sessions were essentially practical and provided useful ideas. Grainne Conole and David Kennedy’s workshop “Use of images to enhance learning” proved very

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

interesting as well. Perhaps some of the aims of the workshop were not met but each group certainly had interesting discussions around the subject of images.

Those new to researching learning technology would have enjoyed the activities in “Turning Research into Practice” with Martin Oliver. In this workshop we were invited to consider the research represented in the morning’s keynote speeches. This raised a lot of issues including the significance of ‘no significant difference’ and the ethics of funded research. The tables were then turned when we were invited to pose our own research questions for the consideration of the group. The latter activity sparked off some lively debate as we struggled to understand each other’s perspectives. We left feeling that we were, indeed, at the threshold of the community of learning technology research practitioners and this was reinforced a few days later when we received an e-mail from the presenter summarising our debate together with advice on publishing our research.

We may be fascinated by the possibilities of e-learning environments but what do the students make of it all? The SOLE project (Students’ Online Learning Experiences) is attempting to find out via an eighteen-month research project involving a broad spectrum of UK higher and further education institutions. The presenters of Symposium SY07 “Sharing Our Souls: E-students experiences across the disciplines”, used a wide variety of data collection methods including questionnaires, diaries, interviews and VLE statistics for students in seven different subjects. Their findings will be available later this year on the Bristol University Institute for Learning and Research Technology website.

In WS10 ‘How can I make my course more interactive?’ (Sandra Windeatt), we were asked about the meaning of ‘interactivity’ and its relationship with learning. We agreed that while print might be defined as non-interactive, you could certainly learn from it. Although multimedia packages could be defined as interactive it has often been observed that students



George Roberts, Grainne Conole, Joyce Martin and Rhonda Riachi look forward to eating the anniversary cake.

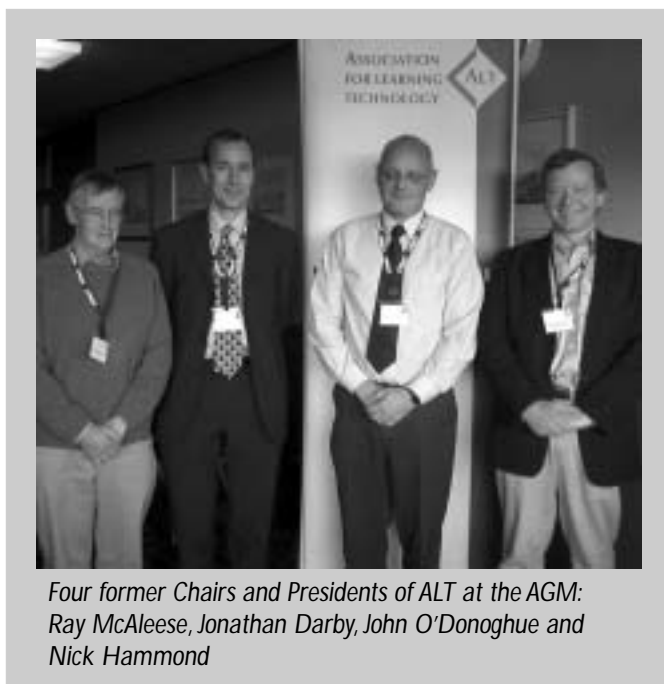
don’t learn from them. While we puzzled over this, we also drew a ‘rich picture’ of the various interactions a student has with a multiplicity of things and people and considered how this might reflect various learning theories. Tips from the literature were included on a handout and we left with plenty to think about.

What were our impressions of the ALT Conference? Given the size of the conference and the objective of “active engagement” we would urge the organisers to be more proactive in providing opportunities for newcomers to feel part of the crowd. We noticed a number of lost souls circulating around the edges of activity. On a personal basis we both renewed acquaintance with old friends and colleagues and engaged in many useful discussions. We also planned some exciting future activities. The area for exhibitors was a great improvement on last year’s conference, having space for delegates to visit and being central (to the refreshment area!). Overall the enthusiasm of organisers and delegates alike and the wealth of innovation and creativity evident throughout made this an exhausting yet exhilarating experience and one we both hope to repeat in the not-too-distant future! (A point for future contributors - if you are reusing slides, please update the title to reflect the current conference!)

See you at Exeter next year.

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Four former Chairs and Presidents of ALT at the AGM: Ray McAleese, Jonathan Darby, John O’Donoghue and Nick Hammond

An alternative perspective of ALT-C 2003

JOHN COOK

Someone once said “the people who go to conferences are the ones who shouldn’t!” My continuing search for data to test out this hypothesis propelled me off to ALT-C 2003. Despite my train being two and a half hours late on the Sunday, I was in time for the evening reception and a pint of ALT-Peculiar, the ALT 10th anniversary beer. Ten years ago I gave a paper as a part-time PhD student in Hull, which was the first ALT-C. This year my PhD student Dejan gave his first paper at ALT-C.

For me, ALT-C is becoming more and more a network infrastructure rather than a destination. Of course it is a good place to go to meet old friends and become acquainted with new colleagues but ALT-C these days is part of the bigger ALT road show of meetings and, well, more meetings. On the Monday I had an Annual General Meeting, a Special Interest Group and a Central Executive meeting. Given the fact that I am also on the Programme Committee, I therefore had to chair a session on Monday. So it was not until Tuesday morning that I finally attended a session of my own choice. This was an excellent research paper by Sarah Currier. I co-edit the research paper proceedings; this is the second year we have had a research strand and I must say it is going from strength to strength. It was just a shame that research papers were not given longer slots than the short papers.

On the Monday evening we gathered in a students halls of residence for authentic Yorkshire food. There was Yorkshire pudding and lots of pies but no cutlery! There was a good band and I helped judge the ‘Old Lags and Their Bags’ competition with Rhonda (the winner had the best collection of bags from previous ALT conferences).

Top tables can cause problems. We didn’t have one at my wedding and the shock waves have only died down 14 years later. On Tuesday evening, at the conference dinner, in the Cutlers Hall, we did have a top table. Its purpose was to honour the founding members of ALT. However, some people chose to sit with their mates. The jury is out on top tables but the dinner was fine and my company on the top table was excellent. I had to return back to London early Wednesday morning but my colleagues told me that Diana Laurillard announced a funded networks initiative and that Shirley Alexander’s keynote was excellent. As for my hypothesis, I think that it is wrong and needs changing: “The people who go to ALT conferences are the people that should go to ALT conferences, except we probably do not do enough to attract colleagues from FE or indeed from Adult and Community Learning.” I’m already looking forward to further amending my hypothesis by the time ALT-C 2004 comes around in Exeter.

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The band, Lazy Dollies, at the Monday evening reception



The winner of the ‘Old Lags and Bags’ competition, Adam Warren



A string quartet sets the tone at the reception in the Cutler’s Hall on Tuesday evening

Communities of practice

CHRIS YAPP

There are two fundamental questions that need to be addressed in this topic: which communities and what practice?

In the not too distant future we will have a global broadband infrastructure with the potential to transform learning. At this year's ALT-C, delegates were asked how long it would be before this infrastructure would be a reality. The consensus was around ten years. So my question is simple, "What do we need to do in the next five years to fulfil the hopes, dreams and aspirations for learning of the next generation?"

Imagine back in 1990, if you were predicting the future for retail banking. It was not obvious at that time the work underway in CERN, in an experimental sub-atomic particle physics facility, would have such an impact on this sector through telephone banking. With hindsight, we can see the underlying similarities in the computational complexity of these two very different spheres of activity.

My greatest fear is that if we are not expansive and bold in our vision for e-learning that we may see an emergence of a, "Gresham's Law" - bad e-learning will drive out good e-learning. For example, what if a university develops a world-class e-learning undergraduate course in say psychology? It costs approximately £10,000. Meanwhile, someone else produces an average course but exploits the new infrastructure and charges £1,000 for the "same" qualification, using economies of scale and scope made possible by the global infrastructure. How can we maintain and build greater quality?

For me, there are ten fundamental issues that bridge the gap (*see the panel*) between the necessary and the sufficient. In discussing these we can identify communities of practice, from neuroscience, to architecture, to politics, ethics and many more that the e-learning community needs to connect to if we are to deliver what I believe is a noble cause for our time.

In addressing each of these issues the "learning technology community of practice" needs to reach out to other communities of practice. Engagement with industry, policy, government, think tanks and others is part of the gap between the necessary and the sufficient. Much of my writing and speaking is to encourage others to see the era we live in as a new renaissance, "joining-up" many different fields underpinned by building a learning society. Let's not waste the chance and as Michael Young used to encourage others just "go for it!"

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This article is based on the keynote speech at ALT-C 2003.

Ten fundamental issues that bridge the gap

1. Values. What are our values for learning in the 21st century? Do we want to make access for all seven billion people a priority? Will we find cultural imperialism emerging through globalisation of education? How do we nurture openness and respect for diversity?
2. Governance. How will our current institutional infrastructure change to deliver to the values we wish to support with the roll out of the technical infrastructure? How will the governance reflect the aspirations for life-long learning?
3. Organisational design. Learning is at heart a social and a socialising experience. How do we blend the best of the old and the new? How do we design physical environments to take advantage of learning technologies?
4. Learning. How will we take new knowledge of the brain into the design of personalised learning styles? How will the individual learner, the team learner and learning communities evolve? How will they interact?
5. The Teacher. What does a teacher need to be confident and competent in the new environment? What is the career path and role of the professionals in learning?
6. Knowledge, skills and attitudes. What will we need to know to be able to create competitive economies and cohesive societies? What should we value in learning? What happens to the concept of curriculum?
7. Assessment. What should we measure and how do we create credible "courses" and "qualifications" How do we build CPD as core to the learning journey rather than a bolt on?
8. Knowledge. The future of Intellectual Property Rights is but one issue here. How will academic freedom evolve? What will the concept of "fair use" become? How will universities square the desire for freedom with the responsibility to transfer knowledge?
9. Funding. It's too easy to start with funding, although it has to be there of course. The balance between the individual, the family, employers and the state may change, indeed may need to change. How should funding reflect the values we started with? What kind of funding instruments do we need to create for lifelong learning?
10. Building learning communities. So much of the literature on change management is written for a stable predictable world of top down leadership. In a networked society, I believe that we need new ideas, to change the way that we think about change. How are the ideas from complexity theory such as emergence to be considered?

ALT's contribution to low-tech, distant education

ROSEMARY PHILLIMORE

How often do we get the chance to improve the life of not just one child but also the lives of their families, friends and village? Indirectly each of us attending ALT-C 2003 did that through a donation made at the conference to the Joe Homan Charity. At the social evening on Monday, John Stratford, Chair of the Organising Committee, presented a cheque for £2,000 to Jeannie Philpott, from the Joe Homan charity. In addition to this Adam Warren, the winner of the 'old lags and their bags' competition, raised another £225 during the evening.

The Joe Homan charity, started in 1965, aims to relieve child poverty in the rural areas of India and Thailand. The cornerstone of the charity is the Child Labour Prevention Scheme (CLPS), which compensates families who send their children to school instead of work. In Tamil Nadu, South India, where the charity started, child labour is endemic. For example, children work in factories for up to 12 hours a day, six days a week making matches. In rural areas children have to work to gather firewood, weed fields and look after siblings. The government provides free schooling but most families cannot afford to live without the money their children earn and so the children do not attend school. It costs £70 a year to fund a child to attend school.



John Hammond presents the cheque to Jeannie Philpott of the Joe Homan charity

Jeannie explained how the ALT donation will be used: 'The cost of taking a student through a year of further education, including hostel accommodation and food, ranges from £450 to £550, depending on the institution.' The money raised at ALT-C 2003 should fund four years of further education for one student. The Joe Homan Charity staff are now looking to find a student whose progress we can follow and further details will be posted on the ALT web site.

By accepting a shopping style conference bag at ALT-C 2003, each delegate contributed £4 to the Joe Homan charity. We are now discussing repeating this at ALT-C 2004. For example, we could purchase cotton bags from a small company in India started by a young man who was funded by the charity. Members are encouraged to let us know their thoughts on this suggestion at alt@brookes.ac.uk

You can help the Joe Homan Charity in many ways. For example, if you are part of the planning committee for a forthcoming conference, you could encourage your conference to make a charitable donation. Alternatively, you could use the cotton bags from the Joe Homan charity at the conference. Finally you could make a monthly donation of £6 per month to improve the life of just one child. Further information is available at: www.joehoman.org.uk

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Learning Technology in Transition: From Individual Enthusiasm to Institutional Implementation

Edited by Jane K Seale

Special 40% discount to members if ordered by 15 November 2003

Celebrating ALT's tenth anniversary, this book is a collaborative project between ALT, SURF (www.surf.nl) and ASCILITE (www.ascilite.org.au)

Contributors: Wim de Boer, Petra Boezeroy, Tom Boyle, Gayle Calverley, Grainne Conole, John Cook, Frances Deepwell, Jay Dempster, Petra Fisser, Barry Harper, Gab Jacobs, Allison Littlejohn, John O'Donoghue, Martin Oliver, Ron Oliver, Susi Peacock, Joe Wilson.

Don't miss your chance to get the discount!

Discounted price: £31.95 / EUR 45.00 (postage EUR 8.00 extra)

Published by Swets & Zeitlinger. ISBN 90 265 1963 X. Autumn 2003. 175 pages. Email: orders@swets.nl <http://www.szp.swets.nl>

Seb's review

SEB SCHMOLLER

Here is an "end of September 2003 snapshot" of my work.

Corporate and institutional membership growth - recently joined corporate members include Question Mark Computing Ltd, the BBC, NESTA Futurelab, Scottish Enterprise, NATFHE, and, as "small corporates", Futurate Ltd and Myknowledgemap. We now have over 100 HE institutional members, over 50 FE (and equivalent) institutional members, and well over 30 corporate members.

The Labs Group SIG - with Sara de Freitas and Stephen Heppell, I worked on the organisation of and follow up to the inaugural meeting in September of this new ALT Special Interest Group (SIG) for learning technology labs.

Accreditation for Learning Technologists - by the time you read this, we expect to have appointed a consultant who will, over the next eight months, be taking forward ALT's work in developing a simple, economical, voluntary, peer-based UK-wide structure to accredit individuals as learning technologists.

ALT Website - at the end of July the site was implemented in the newly commissioned design template, as a result of which the site has moved to near the top of Google's ranking when a

search is made for learning technology. Later this year we will migrate the site to a new open source service provider and begin to implement several new features. Initially we will be concentrating on the paper-submission system for ALT-C 2004 and the booking system for ALT Events including ALT-C 2004.

HEFCE Review of the Research Assessment Exercise - submitted ALT's response to the Review, based on input from members of ALT's Research and Policy Committee. A copy of the response can be viewed at: www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html.

ALT Staffing and Hosting - worked closely with Rhonda Riachi and the ALT Trustees on renegotiating ALT's hosting agreement with Oxford Brookes University and on the recruitment of new staff, including to the new post of ALT Operations Manager. Check the website for details.

If you need to contact me, my email address is sschmoller@brookes.ac.uk.

Director's corner

ALT-C 2003: a peculiar success!

Over 500 delegates gathered in Sheffield for our tenth anniversary conference and to savour the delights of the specially blended "ALT peculiar" beer and the birthday cake. Many thanks to all the ALT-C 2003 team, our sponsors and especially to all the members and presenters who made it a conference to remember.

Committee members update

John Cook (London Metropolitan University) was elected Vice-Chair of ALT at the Annual General Meeting. The Vice-Chair serves for 3 years, taking on the Chair and the Presidency in the second and third years respectively. Stephen Brown (De Montfort University) is now Chair of ALT and Joyce Martin (Becta) is President for 2003-04. Also elected to the Central Executive Committee (the ALT trustees) were Gayle Calverley (University of Manchester) and Jay Dempster (University of Warwick), who will serve three years.

A presentation was made to retiring committee members Nick Hammond and Jonathan Darby to thank them for their service to ALT since its foundation in 1993. Read the AGM minutes at www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html

EASA 2004

Entry forms for the biennial European Academic Software Awards will be available online from 20 October. Applications close on 23 December 2003. Go to www.easa-award.net

Free e-learning guides

In October all individual members of ALT will receive a complimentary copy of the 40-page Guide for Learning Technologists in the e-learning series published by the LTSN Generic Centre. For more information on this and the e-tutor 2003 awards (closing date 15 November 2003), go to www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp

ALT-C 2004: blue skies beckon...

Every year members ask me, "Have I missed the deadline to submit a paper for ALT-C?" Get the dates in your diary now. Research papers: 5 March; all other streams: 26 March (see the advert on page 12).

News from members

Tom Franklin now runs Franklin Consulting (www.franklin-consulting.co.uk) offering specialist advice and consultancy on the implementation of learning technologies. Congratulations to **Ruth Jenkinson**, who took up the position of Assistant Principal/Ambleside Principal at St Martin's College, Lancashire; and to ALT Membership Committee Chair, **Barbara Newland**, who is moving from the University of Durham to take on a Senior Lecturer post at Bournemouth University. **Ted Smith** is Chair of a consultancy specialising in strategic issues for managers in industry and education (www.ts-consulting.co.uk); **Kathy Wiles** will be Director of the Centre for Academic Development at Newcastle University from December; and **Chris Yapp** has moved from HP to Microsoft to become Head of Public Sector Innovation.

Rhonda Riachi alt@brookes.ac.uk

XML: letting humans be more creative

HELEN HARWOOD

Helen Harwood interviewed Marion Manton, eLearning Research Project Manager, and David Balch, web developer, at a recent XML workshop run by ALT. Marion and Dave are both at TALL (Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning), University of Oxford (<http://tall.conted.ox.ac.uk/>)

XML stands for 'extensible mark-up language'. Dave explained its benefits over HTML: "...it's really a framework for applications to be built on (e.g. XHTML). By using XML we gain more control over the data we work with and therefore more power and flexibility to manipulate it as we want". He continued that the more tangible benefits of XML included being able to make major design changes to thousands of pages in a matter of seconds and improving quality by reducing individual hand editing. In addition, he stated that XML can add meaning to content through mark-up, which allows manipulation in a variety of ways. For example, it can deal with the technical areas, be used to collect metadata about learning and also be used to shape the learning content that are produced. If you are new to XML or learning technology, Dave recommends that the best way to learn new web technologies is by using them. He suggests setting up an XML processor (Mozilla and IE6 have them built in), writing a simple XML file and an XSLT file to transform it into HTML and experimenting.

"all the main eLearning specifications (SCORM, IMS etc) are based on XML to greater or lesser degrees, so if you are under pressure to conform to any of them you will need to use XML."

XML behind the scenes

XML is not strictly a learning technology tool but it has found many roles 'behind the scenes'. Dave explained: "The content production for three projects currently in development at TALL is handled using XML. This is essentially managing content, so is not learning-specific, but is very helpful when dealing with the large amount of content some courses have (thousands of pages). The XML approach lets us replace a lot of the tedious hand editing with automated conversions". Dave went on to describe the process: "We use XSLT to convert our authors' MS Word documents into an in-house XML application (based on our XML schema) and produce the final HTML content from that (again with XSLT). Most of the conversion from MSWord is automated, although some hand-editing is needed as MSWord documents don't describe the content as fully as we'd like. The conversion from XML to HTML is automated, via a batch conversion process."

Standards

In relation to standards (metadata, content packaging) Dave explained that, "Two of our projects are being delivered in the UKeU learning platform, which uses the XML-based IMS metadata and content packaging standards. TALL produces most metadata automatically from MSWord documents, and currently writes the content packaging manifest by hand,

producing content packages for loading directly into the UKeU's LMS (Learning Management System). This has given us more control than using the UKeU's LCMS (Learning Content Management System) would have given us."

In an age of sharing, the role of standards was further developed by Marion "...all the main eLearning specifications (SCORM, IMS etc) are based on XML to greater or lesser degrees, so if you are under pressure to conform to any of them you will need to use XML. As well as learning tools XML is huge in the library world (with standards such as Dublin Core) and looks like it is likely to be the key to sharing resources more straight forwardly in the future."

Dave listed the current applications of XML: online documents (XHTML), historical texts (TEI), printed documents (XSL-FO), document transformation (XSLT), links (XLINK), vector graphics (SVG), multimedia (SMIL), mathematical notation (MathML), software user interfaces (XUL), personal relationships (FOAF). He added: "If there isn't already an XML format that does what you need, you can create it yourself and that is the most important way that XML will develop and change." Looking to the future, Dave felt that XML would probably still be used in 50 years' time but in some more evolved form. As indicated by the name, it is designed to be extended.

Extending the XML workshops?

At the workshops run by ALT in July 2003 ('Using XML for effective eLearning development') the team included a project manager, a web developer and a more traditional learning technologist, who all use XML in varying ways in their work. The presenters gave an overview of XML with implications of different options of use so participants could learn enough about areas they were interested in to investigate further. Marion told me, "... the two workshops deviated in terms of areas where there were a lot more questions and people wanted to explore things in detail." She added "I think we managed to find a middle path, but inevitably some people got more out of it than others. We have been wondering if we did it again whether to mix the theoretical with more hands-on, and perhaps make it a two-day course." The workshop web site is: www.tall.ox.ac.uk/tallinternet/projects/projects_development-tools.asp

If you are interested in attending a workshop on this theme (or would like to suggest another theme) contact alt@brookes.ac.uk. For further reading see the extended version of this article on www.alt.ac.uk

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How can JANET support your teaching and learning?

GILL CHESTER

The UK educational sector can share information and access the Internet through connection to an advanced telecommunication network, known as JANET. This is run by the 'not for profit' organisation, the United Kingdom Education and Research Network Association (UKERNA), through a service level agreement with the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). At the centre of this network is a high-speed backbone referred to as SuperJANET. A number identifies the individual versions of the backbone, with the current version being referred to as SuperJANET4.

To ensure the network continues to meet the changing needs of its community this backbone is procured under a fixed term contract. The contract for SuperJANET4 finishes in December 2005. The JISC has asked UKERNA to build an overall statement of requirements in order to advise the Funding Bodies within higher and further education on the needs of a successor to SuperJANET4. Although this requirements analysis will be based on a number of factors including the technologies and funding available, it is important that UKERNA has feedback from a variety of different user groups as well as networking staff. We are particularly interested in receiving comments from staff using the JANET network to support learning and teaching, either remotely or on campus. This use may include e-learning, facilitation of distributed communities, videoconferencing or video streaming to support learning.

To stimulate discussion, a summary document has been produced based on UKERNA's experiences in running SuperJANET4 and some early feedback from our users. This document starts from the premise that there are certain key issues that are going to be important in future networking provision which are not simply based on the provision of bandwidth. These include the need to provide end-to-end network delivery, reliability to users and an ability to manage the increasing demands for leading-edge facilities on the network whilst maintaining a sound production-quality service to all users. The areas identified to date are provided in detail within the report but in summary include:

- **Architecture and multiple services concept** - There is clearly a need to provide institutions with a stable and reliable network. However it is essential that this network is continually improved and developed so it can meet the changing needs of our community. This study will look into the potential creation of multiple service provision to allow these conflicting requirements to be resolved.
- **Transmission infrastructure** - In the past the backbone has been provided under contract by a commercial supplier. However the cost and availability of dark optical fibre, i.e. the actual network infrastructure, has come to a point where its direct ownership may be an option. This brings with it several issues including legal and contractual obligations, not

to mention an increased operational and management overhead.

- **Network equipment** - A review of equipment available to support SuperJANET5 will be undertaken. This is a complex but key area, which may include an evaluation and eventual procurement of transmission level equipment.
- **Reliability** - Network reliability has been perceived as an issue for many years, with availability of funding allowing only for increased reliability where low cost solutions exist. If more is to be done in this area then an overall set of standards for reliable end-to-end connectivity will be needed, backed by a cost benefit analysis. This will be undertaken as part of the requirements analysis process. This area is probably of particular interest to staff running online courses as the unavailability of the network can effect your provision both logistically and potentially financially.

A full copy of this paper is available on the SuperJANET5 web site at www.ja.net/Superjanet5

Your comments

We need your feedback on the requirements paper and/or an outline of your requirements and needs for future networking provision. This feedback is welcome from individuals, learning technology units or subject groups. You may, however, find it useful to consult with your institution's networking team to consider a joint response based on technological and user requirements.

Please send feedback either to Jeremy Sharp J.Sharp@ukerna.ac.uk or Gill Chester G.Chester@ukerna.ac.uk. The deadline for responses to this paper is end of November 2003 after which they will be analysed and incorporated into a summary of the Requirements Analysis, which will be published in December 2003. An e-mail list has been established to allow discussion on these requirements; this list will also be used to disseminate updates on the project. Further details on how to join this list are available on the SuperJANET5 web site that contains further information at www.ja.net/superjanet5.

Gill Chester
SuperJANET5 Communications Manager, UKERNA
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We are particularly interested in receiving comments from staff using the JANET network to support learning and teaching, either remotely or on campus. This use may include e-learning, facilitation of distributed communities, videoconferencing or video streaming to support learning.

Antiquity Related Collections Harnessed for Educational Scenarios (ARCHES)

JAY DEMPSTER

ARCHES is a collaborative project between the University of Warwick's School of Theatre Studies, Centre for Academic Practice and IT Services (ITS) elab with City College Coventry. The project, which started in January this year, has been funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) under the Exchange for Learning Programme (X4L). Over a two-year period, the ARCHES Project aims to re-purpose materials on ancient Greece and Rome between *three* educational contexts (further and higher education and an international online resource), *three* subject areas (Theatre Studies, Classics, Virtual Reality (VR) Modelling) and *seven* modules.

The project will make available for national use a new collection of VR objects relating to Greece and Rome prepared by the University of Warwick. These objects will be of immense value to disciplines such as Classics, the Performing Arts, Art History, Architecture and IT Modelling. No similar VR objects currently freely exist in the public domain. Moreover, enabled by a number of recent grants from the University of Warwick, project members in Classics and Theatre Studies have created a collection of 1,500 original digital images of Roman artefacts. Through this project, these two collections will become freely available to further and higher education in the UK and international educational sectors for the first time.

This collaborative project will bring together lecturers from the Arts Faculty departments at Warwick and City College Coventry with educational developers and technologists from the Centre for Academic Practice and the ITS elab. The aims include the creation of a searchable online database for tutors and students which can deliver resources to diverse technical and educational environments. It is hoped that the work will provide in a broad sense valuable models for repurposing electronic resources for use in learning and teaching.

During the first year of this project, we will be focusing on the technical architecture for submitting educational descriptions of the resources and addressing issues of access. We hope to produce a facility whereby staff and students alike can search or browse the resources as thumbnails in a web environment and choose a selection for their own project or teaching purpose. It is also anticipated that it will be possible to annotate and edit the data and then save this personal collection for publishing to the web. In the second part of ARCHES, lecturers and students will create and deploy these collections in a variety of educational scenarios.

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Opportunity knocking: co-opting and games

KYM BUCHANAN

28 Days Later recently opened here in the United States, and it's my kind of movie. A few accidental heroes must survive against bloodthirsty zombies. For many educators, new technologies feel like zombies: terrifying and unpredictable. Many schools ban new technologies: cell phones, CD players, Game Boys, and such. In some cases they're justified: not every technology belongs in school and not all learning can be fun. In other cases the technology isn't so monstrous. The cure is evangelism, professional development, and integration. As our students fearlessly embrace new technologies for communication and entertainment, educators can be change agents or change victims. Many "toy" technologies are extraordinary low-threshold opportunities for "serious" learning. Rather than barricade the door, educators should co-opt the technologies students already play with.

Educators have recent experience in co-opting a new technology. The World Wide Web was originally a distraction in schools, filled with trivial or offensive pages. It's becoming a global library with a variety of valuable resources. Educators didn't sever their Internet connections.

Instead, they co-opted the Web with new content and teaching strategies for meaningful objectives (e.g. WebQuests - <http://webquest.sdsu.edu/>). Here, co-opt means "steal, nicely, for the common good." As educators consider what is good for students, they should look to toy technologies. In high school and higher education, co-opting has led to some of my most successful teaching. I taught English, but these principles apply to all disciplines and age levels. There are three levels of co-opting: finding, adapting, and creating.

Some technologies can be immediately found and used. For example, many students listen to music on portable CD or MP3 players. For a unit on poetry I required each student to bring a poem or song to class. Most students chose songs. I would play the song over stereo speakers, then the student would read the lyrics aloud. We would search for techniques in the lyrics (e.g. rhyme) and discuss the power of the lyrics with and without music. My students were engaged and contemplative, mastered dozens of poetry terms, and perceived their favorite songs in new ways. Co-opting such "found" technologies puts the burden on students, so it's easy to try. Many students are avid technology and cultural consumers, including music, movies, games, and the Internet. Teachers can foster much greater engagement by allowing students to use found examples in their assignments and class discussion. In my class, the greater objective was teaching English scholarship, so any

specific examples were only vehicles to understanding universal ideas (e.g. theme, character, conflict). It can still feel strange to compare Homer's *Odyssey* to Nintendo's Mario, or Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* to Angelina Jolie's *Tomb Raider*.

Some technologies can be co-opted through adaptation. These include Web technologies for collaborative writing or other communication (e.g. chat or instant messaging). Teachers may need to restructure technologies and activities for educational use. For example, some online educators are eager to use the Web for peer editing, but they need software that tracks student involvement and enables easy assessment. Another example is video editing. I taught active voice using a clip from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. I added on-screen text for Yoda's passive dialog. ("So certain are you.") I didn't merely want to entertain my students with a funny scene. I paused the tape and challenged them to rearrange the words on the screen into active voice. ("You are so certain.") Many students were engaged and learned best through this activity.

The highest level of co-opting is creating new learning objects using toy technologies. Computer games are the leading example (and my specialty). Games have tantalizing potential for engagement, and successful players master a variety of skills

and knowledge. Most students either play games or are familiar with the most popular games and game play. The potential for teaching is not well-illustrated by existing games, which are generally narrow, violent, and fantastical. A growing number of educators and companies are trying to create more "serious" games, without sacrificing fun (i.e. engagement). Today's games are the leading edge of a technology revolution in learning. Prior technologies, from the printing press to movies, have allowed one-way communication from a teacher/author to students/readers. Two-way communication distinguishes

classroom teachers from documentary filmmakers: dynamically adjusting lessons to optimize learning. This is the much-hyped "interactivity" that computers can deliver (eventually). Good computer games demonstrate extraordinary interactivity, with dynamic environments, challenges, and continuous learning. A few commercial games, especially simulations, are already useful or easily adaptable for teaching.

Education and games share many values: teamwork, creativity, learning, and continuous improvement. I try to apply good game design to my teaching. For example, good games encourage players to try again after failing. Good games are a continuous stream of follow-on and follow-up "lessons" in the form of new, in-game abilities and successive locations to explore. Good games have authentic tutorials for players to practice applicable skills with low-stakes assessment. As more researchers and

"I taught active voice using a clip from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*... I didn't merely want to entertain my students with a funny scene... Many students were engaged and learned best through this activity."

designers study and create games, we'll discover more potential educational advantages. The challenge to teachers is practising co-opting, to prepare for such emerging opportunities. Toy technologies do require some advanced teaching and some fearlessness. For example, in my poetry unit I had to explicitly discuss lyrics I would condone (e.g. adult relationships) and reject (e.g. sexism). Compared to teachers, students may be more comfortable with technologies, and they will definitely be more familiar with youth culture. Educators must be willing to look a little foolish or uncool, to allow students to learn with appealing tools and examples.

Co-opting toy technologies like games can help students learn better. We must still beware of zombies. We should not teach students that something must be fun to be worthwhile. We

“Co-opting toy technologies like games can help students learn better. We must still beware of zombies. We should not teach students that something must be fun to be worthwhile. We should be wise in how we spend time and money.”

Kym Buchanan
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should be wise in how we spend time and money. We shouldn't replace essential teaching and content with fluff. Moreover we should avoid creating monsters in our students: motionless drones mesmerized by monitor glow, endless clicking and never relating or reflecting. These risks are minor compared to the potential in front of us. Compare the students in a lecture class to the children gathered around a new PlayStation game. We know engagement is essential to learning, and we see that learning can be fun. Opportunity is knocking.

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ALT WORKSHOP

Open source software for learning, teaching, assessment and administration

Oxford Brookes University

13 November 2003

£85 (ALT members) £140 (non-members)

This workshop aims to help academic and research staff in UK HE and FE place the free and open source software movement in context. It will concentrate on software likely to be used for teaching, and administration of teaching.

Two presenters are from OSS watch, which is a nationally-funded Advisory Service on Open Source Software. Its goal is to provide the UK further and higher education community with neutral and authoritative guidance about open source software, and about related open standards. For more information please visit www.oss-watch.ac.uk

Presenters: Sebastian Rahtz, Stuart Lee, Michael Fraser, Howard Noble and Randy Metcalfe, Oxford Univ. Computing Services.

Booking deadline: 30 October 2003

Scenario planning to guide the adoption of learning techniques in education

HEFCE, Centrepoint, London

26 November 2003

£100 (ALT members) £150 (non-members)

This workshop will introduce the field of scenario planning and show how different techniques and approaches can be applied to help shape institutional strategy. The workshop will explore different models of technology and change in higher education with the aim of turning research into guidelines for practice.

For booking forms and more information please visit www.alt.ac.uk/workshops.asp or email alt@brookes.ac.uk

Who should attend:

- Senior learning technologists and others working at an institutional level to introduce VLEs and related technologies
- Academics with responsibility for championing the introduction of learning technologies to the curriculum in their discipline
- Strategic planning managers and staff in institutional strategy and policy units
- Education policy planners working at a national level
- Researchers in the field of learning technology theory, policy and practice
- Researchers in the discipline of scenario planning

Presenters: Henk Frencken, Univ. of Leiden and Dr Wim de Boer, Univ. of Twente

Booking deadline: 12 November 2003

Using simple tools to create e-learning content

City Learning Centre, Islington, London

2 December 2003

£85 (ALT members) £140 (non-members)

Many teachers and lecturers acknowledge that the quality of online materials is often poor, but believe they lack the skills to produce anything better. This workshop will demonstrate how imaginative online materials can be created easily using familiar tools (eg Microsoft Office). Motivation is the key factor in achievement; the workshop will look at how motivation can be encouraged by using information and learning technologies to produce:

- properly differentiated materials
 - resources which meet a variety of learning styles
 - resources which encourage skills development
- Participants are encouraged to bring their own 'raw materials' to work on.

Presenters: Terri Kinnison and Andy Black, Ferl Development Officers (www.ferl.org.uk)

Booking deadline: 18 November 2003

ALT-C 2004: Blue skies and pragmatism

Eleventh international ALT conference

14-16 September 2004 Exeter, Devon, UK

Papers are invited under the following themes:

- technical infrastructures;
- knowledge management, standards and semantics;
- new technologies for learning, including wireless, ambient, smart and other forms of technologies, media and communications;
- tools and strategies for effective use of technologies;
- pedagogy and the social implications of the new forms of communication;
- organisational, strategic and management issues;
- evidence-based research and evaluation;
- accessibility and inclusion.

Deadlines

research papers: Friday 5 March 2004 other streams: Friday 26 March 2004

www.alt.ac.uk/altc2004

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ALT-N

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