

Editorial

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In the summer of 2005 the World Conference on Computers in Education (WCCE 2005) took place at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, and it had been hoped that we would be able to publish a special edition devoted to papers drawn from those presented at the conference. However, due to one or two technical glitches, this proved impossible and three papers from the conference were published in the last edition (12.1), and four further papers from the WCCE 2005 appear in this edition.

The overall theme of conference was “40 Years of Computers in Education. What Works?”, and the first two papers in this edition reflect this.

Margaret Cox and Gail Marshall in their paper “Effects of ICT: Do we know what we should know?” argue that even after many decades of ICT use in the classroom there are still important unanswered questions about the impact of technology in both the long and short term. They initially explain why it is important to obtain answers to these questions, why the questions remain unanswered. They then suggest that the reasons for the questions remaining unanswered, despite considerable research into numerous aspects of ICT in education, are due to major policy and methodological problems including the lack of large-scale longitudinal studies. The main body of the paper focuses on what Cox and Marshall see as the five key problems that “need to be understood and addressed if future research into the effects of ICT on students’ learning is to provide results which are robust and reliable....” They conclude by suggesting ways forward for Government ICT development policies, teacher training programmes, national curricula and future research projects.

In “ICT, Educational Technology and Educational Instruments. Will what has worked, work again elsewhere in the future?” George-Louis Baron and Eric Bruillard like Cox and Marshall note the limitations of previous research. Baron and Bruillard suggest that most results were obtained from focused experiments using some form of educational technology and generally a limited number of students, or from large scale surveys that had little control over the kind of activities that the students undertook. The paper then focuses on

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developments in France over time and conflicting views and results concerning the role of ICT in education, and the problems of studying the influences of ICT on learning. They continue by discussing and giving examples of the changing role of “software instruments” (word processors, spreadsheets, search engines etc). The reader wonders if Baron and Bruillard answer their question when they conclude “Then what has worked in the past in innovative experimentations may transform into something both different and akin that is going to work in the future, no longer as an innovation, but integrated in a curriculum.”

It is perhaps a little usual to publish a paper like that of Tjeerd Plomp, Willem Pelgrum and Nancy Law as it describes work that is very much in progress. The decision to publish this paper was taken as the research project described in “SITES2006—International comparative survey of pedagogical practices and ICT in education” addresses in some part the questions posed in the previous two papers, and also highlights what should be a very significant study. The paper summarizes the conceptual framework and planning of a 21 country cross-national, comparative study under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The study hopes to increase understanding of the role of ICT in the teaching and learning process by examining: the pedagogic practices applied in school and how ICT is used in them, how ICT is supporting and enhancing learning and teaching, and the extent to which factors associated with the use of ICT and pedagogic practices are found in schools and among teachers. The data collection for the study took place during 2006 and the team are now analyzing it, and we are hoping to publish a special edition of EAIT devoted to the findings of SITES2006 early in 2008.

Rosa Bottino’s paper “On-line learning networks: Framework and Scenarios” considers the potential of on-line learning for strengthening relationships between institutions, groups and individuals. This is accomplished by the author examining cases in which she has been involved, or been able to examine closely. The paper initially describes three networks and then presents a framework for analysing learning networks. She concludes her study by suggesting that “online communities can provide sociability as well as information and instrumental aid.” However, she stresses the importance of “the right software to support group communication,” and an emphasis on collaborative learning.