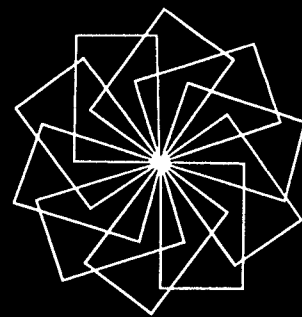


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# Directions IN EDUCATION



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

## Global Students on a Cyber Campus?

*GLOBAL VILLAGE or networks of shanty towns? Our main theme in this issue is nothing less than the re-working of education structures (schools and beyond) in the light of new internationalised technology, local demography and political imperatives. The first five writers raise all this, and some implications for better learning are winked out. And then there's a national election looming...but we'll pick up on that, afterwards, in October!*

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### Need for Human Warmth

RECENT MEDIA reports are replete with examples of computer technology revolutionising education. In *The Australian* (19/8/98:43), Matthew Spencer reported that 'Wake Forest University claims to have been the first US university to furnish every student with a portable computer', a notebook updated every two years. The University's Vice President claimed that 'the computers increased the communication and interaction between students and academics and made learning more collaborative'. In another article, 'Uni. moves on future vision - Melbourne University is to spend \$5m to enhance its teaching', Nathan Cochrane reports on the University of Melbourne's upgrading of its network to an ATM. Computer literacy is widely hailed as the new literacy of the 21st Century. Australian universities are using

technology in exciting and innovative ways. Distance learning, and offshore programs in particular, benefit immensely from these developments. Many Australian universities run programs in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

Innovations like these have brought significant benefits to education. Such technologies should be harnessed to their fullest for the purposes for which they are best suited. However, it is important to remember that such technology is a tool and not an end in itself - it is no panacea for education. It is easy to become caught up in the hype and 'cyberbole' and to lose sight of the fundamentals of education.

Education is, to a great extent, a social process. Each of us recalls those few teachers who really inspired us, acted as mentors, and imparted a contagious enthusiasm for their subjects. Much teaching, to be effective, still seems to require some direct contact. Email, discussion groups, groupware and teleconferencing are very convenient and facilitate global discussions and collaboration between students, and between teachers and students, which otherwise would not occur. However, they do not replace one critical dimension of teaching and learning - the human need for warmth and meaningful social interaction. Interpersonal communication carries dimensions which cannot be replicated through technological means - certain cues, a full engagement of the senses, feedback, warmth, encouragement and a sense of being valued and recognised. This message was brought home to me in reading Hugh Mackay's article in the *Age*, 'News Extra' (5/9/98:8). Mackay, in reviewing the outcomes of a large US research project on Internet users, reported that the study 'has shown that people who regularly use the Internet - even for a few hours a week - become more socially isolated and depressed', irritable and suffering emotional problems. 'For those who used the Internet most, things got worse' Mackay reflected, which 'sounded to me like a faint buzz in the early warning system... one of those messages from the future that we shouldn't ignore'.

'Global village' is an insidious term, precisely because it deceives us into thinking that cyberspace is a real place, where real relationships might be forged.

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### EDUCATION BOUNDARIES The Global Campus

A SET OF NEWS items highlights the complicated picture emerging from what was considered the inevitable internationalisation of education in the 'global village' of the 1990s. While technology continues to provide the means for educating across borders, the ends appear to be getting harder to achieve.

One bright spot is an \$80,000 grant to Monash University from Telstra, to investigate how to deliver tertiary education across national borders in a culturally sensitive and pedagogically meaningful way (*Aust* 19/8/98:36). Cultural differences were seen as one of the major obstacles to effective communication and learning.

In Queensland, other obstacles have emerged (*CMail* 18/8/98:4). Premier Beattie undertook a tour of Asian countries, to counter the view that Asian business leaders and students were avoiding Australia because they feared travelling in rural Queensland: following international publicity about One Nation's racist policies. Premier Beattie stated that Queensland faced a \$90 million cut in education earnings with a 20% decrease in enrolments to Queensland TAFE centres.

Still in Queensland, a record 71,000 primary and secondary students are learning Asian languages, the highest number in any State (*CMail* 24/8/98:7). Mr Beattie argued this provided a new generation able to relate to, and trade with, our Asian neighbours. About 50 Queensland schools have an official sister-school relationship with Japanese schools. In Victoria, a group of Japanese students visiting Port Phillip were told by the mayor that 'this city does not support racism in any form or shape, nor do most fair-minded Australians' (*Caulfield/Glen Eira Leader* 24/8/98:12). The mayor praised young Australian students for demonstrating against racism and argued for the rich diversity of Australian life.

Finally, also in Victoria, friendships built up over the Internet helped cross borders for 50 students, who travelled to South Africa

'DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION' is a policy advice and commentary service provided by the ACEA. Opinions expressed are those of the writers alone and do not represent official ACEA views. Articles are invited from all education stakeholders and are deliberately selected to reflect the wide range of views within the Australian education community. Readers are encouraged to correspond with writers DIRECTLY on any issue they wish to discuss further - locations are provided at the end of each article. Responses to published articles are most welcome.



through the International Student Project (*Geelong Advertiser* 12/8/98:2). It seems that leadership for an educated, tolerant global world is coming from young people, assisted by good policy and smart technology. That's good news!

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## GIFTED EDUCATION Gifted Benefit From Internet

**DEMANDS FOR** excellence in education have propelled issues concerning gifted students into the international spotlight. To their detriment, and with howls of indignation from those whom they purport to serve (*BangkokP* 13/8/98:3), some educational systems persist in ignoring giftedness, causing needless distress to vulnerable students. Underachievement becomes endemic and disenchantment ensues (*CT* 19/8/98:3). Worst of all, self-destruction becomes an option.

No longer will parents tolerate such shabby treatment of their gifted offspring. In today's competitive world they are savvy enough to move their children quickly to schools prepared to offer specialised programs (*StT* 18/8/98:36).

A vastly preferable solution lies in the creative use of emerging electronic technologies. Combinations of multimedia, such as Internet, email, satellite links and video conferencing have provided brilliant educational alternatives for the gifted. Without having to leave their own classrooms, gifted students, such as those at Hampton Park Secondary College, in Victoria (*Cranbourne Independent* 12/8/98:3), have been able to participate in innovative, worldwide projects with gifted peers, e.g., devising ethics guidelines for bio-medical issues.

Rurally isolated gifted Year 10 students (*Buloke Times, Charlton Cluster*, 14/8/98:1) have had a taste of university life ahead of time by being paired online with a mentor who is an expert in their area of special interest, e.g., marine biology.

Improved teacher access to professional development programs and postgraduate courses which examine diverse aspects of giftedness have been influential in the way we now regard the less common manifestations of ability, such as extreme precocity (*Times of India*, 19/8/98:1). Tat, a 9-year-old Delhi boy, has just passed his Year 10 All India Secondary Exams while simultaneously preparing and submitting his B.Sc. (Hons, Patna), thereby earning a well-deserved place for himself in the *Guinness Book Of World Records*. Until recently many of us would have viewed such radical acceleration with horror, distaste and suspicion. Now we know better.

Appropriate curricula and psycho-social counselling, properly monitored by an informed support team, including his

parents, have assisted his success so far. Although such genius occurs rarely (approx. one per million of population) how ready are you (philosophically, curriculum and resource-wise) to have a similar child in your school or university?

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## EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY Victoria's Cyber-School

**THE IDEA OF** education taking place at home via a computer has long since moved from the world of science fiction to the world of possibility. However, opinions are still divided as to the value of such learning.

Governments, on the whole, appear to be supporting the development of new software for education. China's Ministry of Education 'has included electronic information as a major part of its educational development plans over the next few years' (*ChinaD* 12/8/98:2). In Malaysia, secondary school principals are being urged by Education Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, to 'establish an electronic network to allow exchange of information and solution-finding among themselves' (*Business Times* (Malaysia) 19/8/98:2). In Australia, the Victorian Parliamentary Secretary of Education has recently launched three 'home-school technology centres' which 'make use of self-paced computer learning materials, which enable participants to begin a course and progress at their own pace'. (*Bendigo Advertiser* 21/8/98:8).

Of more far reaching consequences are the plans revealed by Mr Phil Gude (Victorian Minister for Education) for a new cyber-school where students from Prep to Year 12, 'will study at home, visiting a new-look education centre for social and sporting events'. (*HSun* 17/8/98:11)

For tertiary and part-time students, distance education online provides many advantages in flexibility, but requires discipline. 'Online students have to be self-starters, able to do independent work', says Dean Becker, (*Asian Wall Street Journal* 18/8/98:8) who completed his MBS via an online Master's program.

For younger students, while 'virtual classrooms enrich and extend the child's education in ways previously unimagined' (Dr Dianne Chambers, *HSun* 26/8/98:18) there is nevertheless, 'a basic community expectation that children will be supervised - personally, not electronically'. (Bruce Mildenhall, *HSun* 17/8/98:11).

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## SCHOOL POPULATIONS SA's Shrinking Pool

**ALL EDUCATIONAL** planning depends fundamentally on enrolments. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recently published

*Population Projections 1997-2051*, which is basic to estimating future enrolments.

Nationally, the numbers in the 5-19 age cohort are expected to change from 3.923m. (1997) to 3.985m. (2011) - up 62,100 or 1.6% - and 3.980m. (2051), up 57,700 or 1.5% on the 1997 figure. These are examples - data is given for every year.

The projections indicate widely different trends across the nation. The corresponding data for South Australia - the mainland State with the strongest downward trend - are 299,300 (1997) to 277,000 (2011) - down 22,300 or 7.5% - and 204,000 (2051) - down 95,300 or 31.8%.

For Queensland, the State with the strongest growth, the corresponding data are 746,200 (1997) to 843,200 (2011) - up 97,000 or 13.0% - and 1,026,500 (2051) - up 280,300 or 37.6% on the 1997 figure.

But there's more! The proportion of the population living in capital cities is expected to increase. For 1997 this proportion was 63.7% nationally, 73.2% in SA and 45.5% in Queensland. The predictions for 2051 are 75.7% for SA and 47.2% for Queensland. This change in population distribution will speed up the decline in the number of those of school age in rural South Australia, and increase the growth rates for Brisbane over the Queensland average quoted above.

There are a number of significant implications here. SA's public and private schools will be forced to compete for a shrinking pool of students (*Adv* 29/07/98). 'Education Departments' are under pressure to maximise outcomes with limited inputs. The reductions in the pool of students attending public schools in South Australia have already resulted in the closure and amalgamation of schools. The rural decline predicted for SA would exacerbate educational problems and costs of schools, which are currently barely viable.

A critical issue in effective planning is controlling the enrolments at popular schools to avoid having to provide additional facilities, while nearby schools remain unfilled. At a time when community diversity and the demand for 'consumer' choice are both increasing, the use of fixed geographical boundaries around schools, and rigid rules about who can enrol, is likely to become politically unsustainable.

In the large population centres, the transfer of students to non-government schools continues. There are also significant shifts in the population distribution within this group, with increasing numbers of low-fee schools and such schools growing faster than 'traditional' independent schools. The smaller pool of students expected in SA was a driving factor in merger talks held recently between 'traditional' Pulteney Grammar School (boys) and Woodlands (girls) (*Adv* 29/7/98). The chairperson of the Woodlands school council said the council felt the State's