Editorial

This special issue includes a number of papers contributed by people who have been working on phase 1 or phase 2 of the UK Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP) projects. There is one exception – the piece about "Project Patron" by Maslin and Lyon from the University of Surrey. This is part of the "Electronic Library" programme funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). However, the end product has similar objectives to many of the TLTP systems.

As Sarah Turpin and Emma Greenwood say in their introductory article, the aim of the TLTP programme is "to make teaching and learning more productive and more efficient by harnessing modern technology". Since 1972 about £70M has been contributed by the UK Universities Funding Council and other funding bodies to support the scheme.

This degree of support is surprising as there have been some notable criticisms about the application of IT to teaching and learning. Roger Schank, well known for his work on artificial intelligence, thinks that most multimedia teaching systems fail because they "merely add video and graphics to page-turning programs" [1]. Diana Laurillard [2], well known for her work at The Open University, suggests that: "Vast sums are made available to investigate the best way of using computers where the subject matter taught is incidental" and "Research and development projects on educational media pay quantities of hard cash for development, lip-service to evaluation and no attention to implementation".

It is also surprising that little work seems to have been done on evaluating the effectiveness of computer based teaching and learning systems – or at least I cannot find any. Is it reasonable to conclude that the launching of the TLTP scheme is an Act of Faith? Of course there has to be a corpus of systems running over a period of time to provide something to evaluate. This may be the reason for the lack of information or perhaps measurement difficulties have so far discouraged attempts at evaluation.

In fact the reason seems to be the need to obtain a representative set of systems to evaluate. Turpin et al. say in their Introduction that in phase 3 of TPFL, announced in July 1997: "as yet there is little known about the real cost and educational effectiveness of such technologies, so these areas will be explored in more detail as part of this phase". The papers which follow demonstrate the variety of ideas described by some of the teams working in 140 different universities and colleges in the UK.

The Maslin/Lyon paper shows how library-based people who understand both information science and information technology can provide the degree of expertise needed for developing multimedia teaching systems. The description of "Project Patron" shows that careful attention has been given to copyright issues, search and retrieval and an appropriate choice of state of the art equipment able to provide the right combination of compression, speed, quality and response. I hope that we have been able to do a good job when reproducing the illustration provided by the authors.

References

[1] R.C. Schank, Active learning through multimedia, *Multimedia* **1**(1) (Spring 1994), 69–78.
[2] D. Laurillard, Introduction, in: *Rethinking University Teaching*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, pp. 7–8.