

Editorial

As I begin my term as Editor of the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, I would like first to acknowledge the kind assistance and support of Dr. Julia Ellis, my predecessor. She has left a clear path and has guided me along my first steps. My work would be much more difficult, if not impossible, without the indispensable services of Edie Peters, the Editorial Assistant. Hillary Clinton, the First Lady of the United States, often says, "it takes a village to raise a child." By the same token I believe that it takes a "global village" to raise an internationally renowned scholarly journal. *ajer* has been elevated to this enviable status primarily through the tireless efforts and continual contributions of its consulting editors and invited reviewers, who represent fine scholarship both in Canada and the rest of the world, thus helping to attract a wide variety of submissions.

The future role of paper-based scholarly journals is a topic that seems to be discussed more and more. A plethora of electronic journals of all sorts have been appearing on the Internet. Although many of these are electronic versions of their paper-based forebears, others are entirely new offerings. A recent article by Vrasidas (2000) in the *Teachers College Record* examines some of the benefits of electronic journals. The major advantages are: rapid interactivity between authors and respondents; accommodation of media that cannot be presented easily in paper format, QuickTime movies, for example; unlimited length of works; and the ability to present information in several languages. At the same time it is pointed out that creating and producing an electronic journal is often much more expensive than producing paper-based versions. Although the advantages of electronic journals might seem enticing to the point of inducing the demise of paper-based journals in spite of the extra cost, it would be wise to consider some possible long-term factors before crossing the Rubicon.

As an undergraduate student in the mid 1970s, I wrote an extensive computer-assisted instruction program using BASIC on a Digital PDP-11 minicomputer. I stored the program and its backup on 8 in. diameter floppy disks. Scarcely 25 years later I can no longer locate a computer locally that will accept them or read them so that the program functions. Also, because the disks are a magnetic medium and affected by cosmic rays and spurious magnetic fields, I cannot be certain that the data continue to exist uncorrupted on the disks. In other words, my program lacked permanence; in this instance no great loss.

My father, who is a retired professor of classics, possesses a few books dating from before the advent of the printing press. Although my ability to read Latin and Greek is rudimentary, it remains possible to read the books without any mechanical or electronic equipment. My father also informs me that existing ancient papyrus scrolls that predate the codex form of current paper-based books and periodicals continue to be readable.

When the computers functioning as Web servers become obsolete and funding continues to be an issue in educational institutions, will many of the electronic journals continue to be available, including back issues? If back issues remain available, will the editorial and production staff ensure that

obsolete media formats are updated so that newer technologies will be able to interpret them as intended? The problem of updating media is not a phenomenon unique to computing. The content of extant large-format wax cylinder records (5 in. diameter, dating from the 1890s) is available only if one possesses the proper player or has sufficient funds to have someone who has such a player transcribe the cylinder to another medium. It seems that with media requiring special apparatus to decode the data, it will remain a costly proposition to decode those data. This begs the question, does the availability of earlier scholarship really matter, or should we be postmodern to the extreme of not caring about what occurred even a few years before?

The availability of electronic journals is also an important issue. While most countries, rich and poor, possess libraries and permit most citizens to read the material, access to electronic journals is dependent on a computer and a connection to the Internet, both costly. Although it may be that in time these costs will become as negligible as print media, most people in the world do not possess computers, and in some countries and even in some institutions access to the Internet is restricted. By shifting from paper to electronic, are we unwittingly contributing to the creation of an "educational elite" where only individuals meeting a particular socioeconomic and political status may access scholarship?

It may appear that I am advocating Ludditism. On the contrary, I consider computers to be excellent tools or servants. Nevertheless, computers make poor masters. I encourage the use of electronic mail to speed communication between **ajer** and authors and reviewers. Moreover, I encourage authors to make submissions and revisions electronically, rather than on paper, both to help reduce the time taken for the review process and to reduce the amount of paper used. **ajer's** presence on the Internet will also increase once sufficient server space and security clearance are obtained. The **ajer** Web site will contain the table of contents of each new issue, plus the abstracts of each article. It is hoped that this information will provide sufficient information and enticement to encourage additional subscriptions. For no matter whether a journal is paper-based or electronic, its continued survival depends on funding, and much of that must come from subscriptions.

George H. Buck

Reference

Vrasidas, C. (2000, July 13). Promises of electronic forms of data representation and scholarly publication. *Teachers College Record*. ID Number: 10546, Retrieved July 14, 2000 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.tcrecord.org>