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Networking is set to become the information technology revolution of the 1990s within Australian educational institutions and their libraries, much as personal computers were the revolution of the 1980s. But networking, coupled with the increasingly more powerful yet cheaper personal computer, is not simply a technology that improves productivity and access to information. It is also a tool that demands a re-examination of the educative process and the role of the library within that process. Individuals can use networked personal computers in their place of study or work, or from their home, to be self directed learners. They can do this not only by searching for, locating and accessing relevant information as text, images, sound and video, but by readily communicating with their peers, experts and others throughout the world.

Bill Linklater has asked me to provide this *Front Line* to give a brief overview of progress within the ACT to explore the potential of networks to the educative process through a collaborative project involving ACT Universities and selected schools.

The project evolved in large part from a mutual interest within the Australian National University, the University of Canberra and the Australian Defence Force Academy in the establishment of a broadly-based ACT network linking public and private organisations in the ACT to each other and into AARNet and the Internet. Education, in the broadest sense of its meaning, was seen as the logical starting point for the establishment of such a network.

From these initial discussions evolved the plans for the ACT Education Information Network (ACTEIN) and a pilot program to demonstrate the benefits of such

an initiative to the community. The aim of ACTEIN is to develop collaboratively an ACT education information infrastructure to improve education and information delivery at all levels within the region by providing electronic information and communication services from within the region, the nation and the world. In using the term 'infrastructure' we do not mean only the technology but also the necessary human 'infrastructure'.

The pilot program is a subset of ACTEIN, focusing on providing access to educational tools and information services to schools. The longer term vision is a network which extends to other organisations within the region which play a role in the access and dissemination of information for education and life-long learning.

The pilot program is a collaborative venture between the four Universities within the ACT: the Australian Catholic University, ADFA, the ANU and the University of Canberra, working collaboratively with a group of sixteen schools, both public and private, bridging all levels from primary through to secondary and senior colleges. A number of other organisations such as the ACT Department of Education and Training, the ACT Chief Minister's Office and the ACT Public Library Service will also participate. The specific objectives of the pilot are to:

- develop an awareness within the ACT education community of the educational resources available on AARNet and the Internet;
- enable and encourage teachers to use the Internet as an additional teaching resource;
- foster the knowledge links and communication between the teachers participating in the pilot, both amongst themselves in

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the ACT and with their peer groups on the Internet;

- establish links between the Universities and the secondary education communities, especially the links to the college sector;
- develop relevant training programs for delivery by the Universities to the schools with a focus on training-the-trainers;
- measure changes in teaching methods and learning outcomes and provide information on teaching and learning in a networked environment which may be of use to DEET, the Universities and educational agencies in planning open learning delivery;
- evaluate the impact of the pilot project on other areas.

To achieve these objectives each school will be provided with dial in access to the ACTEIN server and the necessary windows-based client software to access mail and information services and to create their own information on the server. Participants will have access not only to information created by the schools and participating universities stored on the ACTEIN server, but also to the broader teaching tools and information services available on AARNet and the Internet. The information they create on the ACTEIN server will be accessible nationally and internationally. Each school will have a designated 'mentor' university which will install the necessary software and provide technical support for the duration of the pilot. Perhaps even more importantly the universities will provide the staff (and where necessary the facilities) to:

- train initially two staff from each school who will then become resource people at their schools;
- demonstrate ACTEIN services to teachers and relevant school groups;

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## The School Libraries Section

The School Libraries Section of ALIA has particular interests in library, resource, and information provision for all members of the school community. Issues and topics of interest to the Section include access to information for students, teachers, school administrators and parents; current developments in education at all levels; child growth and development; resource-based teaching and learning; information skills; children's and young adult literature; literature and resource promotion; and education for teacher-librarianship. Among the members of the Section are teacher-librarians and school librarians, library technicians and library aides working in school libraries, students in teacher-librarianship courses, academics, educational administrators, and computer software developers. Activities of the Section include conferences, continuing education seminars and workshops, lobbying and publishing. The Section currently has state groups in New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, and Western Australia (which has the national headquarters in 1994).

## The Children's and Youth Services Section

Through meetings, workshops, seminars and conferences, the CYSS provides a communication link for children's and youth librarians, encourages the exchange of ideas and the discussion of topics of mutual interest; promotes continuing education programs and professional development; and creates an interest in current issues in children's and youth librarianship locally, nationally and internationally. The Section arranges social functions for members and guests, initiates, organises and participates in sectional and community group activities relevant to children's and youth librarianship locally, nationally and internationally, promotes and supports children's and youth libraries, librarians and librarianship; and recommends standards relating to status and appropriate staffing formulae for children's and youth libraries. State groups of the children's and Youth Services Section operate in New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. The National Headquarters of the Section is in Victoria in 1994.

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- coordinate workshops in which teachers and librarians from the participating schools discuss and demonstrate how they have integrated these services into their classrooms and libraries;
- visit each school on a weekly basis over the duration of the pilot to help generate ideas, act as a resource for staff at the school and provide support to staff at the schools wishing to integrate ACTEIN services into their programs.


The pilot is scheduled to 'go live' on the 16 May and continue through until the end of the third

teaching term in late October. Those of you with access to AARNet will be able to track the project by accessing the ACTEIN Gopher server yourself on [freenet.act.edu.au](http://freenet.act.edu.au) or by emailing any of those participating in the project.

There is a great feeling of excitement amongst those participating in the pilot. Those involved will no doubt realise direct benefits from this program. Perhaps of greater importance is the opportunity to raise awareness of the potential of networks in the education and information delivery process. ACTEIN provides the potential to shape attitudes and

behaviour by enabling educators and librarians to re-examine the educative process, and the role of the library within that process, given the context of current technological developments.

A national strategy for public access to networked information has yet to be formulated but hopefully regional initiatives, such as ACTEIN, will help shape the future that we would wish to see as information professionals. I am looking forward to the next six months of ACTEIN, to see what impact such an initiative can have on education and public access to networked information services within the ACT. ■



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